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Edited by

LEO BRAUDY
MARSHALL COHEN

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CONTENTS

Preface, xv

I ❑ Film Language 1

VSEVOLOD PUDOVKIN ***From* Film Technique**
[On Editing], 7

SERGEI EISENSTEIN ***From* Film Form**
Beyond the Shot [The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram], 13
The Dramaturgy of Film Form [The Dialectical Approach to Film Form], 24

ANDRÉ BAZIN ***From* What Is Cinema?**
The Evolution of the Language of Cinema, 41

BRIAN HENDERSON **Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style,** 54

CHRISTIAN METZ ***From* Film Language**
Some Points in the Semiotics of Cinema, 65
Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film, 71

GILBERT HARMAN **Semiotics and the Cinema: Metz and Wollen,** 78

STEPHEN PRINCE **The Discourse of Pictures: Iconicity and Film Studies,** 87

DANIEL DAYAN **The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema,** 106

WILLIAM ROTHMAN **Against "The System of the Suture,"** 118

NICK BROWNE **The Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of *Stagecoach*,** 125

II ❑ Film and Reality 141

SIEGFRIED KRACAUER ***From* Theory of Film**
Basic Concepts, 147

ANDRÉ BAZIN ***From* What Is Cinema?**
The Ontology of the Photographic Image, 159
The Myth of Total Cinema, 163

RUDOLF ARNHEIM ***From* Film as Art**
The Complete Film, 167

JEAN-LOUIS BAUDRY **The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema,** 171

NOËL CARROLL ***From* Mystifying Movies**
Jean-Louis Baudry and "The Apparatus," 189

JONATHAN CRARY ***From* Vision and Visuality**
Modernizing Vision, 206

GILLES DELEUZE ***From* Cinema 1 and Cinema 2**
Preface to the English Edition, 216
The Origin of the Crisis: Italian Neo-Realism and the French New Wave, 218
Beyond the Movement-Image, 227

III ❑ The Film Medium: Image and Sound 241

ERWIN PANOFSKY **Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures,** 247

SIEGFRIED KRACAUER ***From* Theory of Film**
The Establishment of Physical Existence, 262

BÉLA BALÁSZ ***From* Theory of the Film**
The Close-Up, 273
The Face of Man, 275

TOM GUNNING ***From* D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film**

Narrative Discourse and the Narrator System, 390

JERROLD LEVINSON **Film Music and Narrative Agency,** 402

PETER WOLLEN **Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d'est,*** 418

DAVID BORDWELL ***From* Poetics of Cinema**

Cognition and Comprehension: Viewing and Forgetting in *Mildred Pierce,* 427

V ❑ The Film Artist 445

ANDREW SARRIS **Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962,** 451

PETER WOLLEN ***From* Signs and Meaning in the Cinema**

The Auteur Theory [Howard Hawks and John Ford], 455

ROLAND BARTHES **The Face of Garbo,** 471

GILBERTO PEREZ ***From* The Material Ghost**

[On Keaton and Chaplin], 474

RICHARD DYER ***From* Stars,** 480

JAMES NAREMORE ***From* Acting in the Cinema**

Katherine Hepburn in *Holiday,* 486

MOLLY HASKELL ***From* From Reverence to Rape**

Female Stars of the 1940s, 501

RICHARD B. JEWELL **How Howard Hawks Brought *Baby* Up: An *Apologia* for the Studio System,** 515

THOMAS SCHATZ ***From* The Genius of the System**

"The Whole Equation of Pictures," 523

VI ❑ Film Genres 529

LEO BRAUDY ***From* The World in a Frame**

Genre: The Conventions of Connection, 535

RICK ALTMAN **A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,** 552

THOMAS SCHATZ ***From* Hollywood Genres**
Film Genre and the Genre Film, 564

ROBERT WARSHOW **The Gangster as Tragic Hero,** 576

PAUL SCHRADER **Notes on Film Noir,** 581

ROBIN WOOD **Ideology, Genre, Auteur,** 592

LINDA WILLIAMS **Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,** 602

TANIA MODLESKI **The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory,** 617

CYNTHIA A. FREELAND **Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films,** 627

DAVID BORDWELL **The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice,** 649

VII ❑ Film: Spectator and Audience 659

WALTER BENJAMIN **The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,** 665

JEAN-LUC COMOLLI AND JEAN NARBONI **Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,** 686

CHRISTIAN METZ ***From* The Imaginary Signifier**
Identification, Mirror, 694
The Passion for Perceiving, 701
Disavowal, Fetishism, 705

LAURA MULVEY **Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,** 711

TANIA MODLESKI ***From* The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory**
The Master's Dollhouse: *Rear Window,* 723

TOM GUNNING **An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator,** 736

ROBERT STAM AND LOUISE SPENCE **Colonialism, Racism, and Representation: An Introduction,** 751

MANTHIA DIAWARA **Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance,** 767

VIII ❑ Digitization and Globalization 777

LEV MANOVICH ***From*** **The Language of New Media**
Synthetic Realism and Its Discontents, 785
The Synthetic Image and Its Subject, 790
Digital Cinema and the History of a Moving Image, 794

ANNE FRIEDBERG, **The End of Cinema: Multimedia and Technological Change,** 802

PHILIP ROSEN ***From*** **Change Mummified,** 814

MICHAEL ALLEN **The Impact of Digital Technologies on Film Aesthetics,** 824

KRISTEN WHISSEL **Tales of Upward Mobility: The New Verticality and Digital Special Effects,** 834

STEPHEN CROFTS **Reconceptualizing National Cinema(s),** 853

MITSUHIRO YOSHIMOTO **The Difficulty of Being Radical: The Discipline of Film Studies and the Postcolonial World Order,** 865

WIMAL DISSANAYAKE **Issues in World Cinema,** 877

Index, 887

PREFACE

In the thirty-five years since the first edition of this collection appeared in 1974—let alone the more than one hundred years since the first films were shown—the academic study of film has changed enormously, and the journalistic and popular criticism of film has been deeply affected as well. Yet many of the same issues that preoccupied and stimulated writers from the very beginning of film theory and criticism are still puzzling later generations: Is the filmed world realistic or artificial? Is film a language? Is its world best expressed in silence? in sound? through stories that may be derived from other arts? through stories that can be told only on film?

Many of these questions were first formulated in critical language indebted to the methods and terminology of such humanistic disciplines as literary criticism, art history, and aesthetics. But early on, theorists began to emphasize the obligation to appreciate what was different, even unique, about film in comparison with the other arts: its formal qualities, its need for enormous capital investment, and its relation to a mass audience.

In the light both of continuing issues and evolving ideas, we might roughly divide the history of film theory into three somewhat overlapping phases. The first, which generally corresponds to the silent period, was formalist. From the early 1920s to the mid-1930s, theorists such as V. I. Pudovkin, Rudolf Arnheim, and Sergei Eisenstein attempted to demonstrate that film was indeed an art, not just a direct recording of nature. The coming of synchronized sound then brought on a realist reaction to the formalist argument. Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin among others argued that film was not an art in contrast to nature but an art *of* nature.

By the 1960s and 1970s, this classical phase of film theory was being challenged by writers responding both to historical conditions (the Viet Nam war, the student riots in France and America) and to new developments in the academic conception of "knowledge," as defined by literature and the social sciences. Just at the time that film study itself was gaining an academic status separate from the departments of literature and art in which it had often first appeared, these writers questioned the confidence with which classical film theory had used such terms as art, nature, society, reality, illusion, self, performance, work, author, and artist—and in the process

claimed to unearth hidden assumptions about race, class, gender, and language itself that could be best addressed through an analysis of film.

Especially beginning in the 1970s an explosion of new interpretive approaches derived from a broad range of disciplines began to have a tremendous influence on humanistic studies generally and—in part because of the relative youth of the field—on film study in particular. One powerful early inspiration came from linguistics. Here, drawing upon the work of C. S. Peirce, Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Louis Hjelmslev, and Noam Chomsky, film theorists and critics explored the structures of meaning that allow communication of all kinds to exist. A formal consideration of the meaning of individual films, or the special nature of film among the arts, became a less significant question than the place of both in more general systems of communication and meaning.

In this fertile and energetic period—perhaps the richest in new explorations of film since the invention of the medium itself—the most salient avenues of interpretation first followed semiotic and structuralist models, derived from the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss as well as the demystified cultural history of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, often augmented with Marxist historical and Freudian psychoanalytic analysis. Somewhat later came the influence of Jacques Lacan's revisionary view of Freud (itself responsive to linguistic issues), the feminist interrogation of the power structures of vision (in which Marx and Freud were often married), and the deconstructive views of Jacques Derrida (where efforts to pierce the surface of the text and discover its "contradictions" often employed Marxist and psychoanalytic tools).

None of these new approaches appeared without controversy or has maintained its relevance without polemic. Each in its own way has contributed to such classical issues of film theory as the relation of film to reality and how film may (or may not) be considered a language. In addition, they have introduced such fresh considerations as the way that films reveal the underlying social attitudes and ideologies of the cultures that produce them, the ways films manipulate audience beliefs, and the ways they raise, exploit, and seek to satisfy audience desires.

In the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, film study still maintains its earliest concerns with discovering the general terms and assumptions required for understanding film. However, since the mid-1980s, we have entered a fourth, more eclectic, period. One significant aspect of this new phase seeks to merge insights owed to history, psychology, and linguistics into larger perspectives suitable for understanding individual films as well as film in general. These approaches sometimes draw upon feminism, neoformalism, cognitive psychology, analytic philosophy, or phenomenology. They may assert the shaping activity of the audience on film meaning (as opposed to the passive audience often postulated in earlier approaches). Or they may emphasize the resistance of the performer, especially the star, to the meaning imposed by the film narrative; the ability of the independent filmmaker to construct a personal statement despite the supposedly totalitarian necessities of the medium; and the web of financial, political, and artistic decisions that constitute film production. In order to register these crucial arenas of new critical and theoretical work, we have expanded our previous final section, "Psychology, Ideology, and Technology" into two new sections: "Spectator and Audience" and "Digitization and Globalization."

Surveys of how earlier editions of *Film Theory and Criticism* were being used in the classroom have indicated that courses are most often structured around an interplay between classical and contemporary answers to basic issues, along with an acute awareness of the new avenues that have been opened by the willingness to venture beyond disciplinary barriers. With this new phase already demonstrating its potential to reveal important aspects of film, we have maintained the historical perspective of this collection as a broad survey of thinking about film over the past century. In revising, we have therefore retained a good number of "classical" works that have set the agenda of even some of the most advanced recent theory and criticism. We have maintained an emphasis on such major theorists as Sergei Eisenstein, André Bazin and Christian Metz. At the same time we have tried to illustrate the crucial new directions theory has taken over the last thirty and more years. In the process of opening space for new essays, we have regretted the need to drop old favorites, if only to keep the collection to a manageable size (and price). But we encourage readers to seek out the books and essays from which these excerpts have been taken to enrich their own understanding of the ideas presented here.

Perhaps because so many of these questions about film have turned out to be perennially interwoven, our division of the complexity of theory into now eight major topics more than ever indicates general emphasis rather than exclusive argument. The new sections VII and VIII most obviously carry the banners of important current approaches: how film shapes or reflects cultural attitudes, reinforces or rejects the dominant modes of cultural thinking, and stimulates or frustrates the needs and drives of the psyche; the challenge of digitization and new forms of media; and the changing sense of what constitutes a "national cinema" in an age of globalization.

But the impact of new thinking is visible in each section. Every teacher will have his or her own way of organizing these essays into a course, and every reader will discover connections and ramifications that go beyond the confines of a particular section. To help those echoes be heard more clearly, we have continued to include an index of proper names, marking especially those places where individual films are discussed at length by different authors. We have also for this edition included headnotes to the essays, which place the authors biographically and critically.

New essays have been added to many of the sections. Section I treats basic issues of "Film Language." Section II discusses "Film and Reality." Section III focuses on "The Film Medium: Image and Sound." Section IV emphasizes the connections between film and the other arts in particular through the issues of adaptation and film narration. A consideration of "The Film Artist" takes up Section V, while issues of "Film Genre" are stressed in Section VI, with a particular focus on the genres of horror and film noir, which still attract so much attention from critics and theorists (as well as audiences). Each section begins with a brief essay discussing the arguments of the different authors and comparing their approaches to those of authors included elsewhere.

Our deep thanks to all those friends and colleagues whose suggestions and criticism helped us formulate this new edition, as well as the teachers of film who took the time to respond in such useful detail to Oxford's queries about their use of the sixth edition. We would also like to express our gratitude to Amaranth Borsuk, who drafted the headnotes, and also prepared the index for the present edition.

Los Angeles; May 2008 L. B.
M. C.

I

Film Language



Because films embody, communicate, enforce, and suggest meanings, film theorists often suggested that film constitutes a language, a "visual esperanto." They have spoken of film's grammar, its vocabulary, and even of its jargon. The poet Vachel Lindsay spoke of film as a kind of "hieroglyphic" language while the theorist Béla Balász thought of it as a new "form-language." Russian formalists have similarly talked of "semantic signs" and investigated film's relation to "inner speech." In what sense, then, is film a language? Is the claim a suggestive metaphorical one or one that can, as the semioticians think, be subjected to systematic, scientific analysis? And, more generally, by what procedures does film generate meaning?

Those who consider film to be a language often rely on the analogy between the word and the shot. But simply stringing words together does not produce intelligible discourse, and most theorists agree that simply stringing separate photographic shots together will not produce intelligible works of visual art.

The great Soviet filmmakers Sergei M. Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin asked what more than mere ability to photograph reality was required to transform the new technical resources into a great new art. Their answer was montage, the art of combining pieces of film or shots into larger units—first, the scene, then the sequence, and, finally the complete film. D. W. Griffith, the great American director of *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*, to whom the Soviet directors acknowledged a great debt, was not important because he took better pictures than anybody else. He was important for having discovered montage, the fluid integration of the camera's total range of shots, from extreme close-up to distant panorama, so as to produce the most coherent narrative sequence, the most systematic meaning, and the most effective rhythmic pattern. In doing so, Griffith had, they thought, contributed to the development of a cinematic language and invented the distinctive art of the film.

Eisenstein viewed montage as a kind of collision or conflict, especially between a shot and its successor. He sees each shot as having a kind of potential energy that can display itself in purely visual terms: the direction of its movements, the volume of its shapes, the intensity of its light, and so forth. This potential energy becomes kinetic when the first shot collides with the succeeding one. The two shots can produce a conflict in their emotional content (happy versus sad), in their use of illumination (dark versus light), in their rhythms (slow versus fast), in their objects (large versus small), in their directions of movement (right versus left), in their distances (close-up versus far shot), or in any combination thereof. In his films, this conflict produced the tense, violent rhythms that became an Eisenstein trademark. Conflict was also important to Eisenstein because he took it to be an expression, in the realm of images, of the Marxist dialectical principle. Indeed, Eisenstein maintained that just as the meaning of a sentence arises from the interaction of its individual words, cinematic meaning is the result of the dialectical interplay of shots. His emphasis on the conflict of shots, as distinct from a mere linking of shots, distinguishes his concept from that of his colleague, Pudovkin. Pudovkin's view of montage as a method of building, of adding one thing to another, is not merely of theoretical interest. His theory produced more realistic narratives, with their more deliberate, calmer pace.

Eisenstein, like many theorists who emerged in the era of silent films, was uncomfortable with the addition of synchronized dialogue. Because "silent" films had always used asynchronous sound effects and music, Eisenstein believed that the sound film could use these tools with even greater precision and complexity. But he rejected dialogue as being incompatible with the proper use of montage (see Section III). By contrast, André Bazin, while agreeing that dialogue and montage are incompatible, regards synchronized speech as a necessary and proper development. For Bazin, dialogue returns film to the rightful path from which montage and silence diverted it. According to him, the film image ought to reveal reality whole, not cut it into tiny bits. The cinematic method Bazin endorses, which combines composing with the camera and staging an action in front of it, has, like montage, come to be known by a French term, *mise-en-scène.*

In Bazin's view the montage theorists did not in fact speak for all of the silent film. He discerns in the work of Erich von Stroheim, F. W. Murnau, and Robert Flaherty an alternative, *mise-en-scène* tradition, which emphasizes not the ordering, but the content of images. The film's effect and meaning are not the product of a juxtaposition of images, but are inherent in the visual images themselves. For Bazin, the montage theorists' emphasis on the analogy between word and shot is false, and he rejects it along with their reluctance to employ sound as a source of cinematic meaning. Bazin argues that the *mise-en-scène* tradition within silent film actually looked toward the incorporation of synchronous sound as a fulfillment, not as a violation, of the film's destiny.

Bazin considers German expressionism and Russian symbolism to have been superseded in the 1930s and 1940s by a form of editing more appropriate to the dialogue film. This "analytic" editing, which characteristically manifests itself in the dramatic technique of shot/reverse shot, was an important innovation. Still more important, however, was the development of the depth of field shot by Orson Welles and William Wyler in the early 1940s (anticipated in the 1930s by Jean Renoir),

which made even the use of "analytic" montage unnecessary. Entire scenes could now be covered in one take, the camera sometimes remaining motionless. For Bazin, the shot-in-depth, like the use of synchronous sound, constituted a crucial advance toward total cinema and an important stage in the evolution of the language of cinema. It allowed for greater realism and encouraged a more active mental attitude on the part of the viewer, who could now explore more fully the interpretive and moral ambiguity inherent in the film image.

Bazin's composition-in-depth is one kind of long take, but Brian Henderson calls attention to a quite different type developed by Jean-Luc Godard. Godard's long, slow tracking shot avoids depth. Cinema is a two-dimensional art that creates the illusion of a third dimension through its "walk-around" capability. Indeed, both montage and composition-in-depth are techniques that reach for that third dimension, although in different ways: montage through a succession of shots from different angles and at different ranges, composition-in-depth through movements of the camera or of the actors. Bazin's shot can thus be regarded as a long take, in which the camera pauses before a scene rich with interpretive possibilities. In his analysis of the films of Godard, Henderson calls attention to a quite different kind of long take: Godard's slow tracking shot that (perhaps in polemical opposition to the views of Bazin) concertedly avoids and even excludes the impression of depth, to adhere to the single-point perspective of painting.

In Henderson's view, Godard does so for ideological reasons. Composition-in-depth presents an infinitely deep, rich, complex, ambiguous and mysterious bourgeois world. Godard's reversion to one plane demystifies this world and its pretenses. Godard's style of presentation is intimately related to the critical point of view he insists upon. The viewer is presented visually and ideologically with a single flat picture of the bourgeois world not to be unthinkingly accepted as transparent and easy to understand, but to be examined, criticized, and (Godard might conclude) rejected.

Eisenstein and Bazin, for all their differences, were both intrigued by the idea that film was a language, and we might view Godard as adding to the resources of that language. But it is only with the rise of structuralism and semiotics that writers such as Christian Metz and Umberto Eco subjected the topic to more precise analysis. Metz particularly brought this issue to the center of film studies and attempted to put the discussion on a firm scientific basis. He did so by invoking the analysis of language provided by linguists in the semiotic tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure, a tradition that attempted to develop a science of "signs." Saussure distinguished sharply between signs which constitute a *langue* and those that constitute a *langage*. It is Metz's contention that film does not constitute a *langue* in the strict sense of constituting a language system, but that it nevertheless qualifies as a *langage* in the looser sense of being a signifying practice characterized by recognizable ordering procedures ("cinematographic grammar"). Cinema lacks the double articulation characteristic of natural language. The phonemes of natural language are basic, distinctive units of sound which do not themselves signify. It is only when they are articulated at the second level by combining them into monemes (morphemes) or words that they signify. By contrast, the basic unit of cinema, the shot, conveys meaning because of the iconic or isomorphic relation it bears to the world it photographs. The shot is motivated, and is unlike the basic units of language which are arbitrary, conventional and unmotivated.

If Metz rejects the assimilation of film language to natural language, he also rejects the common analogy between shot and word. In Metz's view the shot is equivalent not to the word but to the sentence or statement, and it is the organization of shots in the film chain that invites and supports the claim that film constitutes a language. In the beginning film was purely iconic—it signified exclusively by means of the resemblance of its imagery to objects in the visible world. But reality does not tell stories. It is only when shots are organized according to repeatable, recognizable codes that they become discourse and are capable of telling a story. Cinematic language comprises a number of cinematic codes and sub-codes, but the code which Metz analyses in detail (the code which was more or less established by the time of D. W. Griffith) is the *grande syntagmatique* of the image track. This code, a sub-code of the montage code, permits us to account for the procedures by which cinema denotes such narrative phenomena as succession, priority, temporal breaks, and spatial continuity. As he shows in his analysis of what he calls the alternate syntagma (one of the eight he describes) the order in which signifying images occur may or may not be the same as that in which the realities they signify occur. The student of the language of cinema must therefore account for the processes and mechanisms that make it possible for the viewer to interpret them correctly. For Metz film does not simply reveal reality; it describes it in a language whose features we are only beginning to understand.

Gilbert Harman, in his essay on Metz and Wollen, raises many questions about the entire semiotic approach to film study. He questions Metz's emphasis on plot and on the denotative codes that Metz considers to be primary. Wollen attributes this emphasis to Metz's reliance on the linguistic analogy in developing his version of film semiotics. In Wollen's view the basic linguistic codes are needed for determining literal significance, but the codes of cinema are primarily poetic rather than literal and are best understood through C. S. Pierce's categories of signs. Harman, however, criticizes the basic concept of the code, which Metz and Wollen share. He points out the ambiguous uses to which the concept of code is put and concludes that the proposed science of semiotics has little to contribute to the study of film.

Despite Metz's critique of the claim that film constitutes a *langue*, many theorists in the tradition of Saussure, Louis Althusser, and Jacques Lacan maintain that all cinematic meaning is essentially linguistic and that the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary, conventional, and both culturally determined and culturally relative. The meanings of signifiers are determined by their relation to other signifiers rather than by their reference to any extra-linguistic reality. Films are texts to be "read" and reading them requires our initiation into the specific conventions and ideological biases of cinematic discourse. As Stephen Heath argues, "the match of film and world is a matter of representation, and representation is in turn a matter of discourse. . . . [I]n this sense at least, film is a series of languages, a history of codes."

Against this influential view Stephen Prince argues that cinematic coding is not linguistic but is largely iconic and mimetic, that film images are typically understood because they resemble the realities to which they refer. The capacity to understand these signs has a biological basis (even animals manifest it). Interpreting iconic signs is more a matter of recognizing similarities by transferring real world skills

to the cinematic situation than it is a matter of mastering arbitrary, unmotivated, cultural conventions. Indeed, the capacity to understand iconic signs is shared cross-culturally and this ability helps to explain the intelligibility and global popularity of cinema (recall the early description of it as a verbal Esperanto). Pictorial meaning cannot be explained as a kind of linguistic meaning.

Daniel Dayan views film language from a post-structuralist perspective which goes beyond Metz's earlier, structuralist concept. Using a term drawn from the psychoanalytic theories of Lacan, Dayan describes the system of the suture which negotiates the viewer's access to the film. In Dayan's view this system, which relates to classical narrative cinema as verbal language does to literature, is ideologically charged. Bazin prizes the depth-of-field shot, while Henderson analyzes the meaning of Godard's parallel tracking shot. Essential to Dayan's system is his revaluation of the shot/reverse shot sequence. The viewer's pleasurable possession of the image, his seeing of the image in shot one, is disrupted by his discovery of the frame and his sense of being dispossessed of what he is prevented from seeing. In the first step of reading the film he discovers that he is authorized to see only what happens to be in the axis of the glance of another spectator, called by Jean-Pierre Oudart "the absent-one." The second shot, the reverse shot of the first, represents the fictional owner of the glance corresponding to the first shot. The reverse shot "sutures" the hole opened in the spectator's imaginary relationship with the filmic field by the perception of the absent one.

The absent one stands for that which any shot necessarily lacks if it is to attain meaning—another shot. For, within the system of the suture, the meaning of a shot depends on the next shot and the pair constitute a cinematic statement. The meaning of the shot is given retrospectively and only in the memory of the spectator. Thus, the system encroaches on the spectator's freedom by interpreting, indeed, by remodeling his memory. According to this deconstructive analysis, the system imposes an ideology and the spectator loses his access to the present. The system of the suture is not, however, the only cinematographic system, and Dayan describes how Godard has explored an alternative in his later films.

William Rothman rejects Dayan's assumption of a prior relation in which the viewer "sees" the film image as an unmediated view of reality. He also questions the assumption that classical narrative continuity is illusionistic or necessarily the vehicle of bourgeois ideology. Rothman especially critiques Dayan's contention that the "system of suture" is based on a two-shot (view/viewer) figure: a pair of shots that together constitute a complete cinematographic statement. He argues instead that the point-of-view shot is ordinarily part of a three-shot sequence (viewer/view/viewer), typically initiated when a character visibly attends to something outside the frame. Therefore no ghostly sovereign need be invoked to authorize the point-of-view sequence. It ordinarily manifests the film's power by appropriating a character's gaze, but it does *not* present a figure and then force the viewer to accept that figure as the source of the power. Thus the point-of-view sequence does not lie about its real origin. Indeed, it makes no statement about reality–because it makes no statement at all. The sequence is analogous to a sentence, not a statement, and therefore does not assert whether it is true or false. The film, not the sequence, constitutes the statement–if, indeed, the film makes any statement at all. According to Rothman, we need a critical history of

the way cinematic forms have been used, not an a priori assertion that certain cinematic forms are destined by their nature to serve bourgeois ideology.

Like Rothman, Nick Browne rejects the adequacy of the shot/reverse shot sequence to account for the operation and effects of classic film style. But his more complex rhetorical analysis is meant to contribute to the semiotic study of filmic texts. According to him the system of suture establishes the origin of film imagery by reference to the agency of character (the absent-one) but, surprisingly, does not consider the final agency, the authority of the narrator. The traces of the narrator's action may seem to be effaced by the system as the suture theorists suggest but, in Browne's opinion, such an effect can only be the result of a more general rhetoric. He therefore proposes an account in which the structure of the imagery, whatever its apparent forms of presentation, refers jointly to the action of an implied narrator (who defines his position with respect to the tale by his judgments, including his moral judgments) as well as to the imaginative action occasioned by his placing or being placed by the spectator. The point-of-view of the spectator, in turn, and contrary to the ideas of Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni (see Section VII), is not centered at a single point of view or at the center of any simply optical system. The way in which we, as spectators, are implicated in the action is as much a function of our position with respect to the unfolding of events as it is in their representation from a point in space. In Browne's analysis of Ford's *Stagecoach* he shows that, although we see the action with Lucy's eyes and are invited by a set of structures to experience the force and character of that view, we are put in a position finally of having to reject it as a view either that is right or that we must assent to. Even though we have been sutured into that point of view, we are not thereby committed to the ideology enforced by the system of the suture.