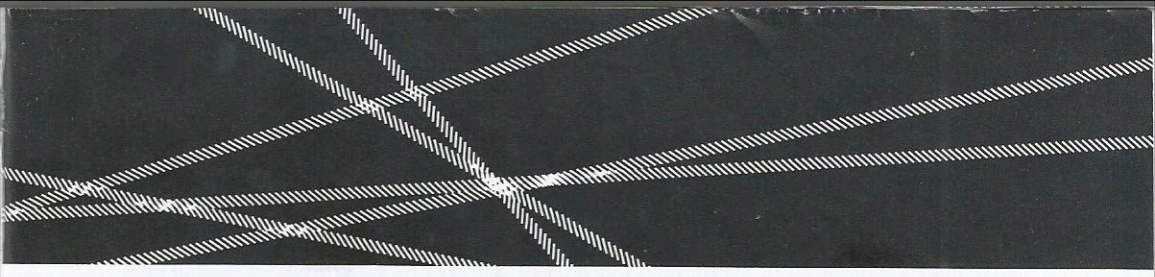

Film Theory and Criticism

Introductory Readings

EIGHTH EDITION

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Contents

II. Film and Reality 109

III. The Film Medium: Image 183

IV. The Film Medium: Sound 251

V. Film Narrative and the Other Arts 307

Preface

In the more than forty 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: To what extent 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 other 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 maintained 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. Finally, the early decades of the twenty-first century signaled a fifth period of development, as rapid advances in global communication and unprecedented technological change revolutionized the formats by which cinematic material could be transmitted to audiences. In order to take into account these crucial arenas of new critical and theoretical work, we have expanded our previous section "Medium: Image and Sound" into two sections. In addition, questions of digitalization and globalization, previously included in a single section, now have individual sections of their own.

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 ten major topics more than ever indicates general emphasis rather than exclusive argument. The new sections IX and X 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; the changing sense of what constitutes a "national cinema" in an age of globalization; and the different kind of audience experience that exists when films no longer are seen only at a theater or on a television set, at fixed hours or in fixed sizes.

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. As in earlier editions, we have 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." Sections III and IV focus on "The Film Medium: Image" and "The Film Medium: Sound." Section V 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 VI, while issues of "Film Genre" are stressed in Section VII, 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). Questions of spectatorship and audience response are taken up in Section VIII, while essays dealing with digitalization appear in Section IX and those considering globalization in Section X. 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 seventh edition: Antje Ascheid, University of Georgia; John Bruns, College of Charleston; Donna R. Casella, Minnesota State University, Mankato; Jennifer Hardacker, Pacific University; Terri A. Hasseler, Bryant University; Dale Hudson, Texas State University–San Antonio; Eileen Jones, University of California, Berkeley; Neepa Majumdar, University of Pittsburgh; Eve Oishi, Claremont Graduate University; Nicole Richter, Wright State University; Jason Wojcik, Pennsylvania Highlands Community College.

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