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The Study of Film

Each image is a different reality, a unique insight. The cinema is a tool which allows man to produce new, unique images of the environment. The more images man has, the more he unlocks his internal capacities necessary to organize these new images, and therefore the more complete and full are the lives that man creates for himself.

Ted Perry*

Film study as an academic field is, at most, only two decades old. Although serious consideration of cinema as an art began in the 1920s, no one dreamed of setting film along side English or chemistry. The perennial affection of young people for movies could be praised, deplored, or ignored, but it was not seen as a basis for scholarly study. True, film was used in the classroom, but invariably it was used for purposes other than film appreciation or understanding. A documentary might show students how to drive or type, a compilation film could present a history lesson or a filmed performance of *Oedipus* could illustrate how a play is staged. Not until the 1950s did a few film courses begin to appear in college catalogues, and not until the 1960s did extensive programs emerge, as scholars started the task of building a discipline. In the high schools, film study frequently appeared in tandem with radio, television, and journalism as a component of the mass media. More recently, as the depth and complexity of cinema has begun to be understood, film is often taught and studied in its own

Note: This chapter was authored by Dr. David Bordwell, Department of Communication Arts, The University of Wisconsin at Madison.
* Ted Perry, "The Seventh Art as Sixth Sense," in John Stuart Katz, ed., *Perspectives on the Study of Film* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), p. 119.

right. Today, film courses are included in the curricula of many colleges, and an increasing number of secondary schools are offering film instruction for interested students.

From the perspective of the secondary school speech communication teacher, film occupies a logical place in a communications curriculum, and the novelty of cinema study promises fresh teaching experiences. Yet the very youthfulness of cinema study poses unique problems for the teacher. What characteristics of the film medium make it a significant object of study? What are the values of such study? What subject areas may be logically covered by film study? What approaches may be utilized? What specific problems arise? These are questions which will receive consideration in this chapter. One warning must be given, however, Because the discipline is still in its infancy, much theory and methodology remain to be constructed. The teacher of film, like the teacher of radio and television, is still very much the pioneer. It is hoped that the following survey will stimulate teachers to build film curricula of their own.

THE NATURE OF FILM

It should not have to be said that film is a unique medium of communication. But judging from the way film is frequently taught, one would think that there were no differences between film and theatre or film and literature or film and language itself. As a preliminary, then, some observations on the nature of film are in order.

Film is not theatre. Film does share some elements with drama—plot and character, actors and props—but all are transformed by the specific material of film. Instead of flesh-and-blood beings, film gives us shadows on a screen; instead of the three-dimensional stage, film gives us a virtual substitute for depth. Since a film is composed of images, it holds sway over a fluid space and time which are at once supple and concrete. Cutting and camera work have no theatrical equivalents. The theatre artist begins with an imaginary space which must be made concrete, while the film-maker begins with a concrete space that must be transformed into an imaginary space.

Film is even less comparable to literature. True, both media tell stories, but again cinema's unique properties intervene and radically transform. Instead of imaginary characters and deeds, films present specific images and sounds. The space of a novel is

conceptual; the space of a film is concrete. "Time in the novel," writes the great film theorist Jean Mitry, "is constructed with words. In the cinema it [time] is constructed with actions. . . The novel is a narrative which organizes itself into a world; the film, a world which organizes itself into a narrative."[1]

Is film then a variant of language? While much contemporary research is seeking a connection between cinema and discourse, we may expect that such a connection will be at a very general level and will necessarily neglect cinematic specificity. It is apparent that cinema's materials and methods permit it to fulfill a unique communicative function. To reduce film to a verbal message usually impoverishes it, for different arts embody experiences which cannot be extracted from the very texture of that art. An apocryphal story is particularly relevant to cinema. A reporter asked a dancer to state the meaning of her performance, and she is supposed to have responded, "If I could tell you, I wouldn't have needed to do the dance." Film is not a linguistic code like semaphore or Morse code. It is a separate system, in some ways comparable to but in no way reducible to verbal language.

Film is not even television, although here we are getting at more subtle differences. Both media share certain common traits. But note first that the presentational aspects of the media differ greatly, and the viewing situation and audience size are important factors in communication. More important, because of inescapable technological factors, the scale, frame ratio, distortion, definition, and color value of the television image are radically different from those of the film image. Lest these be thought trivial distinctions, remember that many film-makers use such image characteristics for specific purposes. After watching Jacques Tati's masterpiece *Playtime* in 70mm and stereophonic sound, the viewer will not recognize it when it is shown in cropped ratio and too-bright color on a portable television screen.

So much, briefly, for what film is not. Wherein, then, lies its uniqueness? At an atomic level, it has two primary characteristics: the moving image and the editing of image in sequence. Putting television aside for the moment, these traits minimally distinguish cinema from other media, and it is no surprise that these are at the center of film study. Nonetheless, a little reflection will show that these traits are neither necessary nor sufficient for the existence of a film. Many films consist of shots of paintings or photographs (and thus lack moving images), and many films consist entirely of one shot (no editing). We must go further.

1. Jean Mitry, "Remarks on the Problem of Cinematic Adaptation," *Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 4 (Spring 1971), no. 1, pp. 7-8.

As Christian Metz has pointed out, film must be seen as a more molecular phenomenon, as a system of diverse materials, as, in short, a *synthetic* medium.[2] (It is probably because of its synthetic character that other media have tried to adopt film as their stepchild.) Taken as a whole, the materials synthesized in film are staggering in their diversity. First is that infinite body of visual materials we call images. Photographed or drawn, realistic or abstract, static or moving, dense or sparse, images projected on a screen by means of a strip of film constitute a vast communicative resource. All the possibilities of image-making in painting are thrown open to the film-maker as well. If you add to this the possibility of movement within the image and the possibility of arranging different images in any sequence desired, you see why many painters (from Fernande Leger to Andy Warhol) have turned to film-making. So have stage directors like Ingmar Bergman who find in the flexible time and space of film images a resource which theatre can only approximate. Along with images, film commands the potentials of written language. Thus, any linguistic formation—titles, signs, handwriting, lengthy pieces of discourse— can play a part in cinema. The written material in newspapers, advertising copy, novels, journals, and speeches offers no small resource, as directors like Jean-Luc Godard have understood.

Film not only commands the visual but also the auditory, so that sound becomes another ingredient in the mixture. All the enormous resources of spoken language, music, and noise thus are made available to the film. The result of all this is a complex ensemble of possibilities we are only beginning to understand. One thing is certain: We shall not understand film by seeing it as painting plus drama plus music plus literature. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. As in that other synthetic medium, opera, the individual elements are radically fused by their interaction. Film's nature, then, makes it one of the most diverse and rich media in history, and to see it as anything less is to underestimate its power as communication and art.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

1. Do a survey of the high schools in your area. What percentage of these schools offer film instruction? How many courses are offered?

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2. Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), pp. 208– 253.

Who teaches these courses? What are the qualifications of these teachers?
2. Construct a definition of film using no more than twenty-five words. Test your definition to make certain that it excludes other media of communication.
3. In Chapter 4 it was noted that there are "many facets of the art [of theatre] arts within art." Compare that perception of theatre as art with the notion that film "is more than the sum of its parts . . . the individual elements are radically fused by their interaction." Should this same principle apply to a consideration of theatre?

VALUES OF FILM STUDY

A number of justifications for studying film in the high school curriculum may be advanced. In this section we will consider four such reasons.

It is a Distinct Communication Medium

The multifaceted nature of film is one good reason to study cinema; we are teased into wondering how such a complex synthesis works. If, as we have seen, cinema is a distinct communication medium, then it is no longer enough for the teacher to screen a movie and assume that the film has neutrally recorded some prior reality, be that reality a play, a novel, or a speech. Indeed, in that ability to transform lies the unique communication potential of cinema. If the purpose of instruction in the English language arts is to enable the student "to play freely the whole symbolic scale,"[3] one dares not neglect this unique and intriguing communication medium.

It Is an Integral Part of the Young Person's World

While watching films is not as pervasive as television viewing, the average high school senior has, nonetheless, seen over five

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3. James Moffett, *Teaching the Universe of Discourse.* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1968), p. ix.

hundred feature films. Perhaps *seen* is an inaccurate descriptive term for the student's viewing behavior. Having been exposed to years of print-oriented classroom instruction, the student searches for literal content in films while ignoring the rich images which are at the heart of filmic communication. One high school student, evaluating the worth of her film course, reported, "I never really *saw* films before. After reviewing the content of the film, I never had anything else to say. Now I can talk about a film for hours. It's amazing how much there is to see." If a purpose of education is to help students to make discriminations, exercise judgments, and articulate responses to life's experiences, film study holds a valid claim to a portion of the curriculum. The student who studies film finds increased understanding, intellectual stimulation, and enjoyment in future viewing experiences.

It Triggers the Creative Communication Impulse

Film study calls on the student to develop the ability to clarify and articulate thoughts and feelings through a unique medium. It is the rare student who can resist the impulse to use the medium in innovative and exciting ways. Students learn to blend language, visual image, and sound into unique patterns of communication. In so doing, their understanding of the communicative potential of diverse elements is enriched. Additionally, students experience immense satisfaction with their work and achievement. Five seniors, presenting their film to a group of teachers at a summer workshop, reported that this was their most memorable and rewarding secondary school experience. In creating a film, high school students are invited to exercise a vast array of creative energies. The rewards can be immense and enduring.

It Stimulates Vocational and Avocational Interest

Although few high school students will become tomorrow's professional film-makers, some will. More importantly, it is difficult to imagine that any student's present and future life could fail to be enriched by the use of filmic skills. The skills which the film course provide may give added meaning to the encapsulation of life's memorable moments. At a time when the distinction between the world of work and the world of play are increasingly obscured, film-making can contribute to the enjoyment of most occupations.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

1. You have just examined four reasons for studying film. Are these valid reasons? Are there other more impelling justifications for the study of film by high school students? If you were trying to persuade a high school administrator to include film courses in the curriculum, what arguments would you advance?
2. Is the study of film more or less important and relevant for high school students than the study of public speaking, interpersonal communication, theatre, or radio and television?

DIMENSIONS OF FILM STUDY

Art and industry, social force and object of historical research, film is multifaceted in its functions. Even in focusing upon communication, the secondary speech program is confronted with a bewildering variety of options. What follows is a review of the three most traveled paths of film study: the elements of the art, the kinds of films, and the social context of cinema.

Elements of the Art

Probably no course in film study can ignore the specificity of the film medium, for communication is inevitably affected by the medium's inherent qualities. Those qualities, as we have been at pains to claim, are not those of drama or fiction. Students analyzing a film as if it were a novel or a play lose the chance to understand the distinct powers and limitations of cinema. In a secondary speech program, then, considerable time may be spent discussing techniques of the medium and examining specimen films in critical detail. What are some techniques to be considered?

   1. *Shot composition.* In any individual shot of a film, the material is arranged within the frame to fulfill a specific function. Lighting, setting, costume, objects, and behavior of the figures in time and space constitute an important repository of communication potential. In *On the Waterfront,* for example, the character of Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando) is indicated as much by costume and gesture as by dialogue. In Truffaut's *Les Quatre Cents Coups*

(*The 400 Blows*), flat grey lighting and cramped, cagelike settings constantly stifle the young protagonist's urge for freedom. Students should develop a sense of how shot composition creates specific meanings and feelings.

2. *Camerawork.* Other aspects of the medium affect the image's look. Lenses, film stocks, filters, and other technical devices necessarily shape how the film communicates. Moreover, not only has material been arranged in the frame for a specific purpose but the frame itself takes on an important function. In filming any object, the camera must asume a specific angle and distance with respect to the object. The motion picture camera can also travel through space, either following a moving object or moving independently, yielding the possibility of a mobile frame as well. Thus camera adjustments (e.g., choice of filters and lenses), camera placement (angle and distance), and camera movement are essential components of filmic communication. What is the consequence of the use of color in the Beatle's film *Help!* as opposed to the black and white film stock of their first effort, *A Hard Day's Night*? What meanings are communicated by the long shots in Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), the low angles of Welles' *Citizen Kane*, the close-ups of Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, or the straight-on angles in Keaton's *The General*? The camera, then, does not merely record—it also transforms and interprets.

3. *Editing.* There are also relations between shots, and it is editing that creates these. The relations are *temporal;* is shot A occurring before, after, or during shot B? Editing can play considerably with temporal reference; it can compress time or expand it, leap backwards or forwards, or convey the simultaneous occurrence of several events. Editing relations are also *spatial;* is shot A occurring in the same space as shot B or is it occurring elsewhere? Editing permits film to explore a single space in some detail or to leap great distances. Editing relations are also *graphic;* is shot A graphically similar to or different from shot B? The editor can cut from a bright, stationary composition to a dark, moving one, or from black and white to color. Finally, editing relations are also *rhythmic;* what is the duration of shot A with respect to shot B? As every editor of television commercials knows, shots may be cut together in a very fast rhythm, with a dynamic effect. In all, the parameters of time, space, graphics, and rhythm provide the editor with a rich repository of purely filmic communication materials with which students should become familiar.

4. *Optical Devices.* Fade-ins and fade-outs, dissolves, superimpositions, slow- and fast-motion, and other optical effects also constitute an important body of techniques for filmic communication. How, for example, does Norman McLaren's use of pixilation affect the meaning of *Neighbors*? What differences issue from the use of a dissolve rather than a cut?

5. *Sound.* Though not all films use sound, sound is a primary component of cinema as we know it today. Speech, noise, and music play central roles in filmic communication and should be studied in their interaction with the visual images. What is the function of the score or the sound effects in *M. Hulot's Holiday*? How does off-screen commentary interpret the visual material in a persuasive documentary film like *The River*?

Study of the techniques of the medium can be carried out in several ways. Reading is an obvious strategy for introducing the material, particularly if the text is well illustrated. Lectures and discussions, especially with slides and film clips, can go over the techniques more carefully. One helpful resource is the Sunday comic strips, which offer excellent exercises in frame composition, "camera" placement, and editing. Students also quickly observe the different visual styles at work in various comic strips. Another exercise is to give students a picture and ask them to experiment with different ways to frame an image, after which they can discuss the results which different framings yield. The logical outcome of the study of film techniques is, of course, the intensive analysis of one or more films to discern how a single work employs all these techniques of the medium to create a unique system. Such close consideration of the medium seems a necessary first step for any further study of cinematic communication.[4]

Kinds of Films: Modes and Genres

There is more to the medium than its techniques. Students should be aware of the common ways films are grouped by film-makers, audiences, and those who study films. The two primary groupings are those of mode and genre. A *mode* is a major class of films, such

4. For discussions of the aesthetics of the film medium, *see* Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960); Andre Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Noel Burch, *Theory of Film Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1973); Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form and The Film Sense*, Jay Leyda trans., (Cleveland: Meridian, 1957); P. Adam Sitney ed., *The Film Culture Reader* (New York: Praeger, 1970); and Daniel Talbot, ed., *Film: An Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

as documentary, fiction, or animation films. Students can discuss the difference between a documentary on high school life and a fiction film on the same subject. Documentary, presumably, utilizes material that is in some degree or manner unstaged, while the fiction film will be staged. Put another way, in a documentary the film-maker relinquishes absolute control over some aspects of the material in the frame, while retaining control over camerawork, editing, optical devices and, usually, sound. Many important documentaries, such as Lorentz's *The River* and Humphrey Jennings' wartime films, are readily studied at the high school level.

A *genre*, on the other hand, is a secondary class of film types, such as westerns, musical comedies, horror films, or science-fiction films. A genre, though most often encountered in the mode of the fiction film, may also occur in other modes. Genres, moreover, have definite conventions which students already intuitively know. Recurrent subjects, stories, iconography (characters, settings, objects), and themes constitute a recognizable set of films which, for example we call westerns or gangster films. These conventions thus offer us a stable and familiar world which can generate expectations. We recognize the cues that signal a gunfight in the offing or a song coming on. (As students will quickly notice, television commercials make frequent use of genre conventions.) What must also be noted is that film-makers often transform genre conventions, thus creating what we can call inventions. Thus, in *Meet Me in St. Louis*, Vincente Minelli and his co-workers make the musical genre yield a nostalgic vision of an idealized past, while John Ford gives us an unconventional Wyatt Earp in *My Darling Clementine*. Inventions yield a sense of novelty—a freshness that alters our expectations. Thus, any study of genre needs to consider the dialectic of convention and invention that informs the genre. An excellent way to do this is to examine two rather different films from the same genre, such as Zinneman's *High Noon* and Hawk's *Rio Bravo*. As significant cultural groupings, modes and genres constitute sets of constraints and options for the communicator. Secondary study should probably avoid categorization for its own sake and concentrate on how such groupings alter the ways film-makers communicate.[5]

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5. For a variety of materials on modes and genes, *see* John Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green Popular Press, 1971); Louis Jacobs, ed., *The Documentary Tradition* (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971); Jim Kitses, *Horizons West* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969); P. Adam Sitney, *Visionary Film* (New York: Oxford, 1974); and Ralph Stephenson, *Animation in the Cinema* (New York: Barnes, 1967).

The Social Context

To study film as communication and art is also to study the institutions and processes that concretely affect cinema. It is therefore worthwhile for secondary school students to examine how film production and viewing both alter and are affected by social circumstances. Students can, for instance, read biographies of film-makers to learn how a production situation affects the film-maker's work. Compare, for example, Joris Ivens' perception of his political purpose with the studio-based assumptions of Cecil B. DeMille. How does the production system alter a film, sometimes against the creator's will? Many case studies of the making of a film are available to illustrate the concrete constraints imposed upon the film-maker.

Similarly, students can take the opportunity to discuss how films consciously or unconsciously communicate social attitudes. Propaganda films wear their ideology on their sleeve, but every film presupposes certain social attitudes in its audience. Students can discuss how racial and sexual stereotypes, attitudes toward politics and religion, and assumptions about values are reinforced by films. How, for instance, does the western genre embody sometimes contradictory American attitudes toward civilization and savagery, the lure of wilderness, and the demands of settlement? What assumptions about politics and family love *Citizen Kane*? To what extent does film violence both reflect and affect our attitudes toward violence in the outside world? Like all communication activity, cinema is imbedded in a social context, and that context profoundly affects both context and treatment. Thus, with the study of the medium's techniques and the study of kinds of films, coming to grips with film as a vehicle of social attitudes can do much to enhance students' understanding of both films and their own experience.[6]

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

1. This section identified three major dimensions of film study. Are there any dimensions which have been overlooked?

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6. Of the many works devoted to the social context of cinema, the following are especially useful to the teacher: Andrew Bergman, *We're in the Money* (New York: Harper, 1971); Stephen Farber, *The Movie Ratings Game* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1972); Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts* (Boston: Beacon, 1964); Ian Jarvie, *Film and Society* (New York: Basic Books. 1970); and Richard Schickle, *The Disney Version* (New York: Avon, 1969).

2. The authors assert that students should be given a sense of how the elements create meanings and feelings. How do you give students this sense?
3. How do modes and genres specify constraints and options for the communicator? Take one mode or genre and indicate which constraints and options might be operative.
4. In order for students to be enlightened critics, must they understand the elements of the art, film modes and genres, and social context?

APPROACHES TO THE FILM CURRICULUM

Teachers have set about film study in three principal ways: film appreciation, film production, and some mixture of the two. We shall here examine the first and third approaches briefly, and the second at greater length.

Film Appreciation

This approach concentrates on the study of existing films. The teacher organizes a series of films, discussions, and projects with the purpose of exploring the nature of the medium. The objectives are, broadly, similar to those of examining other communication activities. Logical topics within such a program include subjects already discussed: film techniques, film modes and genres, and the social context of film. The organization is obviously very flexible. The course could be structured around techniques, themes, or genres. For some classes, organizing the study historically may be feasible, although a thoroughgoing historical investigation of film is not recommended at the secondary level. Asking one set of questions may lead to others; the class might move, for instance, from examining shot composition to studying characteristic compositions in the western, or from examining camerawork to studying camerawork in documentaries. In short, the organization is completely open to individual teacher innovation.

Some general suggestions for teaching film appreciation may be helpful, however. Needless to say, the teacher should know cinema as well as possible. Ideally, he or she should have taken college film courses, read in the field, and seen many films. This also entails the teacher's keeping up-to-date with current thinking in the field, as developed in recent books and in articles in such

journals as *Cinema Journal, Film Comment, Film Quarterly, Screen* (and its companion *Screen Education Notes*), and *Sight and Sound.* A wide background will obviously enable the teacher to be versatile and varied. Correspondingly, the scope of class activities is considerable. Paperback "scripts" (actually transcripts) now permit close critical study of individual films. Class exercises such as visiting local theatres, making scripts, and locating genre conventions or social stereotypes in the world outside the classroom will enrich the course. The course will also be enriched by visits from guests such as theatre managers, distributors, college teachers of film, or local film-makers. The student can examine the film itself, comparing, for example, what accelerated editing looks like on the screen with its physical basis on celluloid. Tracing the debate on the Hollywood rating system, dissecting a critic's essay, or examining an issue of *Variety* can also enliven the curriculum. The crucial issue is to present film as film, in all its diversity of nature and function.

While the film appreciation course may be organized in many ways, it is important to note that the course should be organized. Skills of appreciation, like skills of performance, should be developed progressively and systematically. The student cannot be expected to emerge as an accomplished critic/appreciator on the first exposure to a film in a classroom. Students must be taught how to appreciate. To appreciate is to know the vast array of artistic choices which govern the work of the film artist. To really appreciate is to exercise one's critical judgments in an increasingly sophisticated way.

Film Production

Secondary school programs which utilize film frequently devote substantial parts of the curriculum to film-making, for the excellent reason that many teachers have found student film production exciting and rewarding. Film production can give students a chance to work creatively on visual communication skills and to articulate their responses to the films of their peers. Nonetheless, student film-making places unique demands on the teacher and on the speech communication program as a whole, some of which the teacher will want to consider when mapping out instructional programs.

First, there is equipment. Film depends on technology. Does the school possess super-8mm cameras, projectors, and editing equipment? Or will the students be asked to supply their own

equipment? Second, there is expense. Film costs money. Some speech programs fund the costs of film, others charge each student a lab fee (comparable to the purchase of paperbacks), and still others stipulate that the student will be expected to pay for his or her film. Third, there is time. Film-making consumes hours, especially at the shooting and editing stages. Is the class's schedule flexible enough to permit student groups to meet for some fairly long periods? Can students readily meet on their own outside class? Is an occasional Saturday afternoon meeting feasible? Finally, preparation must be considered. Film-making can consume unnecessary money and time when the students are inadequately prepared. Taking a camera outdoors the first day of class and filming randomly will seldom yield happy results. The groundwork should be laid in advance by discussion, readings, and practice.

Each teacher's solution to the problems of equipment, expense, and preparation will vary, but most film-making programs will share three broadly similar goals. The student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate technical proficiency in at least one and perhaps several phases of film production, as evidenced in both verbal and physical activities. This is evidence of purely practical facility. Can the student draft a script, plan a shot, use a camera, splice two shots together? Effective communication presupposes skill in the sheer manipulation of the medium.

2. Communicate an emotion or thought clearly and specifically through some aspects of the film medium. The student will often necessarily discover "what I want to say" only gradually, while working to refine and clarify what may have started as a vague impulse. How we say something affects what we want to say. Since discovery seems to be a necessary process in all artistic communication, the teacher should probably not demand an overly fixed stipulation of purpose or message—a priori. But after the work has been finished, the student should be able to grasp and point out what the given film communicates and how it does this through the medium of film.

3. Discuss constructively the filmic communication of other students, relating his or her ideas to specific aspects of the film. Audience interaction and feedback is a necessary component of student film-making. A student should be able to analyze and assess another student's films, to relate his or her response to the aspects of the films, and to make suggestions for improvement.

These goals, broad as they are, remain compatible with the general goals of most speech communication programs.

The teaching of film-making can follow many routes, but the outline that follows includes most of the steps common to all: introduction, planning the film, shooting, editing, and screening. Communication though the medium occurs at each stage.

1. *Introduction to film-making.* Several methods may be employed. Reading and discussion can introduce concepts and anticipate problems. Books by or about film-makers not only generate interest but also introduce production material.[7] Critical analysis of a brief film, especially a student film, is an excellent way to initiate interest and pose questions. How was a given effect obtained? What seemed particularly significant in camerawork, editing, frame composition, sound? What would be alternative ways to film a given scene? A particularly good motivating activity is that of making a scratch film from the very start. A reel of 16mm white or clear leader may be unrolled and taped to work tables, allowing the students to paint and draw on it with marking pens. When the film has dried, it can be immediately projected. This could lead to a discussion of the nature of our perception of a film, the fact that a film is created frame by frame, and the communicative aspects of duration and composition in cinema. By such activities, the teacher can map out basic questions and outline the fundamental phases of film production.

2. *Planning the film.* Typically, this stage will consist of making some blueprint for the proposed film. It may be a synopsis, a treatment (a detailed synopsis of the film's action or argument), a script (a shot-by-shot description of the finished film), or a storyboard (a series of sketches, shot-by-shot, of the finished film). Although the degree of precision is at the teacher's discretion, it is often helpful to ask the students to prepare either a script or a storyboard for the film project. Both formats encourage the students to think cinematically, putting them immediately to grips with the specifics of camera placement, composition, editing, and structure. Thus a script or storyboard makes a start toward cultivating technical proficiency and communicative clarity. Moreover, time, money, and energy are less likely to be wasted if there is a coherent blueprint that keeps uncontrolled improvisation

7. *See,* for example, Jerome Agel, *The Making of Kubrick's 2001* (New York: Signet, 1970) and Lillian Ross, *Picture* (New York: Doubleday, 1952).

to a minimum. The students are also reminded of the necessity for every film artist to make creative decisions quite early in the process. Finally, the preparation of a well thought out script or storyboard can itself be a source of great satisfaction and motivation, particularly if these materials are discussed in class and other students make recommendations and suggestions. The specific nature of the blueprint will be dictated in part by the kind of film to be produced; a treatment is more suitable for a documentary, whereas an animated film demands storyboarding, and a fiction film may utilize either script or storyboard. Whatever planning format is chosen, it should be treated as an initial guide and not as the final arbiter. The student should feel free to go beyond the blueprint and alter and improve the film at subsequent stages.

3. *Shooting the film.* One of the most persistent questions asked by prospective film teachers is, How much should I emphasize the technical side of film-making? While a detailed answer is relative to the individual teacher's goals, a general answer can be offered—As much as will permit the students to communicate. Technical know-how for its own sake is probably of secondary usefulness for most students. Thus, the optics of lenses and the chemistry of color are, on the whole, unnecessary for secondary students' purposes (Certain students, needless to say, will become fascinated by such material on their own). Generally, the students should acquire the basic technical skills that will let them concentrate on shaping the medium to their own communicative ends. They should, for example, learn that many camera motors permit filming at different speeds for fast- or slow-motion effects; that lenses of different focal lengths produce different images of the same object; or that different film stocks generate very different qualities of light and texture. This kind of technical knowledge leads to a greater ability to control camerawork, composition, and other techniques for communicative ends.[8]

The basic task of shooting is to get the images on film. At this stage, the students can profitably be introduced to the typical roles that constitute the filming crew: director and cameraperson (at the least), actors, and technical assistants. If the students are working on films individually, they can bring in friends and relatives for help in shooting. If the students work as a group, they can be encouraged to swap roles so that every student gets a chance to

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8. For material on the techniques of film production, *see* Lenny Lipton, *Independent Filmmaking* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1972) and Edward Pincus, *Guide to Filmmaking* (New York: Signet, 1969).

perform several functions in the film-making process. Needless to say, shooting can be as simple or as elaborate as the project demands. As in other matters, the student's communicative interests and goals should dictate the scale of the project. Finally, if shooting continues over several weeks, the screening of processed but unedited footage ("rushes") can constitute an important feedback process, letting the students see how their purposes were achieved and suggesting refinements and revisions of initial plans.

4. *Editing the film.* If not the be-all and end-all of film making, as it was once considered, editing is still not a mere mechanical assembly of shots either. Editing is in itself an important communicative act, since the same footage edited differently will generate very different meanings. If students experiment with rearranging shots, they will see the subtle distinctions that even the slightest changes in editing introduce. More generally, editing creates an overall structure for the finished film, and the placement of each shot in that structure may be seen as crucial to the feelings and meanings produced by the total film. Again, with preparation, minimal technical expertise can be quickly acquired, permitting students to make communication decisions confidently.

Though not strictly a part of editing, sound is also typically added to the film at this phase. Records and tapes of music, noise, and speech can add considerably to the communicative efficacy of the film, and reading and discussion can profitably focus on the differences in meaning resulting from differences in the type and patterns of sound accompaniment.

5. *Final screening.* The screening of the finished film or films can be made as crucial a part of the communicative process as planning, shooting, and editing. The screening, if open to some public, can provide a specimen instance of the roles of the audience and the surroundings in filmic communication. Again, as a technological medium, film depends upon proper circumstances, working equipment, and efficient presentation; a room that cannot be darkened, an audience which blocks the projector beam, a dirty projector gate, and out-of-focus images hamper the communicative act. At some point, moreover, the film should be shown in a situation which permits detailed discussion. A necessary component of the film-making process is response, and by such discussion both film-maker and audience have a chance to exchange views. The result is that from first stage to last, students have had a chance to use and strengthen manifold communication skills.

The Mixed Approach

Perhaps most common is the combination of film appreciation and film-making. In such cases, the teacher integrates film viewing, discussion, and production experiences. The organization can be crafted to permit ideas discussed in film appreciation segments to be tested in practice. Conversely, the class's own films can be subjected to critical examination. After studying the effect of rhythmic editing, how can it be achieved in student films? How can a student film be studied as part of a genre? The mixed approach obviously permits the interplay of a host of such questions and a variety of interrelated activities.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

1. In one school the film appreciation course consists of a Monday viewing of a film with discussion of that film on Tuesday and Thursday. The films are not sequenced in any special way. Students discuss all aspects of film for each of the films viewed. How does that grab you?
2. In Chapter 5, it was implied that the development of radio and television production skills are not the primary goals of broadcast media instruction. Are production skills of major interest in film courses? If you value production skills in film but not in broadcast media, how do you justify the inconsistency?
3. If only one semester-length film course is available, what should its focus be—appreciation, production, or mixed?
4. Since there is no "right" way to make a film, how do you hold students accountable for production excellence?
5. Given that you are responsible for the total film curriculum of Utopia High School, what courses would you include? What should be the focus of these courses? What students should take these courses?

SOME TYPICAL PROBLEMS

We may close this survey with a look at three frequent problems especially common in film study.

1. *What did the film-maker intend?* Intention is a vexing question since it is not clear what an intention is or how we can

verify statements about it. Artists may tell us their intentions, but how can we know if they fib or misremember? In film study, discussions of intention quickly become excursions into the hypothetical and the fantastic. The student director quickly learns the difference between intention and actuality when his or her film misses its target, and to talk of intent will not put on the screen what is not there. Understanding a film does not require reading a creator's mind; understanding a film means grasping how it works. Of any element in a film, the critical question should not be, Why was it put there?, but rather, What does it *do* there?

2. *Who's the communicator in film—the director or the scriptwriter?* In drama, the text of the play is the script, and any deviation in performance is perceived by many as a fault in the performance. But in cinema, the text is the film itself, and any deviation from the script is irrelevant. There are profound theoretical issues at stake here, but we may observe that there is no way to notate a film (as one can a play or musical composition). The visual aspect of the medium constitutes what Nelson Goodman calls "replete" system that cannot be notated. Again, because of the synthetic nature of the medium, the film script is comparable to the libretto for an opera, which the composer transforms by scoring; the film director scores the script. Thus, the director is, by the very nature of the medium, likely to be the primary communicator. This is not to say, though, that a given film may not be analyzed as the work of many artists.

3. *"I don't know why, but that movie was weird."* Since students may not be accustomed to articulating their response to films, cinema study is particularly prone to casual impressionism. Worse, the inarticulate yawp has been encouraged by some college and high school film instructors who urge students not to worry about formulating precise comments but instead to "let it all wash over you." Needless to say, this essay has assumed just the opposite—that humans define themselves through engaging in communicative and artistic activity. Objective understanding, communication, and growth in skill are as possible in film study as in any other field. The fact that one cannot recapture the film experience in words does not suggest that we cannot say illuminating and useful things about it. Indeed, we are a long way from saying all that we can about film, and in large measure it will be the men and women teaching film who will help both students and scholars to better understand the potential of this exhilarating medium.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

1. How does one grasp how a film works? Can one perform this grasping without understanding the film-maker's intent?
2. This section asserts that in film the script is irrelevant. What are the pedagogical implications of this observation?
3. Are there right and wrong responses to a film experience? How should students be guided in articulating their responses to film?

FOR FURTHER READING

The Film Index. vol. 1, *The Film As Art.* New York: 1941.

This invaluable bibliography lists virtually all material available in English on film aesthetics and history through 1940.

Gerlach, John C. and Lana Gerlach, eds., *The Critical Index.* New York: Teachers College Press.

As a reasonably successful attempt to update The Film Index, *this volume constitutes a valuable reference tool.*

Manchel, Frank. *Film Study: A Resource Guide.* Teaneck, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973.

Full of material on specific films, genres, techniques, and suggested curricula, Manchel's work deserves to be part of every film teacher's library.

Sadoul, Georges. *Dictionary of Films and Dictionary of Film Makers,* translated and updated by Peter Morris. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

One of the greatest of film historians, Georges Sadoul, compiled these two very useful reference tools.

PART TWO

Perspectives on Teaching and Learning