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# PART I

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## Critical Practice



# The Critical Practice of Film

# 1

## Learning objectives

After completing this chapter you will be able to:

- Develop an appreciation of the critical-practice approach to film;
- Distinguish the different types and genres of film;
- Recognize the characteristics of **Classical Hollywood Cinema**;
- Identify the different phases in the production of a film.

## Critical practice

So you want to make films. Or maybe you love watching them and want to learn more about how they are made. Perhaps you want to expand your knowledge and understanding of critical analysis and theory and how these relate to the practical aspects of filmmaking. Whatever your interest in film, you have turned to this book for further information. This book introduces you to both the production and the critical analysis of film. Throughout you will discover the techniques that go into making films and will examine how film functions as a part of the larger culture and society in which we live.

The approach this book takes is that of 'critical practice'; a process that explores the integration and intersection between the critical analysis of films and the practical aspects of filmmaking. In other words, this book is both an introduction to the ways in which we watch films, as well as an introduction to how films are made. It stands to reason that the more you know about how films are made, the more you can appreciate the artistry involved in a film. Likewise, the more you appreciate the cultural context and critical ideas that inform how films are viewed, the more interesting and engaged your creative work will become. Thus, critical-practice filmmaking and analysis guide you towards both creative expression and an active role as both a viewer and a critic.

The separation between thinking and doing is a problematic binary we need to interrogate; it is based on the absolute distinctiveness of both categories, and a division of labour between those who do, and those who think about and theorize. Theorist-practitioner Mike Wayne in *Theorising Video Practice* questions this division between theory and practice:

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Rather than seeing theory and practice as distinct and separate activities, we need to see them as part of a continuum. The terms 'theory' and 'practice' refer to those circumstances and contexts in which either reflection on practice (theory) or the implementation of theory (practice) predominate. (Wayne, 1997: 13)

Throughout this book we will embrace the idea of a continuum between theory and practice rather than absolute categories, breaking down these distinctions, in order to see writing criticism and theory as practical and creative, and practice as critical and theoretical. As we will see throughout the book, but particularly in Chapter 12, this integration is not new, filmmakers have always engaged with critical and theoretical ideas, just as critics have explored and experimented with creative practice.

Critical practice also means that we debate and discuss our own practice and see theorizing as practice: writing and producing new knowledge and ways of engaging with the world. Thus, although this book deals with conventions of filmmaking, it also has the goal of questioning, disrupting and experimenting with the normative models of practice and challenging the restrictions of conventional forms. Throughout the book, the aim is to find a creative practice that goes beyond the limitations imposed by industrial structures and conventional thinking. Likewise, we aim to overcome any stigma associated with the notion that theory or theorizing limits creativity. Sometimes, instinctive doing without critical reflection, has a romantic appeal grounded in the notion of the genius of the individual artist, but what it frequently fosters is the reproduction of traditional models of practice that are trained into us by our viewing and consumption of conventional media. Critical reflection allows for a breaking of this pre-programming and a licence to experiment with form. Thus, throughout the following chapters we will explore some of the conventions of filmmaking and the so-called 'rules' that have developed from the dominant traditions of **Classical Hollywood** style. From the basis of understanding these conventions, we will then question the dominant style, disrupt the so-called rules and experiment with alternative ways of filmic communication.

Before we continue with the process of critically engaging with film, let's first explore how we have already become involved in the world of film through theorizing, criticism and practice. Most of us have used a camera at some time in our lives – snapshots from a family holiday, a videotape of a cousin's wedding or the amateur horror flicks you made with your teenage friends. Even if you have never used a video camera, if you have taken still shots and arranged them in a photo album or online display, you have gone through a filmmaking process: first composing and shooting the snapshots, then a type of editing process, selecting and placing images together in a sequence. What you have done here is similar to the way that a filmmaker first shoots, then edits: taking pictures, then selecting different shots. On some level, we are all filmmakers. Through closer study and analysis we can come to appreciate how different techniques of camera operation, or placement of items in the **frame** can make even your amateur productions more interesting.

What then links our intuitive ability to make media with the powerful structures of the creative industries? How can we come to an understanding of our role as amateur film producers and theorists in relation to the systems of industrialized media production? How can we understand the differences between our own home movies, or even our student productions and the world of 'professionals': artists, filmmakers and multiplex cinemas? Like many of the issues of representation that this book addresses, these questions about our role in media practices are **ideological**

questions and lead us into the area of theory and criticism: an awareness of the cultural context in which media representations exist. How we address these issues in the coming chapters, relates to the process of critical practice, by fostering an understanding of how the film work we produce fits into the larger world of cultural production.

Just as all of us can be filmmakers, so all of us are critics of film. We watch films, we are influenced by them, and we have opinions and reactions to what we see. We enjoy and analyze film in our daily lives. Woody Allen reminds us of this in a famous scene from *Annie Hall* (1977) when the two main characters are waiting in line at a cinema and have to listen to the opinions of another of the patrons. Although hopefully you are not as rude and overbearing as the character in *Annie Hall*, still, when you go to the cinema with your friends, you talk about the film afterwards. You say whether you liked it or not, and what you particularly enjoyed, and maybe how you sympathized with one character or another. If you have seen other films by the same director, or with the same actors, you might make comparisons. You discuss the elements of story and character, sometimes you talk about the techniques: the special effects, the music or the acting. These discussions are the basis of critical analysis of a film, a key part of the critical-practice approach. Your analysis of a film will become deeper with a stronger appreciation of the techniques and styles that go into its creation.

There is a further level of analysis to consider beyond the critical discussion of an individual film. Film theory places creative practice within its cultural context, giving a fuller understanding of how representation works. Adding this to our analysis or creation of individual films, we gain a deeper knowledge: not just of the artistry of film or the entertainment industry which produces it, but also of the society in which we live. Throughout the analyses that follow, we will return to the concept of **ideology**: the interpretation of a film in relation to how it reflects certain ideas or assumptions about the cultures in which it is made and seen. Thus, through analysis of films, we can see how the world of social, political and economic ideas is reflected in the imagination of a culture. On another level, if you continue to make films yourself, an understanding of theory and ideology will help you produce work that is critically informed, sophisticated and able to communicate ideas on a number of levels.

So to get started on this process, let's look at some of the basic divisions and types of filmmaking practice, then we will introduce the dominant conventions of Classical Hollywood Cinema, before exploring the phases of production that go into the creation of a film.

## Types of film

If you have visited the cinema recently you may have felt that there is a wide selection of films on offer. With so many screens in an average multiplex, there should be a suitable choice of films to view, something for every taste. There are, however, many types of films made that are not shown on your multiplex screen, and that are interesting and challenging examples of film art. In this book we will be considering many different types of film, comparing and contrasting the kinds of movies you may already know from mainstream cinema, with less well-known styles of filmmaking.

Most of us are familiar with mainstream Hollywood **narrative** cinema. These are the films we go to see in the cinemas, rent to watch on DVD or download to view. Chapter 4 will introduce you to **documentary**, a form you will have also seen on television, in an educational context or occasionally at mainstream cinemas. A third type of film production is **experimental film**, often

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associated with art and exhibited and viewed within that context. We will look more closely at experimental film in Chapter 5.

When we consider the contrasts between narrative, documentary and experimental film, one difference is the context in which these types of films are viewed:

- Narrative films are seen in cinemas, downloaded, rented on DVD (often from national chains) or seen on television. When we go to the cinema, download, rent a DVD or watch a film on television, we are looking for diversion, pleasure and a way to spend our free time.
- We view documentaries on television or on the internet: we watch them in courses at university and on loan from the library. When we watch a documentary, we are usually looking for information, often we are interested in the subject and want to know more about the content of the film.
- Experimental film is perhaps the least commonly viewed style of filmmaking; these films are often seen in art galleries or festivals and are produced as part of the culture of contemporary art. As the name suggests, experimental films challenge our ideas about what film is and 'experiment' with both form and content. Although they may be less popular, and seen by fewer people, experimental films are nonetheless influential in shaping the development of narrative and documentary styles as well as inspiring other forms of media such as music video and advertising.

Just as these three types of films are seen in different contexts, they are also produced by different groups:

- The average narrative cinematic feature film is created by a multinational corporation with global interests. Such a film's production cast and crew all work for this large company. The film is part of a business: a commercial enterprise designed primarily to make money.
- In contrast, documentaries are often funded from a number of public and private sources, including television commissions. Documentary production teams are groups of filmmakers, including researchers and historians, who create films for a variety of reasons, but often to serve as a record or an educational tool.
- Experimental films, by contrast, are made by individual artists or groups of artists working outside the commercial mainstream. They are expressions of the individual's artistic vision of the world.

Within these broader categories of film practice, films can also fall into particular **genres**. Genre is a term for a category or type of film, usually one that is identifiable by a set pattern of tropes, character types, style or subject matter, for instance. It is common for the audience to mention genre when talking about film. When deciding what to go and see at the weekend, you might use certain terms to describe the films playing at the cinema. These terms assign the films to their respective genres; for example, *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997) is a comedy, *Star Wars* (1977) is a science-fiction film. Some films, of course, cross different genres, and are described using multiple terms. For example, a film such as *Men in Black* (1997) is a science-fiction, comedy and action film, all at the same time.

Genre is both a critical category and part of the structure of the film industry. As industry terminology, genres are shorthand methods for describing a film to potential backers, and can be

employed as a marketing strategy to draw an audience. These terms are used by DVD rental outlets to sort their shelves and by critics to describe a film to their readers as succinctly as possible. The studios that produce films, target certain genres towards certain audiences. So, an animated adventure cartoon, such as *Finding Nemo* (2003) is geared towards children, or a broader family audience, and marketed that way. Horror films are mostly marketed to a young, teen audience, whereas romance films such as *The Time Traveller's Wife* (2009) have a target audience of women in their twenties and thirties. In film marketing, the genre of a film is part of an understanding between audience and producers. This means that if you go to see a film advertised as a horror film, such as *Drag Me to Hell* (2009), you expect certain types of action: suspense, murder and stylized violence. You also expect to see a certain **iconography**, which can include deformed monsters, bloody death scenes and screaming teenagers.

In discussing genre as critical category, theorists and critics look at the different elements that link a group of films together, and analyze the common features. So if we define *Star Wars* as a science-fiction film we have to ask the question; what is it that makes it science fiction? Setting is one of the elements that define a genre; in the case of *Star Wars*, the galaxy 'far, far away', indicates science fiction (with the flavour of fairy-tale fantasy). Science fiction also uses elements that do not exist in the contemporary world that we know. Thus in *Star Wars* there are light sabres, blaster guns, androids, alien creatures and super-fast space travel. These are all things that are fictional to our current science. On another level, films within the same genre often feature similar themes. In science fiction, the conflict between technology and humanity is a strong theme. In *Star Wars*, Darth Vader (David Prowse) himself embodies this theme, as he is physically part human and part machine, in conflict with himself. A similar theme underlies films such as *The Terminator* (1984) or *The Matrix* (1999), both of which include the struggle between the technology and individual human heroes.

Genre studies then, look at the common features that unite a group of films, including the setting, the iconography, character types, plot situations, underlying structures and thematic concerns. It is important to remember that genres are mutable and a film can belong to a particular genre without adhering to all its conventions. Each genre film is different, and genres change stylistically over time, developing new approaches to their central thematic concerns. For example, during the early days of sound film in Classical Hollywood, a **musical** involved a simple translation of theatrical stage shows to the screen. As film musicals grew over time they developed a clear sensibility of their own, reaching a period of sophistication and popularity during the 1950s. They then declined in popularity to return, in a different form, after the growth of the music-video culture of MTV. Certain genres are also culturally specific, in the sense that distinctive genres emerge from various parts of the world and reflect an aspect of a country's culture. The **Western** is a good example of this, as it is a particularly American phenomenon, relating to a part of US culture. Likewise the Japanese samurai film is a genre specific to Japanese culture.

Many of these examples of genre are drawn from popular mainstream narrative film. It is important to remember, however, that other filmmaking traditions utilize different styles of practice. Likewise, we have been using genre as a way to talk about narrative films, but other types of filmmaking also fall into broad types or styles. In Chapters 4 and 5 we will discover how documentaries and experimental films both engage with different genres or types: such as the rhetorical or observational style of documentary or the structuralist/materialist or the personal film of the experimental tradition. Like narrative genres, these particular types emerge out of a specific cultural context, often connected to different movements in the historical trajectory of the style.

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The critical-practice approach to film engages with different types and genres by fostering an understanding of cultural context. Genre filmmaking, for example, is a mode of practice based on how the generic styles and techniques arise from the particular structures of the entertainment industry. These structures lead to a codification of style, created within the limits of the generic form. Genre study becomes a way of exploring how style and modes of production are intricately linked. On another level, genre conventions become of interest to critical practice, as they can be explored, imitated, parodied or undermined creatively as a way to a deeper critical understanding of the medium. As with many other conventions, genre is a key part of the development of Classical Hollywood and is one of the many ways in which the industrial structures of Hollywood defined their cinematic product. Today's entertainment industry is still grounded in this generic approach to film. So to continue, let's explore the Classical Hollywood style and its legacies.

### The conventions of Classical Hollywood

Classical Hollywood conventions were developed within a specific cultural context, a dominant mode of practice and a set of industrial structures, which affected film techniques and aesthetics. Thus, the films that were produced within the Classical Hollywood style, and the conventions that developed from it, were, at least on some level, a reflection of the context of creation within the entertainment industry. Therefore, before we are introduced to the styles and techniques of filmic practice in the upcoming chapters, let's review the cultural context in which many conventions of film style emerged. Throughout this it is important to remember that these Hollywood conventions only represent one filmmaking tradition and we will study examples of others before returning to a closer analysis of critical-practice traditions in Chapter 12.

The period known as Classical Hollywood Cinema ranges from the 1920s into the 1960s and the characteristics of the Classical style influenced cinematic storytelling in many ways. The Classical Hollywood system developed a particular set of industrial practices under a structure known as the **studio system**. The studio system arose in the 1920s when the most successful production companies consolidated their economic power and developed a series of creative practices that would assure an output of financially successful products. One of the characteristics of the studio system was **vertical integration**. This meant that the five dominant studios owned all elements of the film business from its creative production, through the channels of distribution, to the cinemas where the audiences watched the films. This virtual monopoly lasted until the late 1940s, allowing these studios to exercise an unprecedented control over the US film industry.

A key feature of the studio system was how the films were produced: a method which defined the style of the films made during this period. The studios developed a factory-like approach to production. This means, in effect, that the workers in a studio film followed a strict division of labour. Each job in the process was clearly defined and each participant had his or her own duty to perform. Under the studio system the workers had long-term contracts: making film after film with the same studio, without any choice about which films they made. This included the studio's actors; the films they made were decided on by the studio. Ranging from the **extras** performing small roles to the studio's stars, all were controlled by long-term contracts. The studio's control over the stars meant that the stars' images were cultivated and publicized over a number of films and film roles were created especially for them. The **star system** was one of the studio's methods for promoting and marketing a film. The stars were products of the studio system; their film roles,

as well as the publicity that surrounded them, was carefully engineered by the studio to create their image. One of the questions that this factory system raises is how the films made by the studios reflect this approach. Factories generally produce a standardized product: one Ford car coming off an assembly line should be exactly like another. In film this is not the case, as each film has to be distinctively different. Yet through genre style the studios attempted to create similar products that could be sold to an audience based on the commonality between them. Genre allowed the studios to create films that were a standardized product, yet at the same time each film was individualized with its own story to tell.

During the studio period in Hollywood, a self-regulating method of censorship developed that also had a significant effect on film style. The **Hays Code** was introduced in the early 1930s and defined how films dealt with controversial subjects such as sex and violence. The process of regulation mandated by the Hays Code had an interesting effect on the storytelling of the films produced under its rubric. For example, the Code stipulated, 'crime need not always be punished, as long as the audience is made to know that it is wrong' (reprinted in Mast, 1983: 328). Thus, Classical Hollywood films always have endings that show the bad guy being caught or killed, endings designed to enforce the Code's moral ideals. Although the Code was replaced with the rating system in the 1960s, the ways in which it affected film storytelling continue to have implications for film style. The structures of film narratives still often require an ending (or **closure**) that restores the moral order. A film such as *The Player* (1992) is so effective because of the surprise ending that shows a murderer profiting from his crime: something that the Classical system would not have allowed. This type of ending is particularly unexpected to an audience trained by the conventions of Classical Hollywood to expect a certain moral resolution. In addition to moral closure, the Code was very specific about the methods of portraying sex. These regulations meant that filmmakers in this period developed metaphorical images to express passion and/or sexual activity. Often scenes would **fade to black** just as characters kissed and would then return to the scene at a later point in time, implying sexual activity that could not be shown on screen.

Classical Hollywood style is a form of narrative filmmaking. The films of this period are designed to entertain and tell stories. In fact, the Hays Code opens with this assertion: 'Theatrical motion pictures ... are primarily to be regarded as *Entertainment*' (Mast, 1983: 321). During this period, the narrative form of film was consolidated, and techniques for communicating stories through cinema became standardized. Under the Classical system, writing for the screen developed along formulaic lines. This is not to say that all these films were the same, only that there was a system in place for structuring stories in a similar manner. Classical Hollywood films had strongly defined character types, recurring plot situations and structures that fitted neatly into the time span of ninety minutes to two hours. Despite the formulaic structure, Classical Hollywood produced many great films. In Chapter 3, when we discuss story form in detail, we will see how some of these structures operate.

Classical Hollywood also refers to the style of filmmaking that developed at this time and under these institutional conditions. One of the principles of the Classical style is the invisibility of the cinematic techniques. In other words, when you are watching a Classical film, you are drawn into the story world and forget that you are watching a film. This invisible technique led to the development of unobtrusive lighting and camerawork; camera angles and movements were designed so as not to call the viewer's attention to the apparatus of production. In addition, as we continue to study film techniques, we will frequently return to the **continuity** style of staging and editing. This is a Classical technique of shooting and editing film that creates a particular view of

narrative space, where the viewer can clearly understand the relationship between the different characters by where they are placed in a scene. We will return to how this system works in Chapters 7 and 9. The practices of Classical Hollywood defined the conventions of filmmaking for a considerable time and still influence contemporary style in a number of ways. As we will see in upcoming chapters, this invisible technique, what Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger (1985) have called ‘an excessively obvious cinema’ (3) is an illusionistic practice with ideological ramifications. In concealing its own status as filmic fantasy, the Classical model also hides its ideological work. Film theory and criticism seek to interpret the ideological **subtexts** in films that claim to be just entertainment. On the other hand, alternative methods of filmmaking (explored in later chapters) often use **reflexivity** – a film’s awareness of its own status as a film – to expose the process of production, or to break the illusion and make the ideological nature of film visible.

It is important to keep in mind the context of development and the basic conventions of Classical Hollywood practice, in order to effectively critique the limitations of this model. From this critique it is then possible to use the critical-practice approach to explore what is effective in this style, as well as to experiment with alternative forms of creative expression. Hollywood’s method of production, with its strong division of labour, led to a particular process of creation: the stages of making a film that we will now survey. These stages need to be critiqued from their basis in an industrial division of labour but they are also, to some extent, a viable approach to film practice that can be adapted to alternative types of film.

## The stages of making a film

It is quite possible that you are a film student who will soon be embarking on a creative project for the first time. You have an idea of what you want to make: maybe a spoof horror film or a music video for your garage band. You have developed a short script and a plan for how you are going to shoot the project. Then you call some of your friends to perform in the project, arrange to have a video camera, and maybe more friends to help out with the technicalities. You tell your friends to meet you at a certain place, at a certain time. What you have done here is the same as most filmmakers do in arranging and planning to shoot a project. In the filmmaking business this stage is known as **preproduction**. Now, if you are lucky, all your friends have shown up and you can get the serious business underway. You shoot your short video with the video camera, which records the sound from the scene at the same time. Perhaps to make things look a bit better, you turn on extra lights, or move some lamps around the room. Maybe you shift the furniture to best suit the scene or bring in extra props that are needed for the action. You have your friends perform the scene and they interpret your idea. Setting up and shooting are parts of the **production** phase of the film. In the next phase, after everything is shot and your friends have gone home, you watch what you have created. If you are fortunate enough to have an editing program on your computer, you might capture the images and sounds from the camera and rearrange them, selecting the best shots and constructing the project from this. You may want to add some music or record an extra voice track to edit into what you have created, and put titles at the beginning or the end. This is the **postproduction** phase of a film. Now that you have created the ‘film’, you call all your friends again and invite them over to watch the final product. You might even make copies and give them to your friends or upload them to YouTube or Facebook; this is the **distribution** and **exhibition** phase.

Within the structures of the film industry, these are the phases of creation of a film. The production processes, and the roles that are required to perform them, are codified and clearly delineated. In **preproduction**, the preparation for filming takes place: the development of the idea, the writing of the script, the casting of the actors, the search for a location or the building of a set, the rehearsals and all the preparation for shooting. In this phase, the key personnel include the **screenwriter(s)** who works on the script, often through many drafts and revisions. The producers are also at work securing funding and making the necessary arrangements for production. One of the important functions of the preproduction stage is this acquisition of funding, as the size of the budget often defines how a film will be produced. Funding works differently for different types and levels of filmmaking. A studio-funded feature film, for example, would receive money based on the development of its script within standard studio practices, whereas independent filmmakers acquire funding by collecting sponsorships and investments. The **director** is involved in the process from this early stage, participating in the casting (supervised by a **casting director**) and having input in the search for and choice of locations (the job of the **location scouts**). During preproduction, the director also works with the **cinematographer** to break down the script into shots, which are then produced as a **storyboard**. Once the script and the storyboard are prepared, the **production manager** can then schedule the shoots, so that a plan is in place to film all the necessary scenes of the script, with the relevant cast, crew, equipment, **props**, costume and make-up all at the correct location at the scheduled time.

The production stage is perhaps the best known. It is when the cameras roll and sound is recorded; the action is captured on film. This includes elements we will study in detail in the first three chapters of Part III: **cinematography**, **mise-en-scène** and sound recording. The production crew works in teams, with the cinematographer supervising the camera operator and assistants, and the lighting crew. The **production designer** and the art crew are involved with all elements of design, from the construction of the set to the smallest details of the props. The sound team is responsible for production audio, choosing and placing microphones, recording and mixing sound at appropriate levels. Also on the production team is a **script supervisor**, who assures that all the necessary shots are taken and that continuity is maintained from shot to shot. The director oversees every part of production, and works particularly with the actors to interpret the script through the dialogue and performance. Finally, on a large-scale feature, there could also be a **second unit**, which is another production team that is scheduled to shoot scenes at different locations while the main unit continues working.

Once the shooting is completed and the sound recorded, a very large part of the process of making a film still has to be undertaken; the film enters the postproduction stage. The film is edited, the special effects are added, parts of the soundtrack are **dubbed**, the music is composed and recorded and the audio track mixed and all the extensive work done to bring the finished film together. In the last two chapters of Part III we will look at editing and music in more detail. Finally, the film is distributed to the cinemas, where the audience gets a chance to see it. This stage also includes the business of marketing, advertising, merchandizing and all the tricks of the trade that are used to bring in an audience.

The preceding description of the stages of film relates to both the large-scale industrial practices of the entertainment industry or the smaller-scale independent productions that imitate these models. These stages of filmmaking apply in different degrees to the various types of filmmaking. Smaller crews are often used for documentary, for example a production team of three,

one person to operate the camera, one for sound and a director to oversee the production or to ask questions of interview subjects. Experimental filmmakers' work can be done in a variety of ways, from the individual practice of an artist such as Stan Brakhage, who we will study in Chapter 5, to a variety of crew and production methods. In general, however, an overlapping three-part stage of preparation, shooting and editing is a useful model for many types of practice.

Before we finish with the first chapter, let's see what is coming up later, and look at how the book takes on the task of introducing and exploring the critical practice of film.

### How to use this book

The book is divided into four parts. Part I introduces the idea of 'critical practice'. This chapter has explored the integration of critical analysis with the creation and critique of film. The next chapter introduces motion picture, film and video technology: the way in which still images are transformed into moving images. As an extension of this idea, we will explore animation as it is a particularly apt illustration of this principle.

Part II examines different types of film in more depth. First we start with a detailed study of narrative film and how stories are constructed and developed in script form. This involves working with both the process of screenwriting, as well as the study of narrative structure and theory. The next two chapters continue with other non-narrative film forms: Chapter 4 introduces documentary conventions and Chapter 5 experimental film and the related areas of **Expanded Cinema** and **video art**.

Part III then breaks a film down into its different elements. Here we will analyze the creative use of film techniques; cinematography, mise-en-scène, sound, editing and music. This part of the book is structured around the process of making a film, introducing the elements of production first: cinematography, mise-en-scène and production sound. The next two chapters deal with aspects of postproduction: editing and music. There is also a distinction here between the study of sound and music, although both constitute parts of the auditory experience of a film (as cinematography and mise-en-scène are both part of the visual scheme). This is done in order to first introduce the possibilities of the sound environment of a film then to explore film music in some depth as a creative force, drawing on a distinct artistic practice with its own conventions, expectations and emotional impact.

Part IV develops further the critical-practice ideas that have underpinned previous chapters. Chapter 11 introduces writing as practice: presenting some of the ways of writing about film, including critical analysis, theoretical interpretation and creative reflection on your own practice. The book then concludes with a chapter offering concrete examples of successful critical/theoretical practitioners who embody the engagement between artistic creation and critical dialogue.

Each chapter begins with the learning objectives. These will guide you to the key points that will be covered and the aims you can achieve once you have read and engaged with the material. The chapter ends with summaries in the form of questions which will allow for discussion with peers, or for you to assess your understanding of the chapter. One goal of this book is to move beyond passive consumption, so that after reading each chapter there are exercises and experiments that allow you to take your knowledge one step further, by actually trying out some of the concepts presented. The exercises at the end of each chapter give you the opportunity to think

critically as well as to explore filmmaking practice: things to think about and things to try. You can try these exercises on your own, or you can work on them in the context of a film studies education. Finally, the section ‘Want to Learn More?’ guides you to resources to deepen your knowledge and understanding of any given area.

Throughout the chapters there are a number of examples from various films. For the sake of consistency many of these films are the same. This means, for example, that when we study a scene from the classic Western *Stagecoach* (1939) for the ideology of camera position and technique in Chapter 6, we return to that scene again in Chapter 10 to integrate the study of music and see how different techniques work together to create various levels of meaning. The number of films selected as examples for study are purposely limited so as not to overwhelm any reader with a variety of films that incorporate different techniques. Instead there are fewer examples, enough to make up a reasonably achievable core of recommended films for viewing. This selection is representative of styles, eras and movements but does not constitute an overview of film art in any way. Other examples are equally valid, or may better exemplify film techniques or theoretical concepts. The hope is that after studying the topics, the engaged reader will apply the concepts learned when viewing other examples. To that end, there is a list of suggested further viewing at the end of each chapter.

Unlike most novels, a book like this is not meant to be read cover to cover. If you read it in the order it is presented, that’s great, you will see how many of the ideas and concepts progressively build on each other. However, the book is also designed so that you can read it out of order and still follow the logic of the ideas being developed. To facilitate reading the book in this way, some words or ideas that may be new to you are in bold and defined in the glossary. There are also cross references in the text to the chapters where one idea will be elaborated on from a different perspective. There are many film studies classes at colleges and universities throughout the world and every instructor has a different way of presenting the material. The features in this book will hopefully facilitate reordering and presenting the various topics as necessary to accommodate different learning approaches.

### Summary and key questions

As the starting point in your study of film, take this opportunity to check your understanding of the key ideas introduced.

- What is ‘critical practice’? How does critical practice integrate production, criticism and theory?
- What are the distinguishing characteristics of the three types of film?
- How are genres of film defined and categorized?
- What are the key features of the conventions of Classical Hollywood? How are these conventions part of the ideological project of entertainment?
- What do the different phases of filmmaking involve?

## **Want to learn more?**

### **Think about this ...**

#### *Film genres*

Objective: To distinguish the different types and genres of film.

Choose a genre or style of filmmaking that you particularly enjoy; do you like action films, romances or comedies, etc.? What films are made in this style? What are the characteristics of this genre or style? What themes, character types and plot situations recur in this type of film? What stylistic elements define this genre?

#### *Classical Hollywood*

Objective: To recognize the characteristics of Classical Hollywood Cinema.

View a couple of examples of films from the Classical period of Hollywood. What aspects of style, structure and technique can you identify? How are they reflective of the time and place in which they were made?

#### *Phases of creation of a film*

Objective: To identify the different phases in the production of a film.

Think about the times and places you have been involved in the creation of visual media in the broadest possible way – still photography, photo albums, online picture sites, amateur video, etc. Having identified examples of your own media practice, think through how you went about the creation of this work. What were your phases of production? How did your working method relate to the standard practices of preproduction, production, postproduction, and distribution and exhibition?

### **Try this ...**

#### *Analysis of your own media work*

Objective: To develop an appreciation of the 'critical-practice' approach to film.

You will need: A group of friends and somewhere to show them your work.

Using any of the media work that you have discovered in the last exercise, show that work to a group of friends. Take the opportunity to discuss your work and to solicit their reactions to it as

an example of media communication. Have them compare your media practice to their own experiences of making media. What do you learn from how your media communicates with this audience?

### **Further reading**

A good introduction to how theory and practice integrate is Mike Wayne's *Theorising Video Practice*. This book combines analysis of different parts of technique with examples drawn from student productions to explore how ideas can be put into practice in the experimental environment of a media studies education. An equally key text in this area is Jean-Pierre Geuens, *Film Production Theory*, which includes analysis of technique and a critique of conventional modes of practice. A more theoretical reading of the relation between theory and practice can be found in Noël Burch's *Theory of Film Practice*. For ongoing debates around the integration of theory with practice in both a professional and a higher educational context, *The Journal of Media Practice* includes a number of articles on the topic and keeps up to date on debates in both the theoretical and the creative fields.

There are a large number of theorists working in the area of genre studies, I will just mention a few of the most significant. Steve Neale's edited collection *Genre and Hollywood* is a good core introduction to the topic, as is Thomas Schatz's *The Genius of the System*. The conventions of Classical Hollywood are critically explored in numerous writings. Key texts include David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* on the formal aspects of Hollywood style and Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* on the critical and contextual elements of Hollywood.

To get a better sense of film production there are a number of technical guides that explore the filmmaking process from beginning to end. It is important to read these critically and to be aware of how they reproduce conventional ways of thinking about the industrial structures of filmmaking. Mike Wayne's *Theorising Video Practice* contains a useful chapter 'Art and Industry' which includes a critique of how technical texts are often steeped in certain ideological perspectives about filmmaking.

### **Films studied in this chapter**

*Annie Hall* 1977 Woody Allen (director)  
*Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* 1997 Jay Roach (director)  
*Drag Me to Hell* 2009 Sam Raimi (director)  
*Finding Nemo* 2003 Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich (directors)  
*The Matrix* 1999 Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski (directors)  
*Men in Black* 1997 Barry Sonnenfeld (director)  
*The Player* 1992 Robert Altman (director)  
*Stagecoach* 1939 John Ford (director)  
*Star Wars* 1977 George Lucas (director)  
*The Terminator* 1984 James Cameron (director)  
*The Time Traveller's Wife* 2009 Robert Schwentke (director)

***Other examples to explore***

Chapter 12 looks at the work of critical practitioners from a variety of different movements and styles of filmmaking. Any of the recommended viewing from there would serve as a strong introduction to critical practice. There are also numerous examples of Classical Hollywood, from a variety of genres, many suggested in later chapters. One particularly interesting film is *Sunset Boulevard* (1950 Billy Wilder director) that is set at the height of the Classical period and reflects some of the aspects of the style.

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