Film Art An Introduction 11th edition Bordwell Solutions Manual

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CHAPTER 2
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FILM FORM

Chapter Outline

The Concept of Form in Film
- Form as Pattern
- "Form" Versus "Content"
- Formal Expectations
- Conventions and Experience
- Form and Feeling
- Form and Meaning
- Evaluation: Good, Bad, or Indifferent?

Principles of Film Form
- Function
- Similarity and Repetition
- Difference and Variation
- Development
- Unity and Disunity

A Closer Look: Creative Decisions; Picking out Patterns
Summary

Teaching "The Significance of Film Form"

The Purpose of the Chapter

In Chapter 1, students learned how films are made by filmmakers. In chapters 2 and 3, we turn to how they are "made" in a different sense—how they are composed of parts that add up to a shape and pattern across the film as a whole. That patterned shape we call "form."

In some ways, Chapter 2 is the most important chapter in *Film Art*. It is designed to get students actively thinking about how films are made from many parts that relate dynamically to one another to make a system. It suggests that they can and should participate actively in the viewing of any film, looking for individual devices and trying to explain why they are in the film and what effect they have on the viewer. In other words, Chapter 2 suggests why close analysis of films is important.

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The concept of the film's form as a system is introduced early in the chapter. We stress that films are not random collections of technical devices. This picks up on the Chapter 1 emphasis on films as made objects. Similarly, it establishes *Film Art's* emphasis on looking at films as wholes. Most of the chapters contain extended examples that examine film techniques in their contexts.

Much of the first half of Chapter 2 is devoted to explaining how the spectator reacts actively to the film, forming expectations, drawing on previous knowledge of conventions, reacting emotionally to what occurs on the screen, interpreting it, and evaluating the whole experience.

The second half of the chapter lays out the principles of film form. It also explains the concept of segmentation, or breaking a film down into parts for the purposes of analysis. All of these concepts will be crucial to the more specific subjects of later chapters.

Lecturing On and Discussing Film Form

Since it is vital that the students understand the basic concepts in this chapter, it might be valuable to simply go over these in class, giving additional examples. You might wish to illustrate your lecture with a short film containing a very obvious formal structure. Some possibilities would be Hilary Harris's *Nine Variations on a Dance Theme*, which presents the same dance filmed in nine successively more distorting styles, Robert Clampett's cartoon, *A Corny Concerto*, with its two short segments parodying *Fantasia*, and Robert Enrico's *Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, which contains a frame story and flashback.

We have included extensive examples from a film that is probably familiar to virtually every student: *The Wizard of Oz*. This gives you the option of showing this or another film in your screening for this week. (It is best to stick to a fairly simple, straightforward film at this stage; see suggested titles at the end of this section.) Remind the students to take notes as they watch the film, recording their expectations and how they are fulfilled or thwarted, as well as other reactions they have as they watch the film and what triggered them. In discussion, you can go through the categories of film form as outlined in the chapter, asking your students to come up with examples of each type, to make sure that they understand each characteristic of film form. You should encourage them to ask questions during this discussion, since the concepts introduced in this chapter are more abstract than in any other part of *Film Art*.

Assigning a Paper on Segmentation

It is important for students to learn as soon as possible how to notice the large-scale parts of films. There are at least two ways of doing this, and you can choose to assign one or both. First, you can ask them to take notes on when scenes in the film you show that week begin and end. Then, in discussion, draw a horizontal line on the blackboard and make marks along it to indicate scenes, labeling each. Not every student will be

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able to keep track of every scene upon a single viewing, but among them they usually can come up with a good basic segmentation. (They must, however, be told in advance that this exercise will be part of the discussion.) For this purpose, it is a good idea to choose a film made primarily from lengthy scenes (for example, *His Girl Friday*) rather than one with many short scenes (for instance, *Do The Right Thing*).

A second approach to teaching segmentation is a written assignment in which the student uses a video copy of a film and does a more formal, detailed segmentation of his or her own. This could be more or less elaborate. You could simply ask for a list of scenes, or additionally ask the students to explain what cues in the film led them to make the breaks where they did. Either of these segmentation exercises gives them an experience of doing basic analysis and prepares them for more complex work to come. As we shall see, they can be asked to do a more formal outline segmentation in connection with Chapter 3, on narrative form. Similarly, they can also be asked to do a more localized segmentation of a short scene in the form of a shot breakdown when you teach Chapter 6, on film editing.

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