

*Postcards from the Edge:*  
**Reference and Instruction  
for Film Studies**

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Presenter:

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*With thanks to the Banff Centre for  
their hospitality & sponsorship!*



# Workshop Overview

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- 1:30 – 1:35 Introductions
- 1:35 – 2:15 What Librarians need to know about Film Studies
- 2:15 – 2:25 Break
- 2:25 – 3:15 Reference Materials
- 3:15 – 3:45 Coffee Break
- 3:45 – 4:15 Books, Journals & Collection Development
- 4:15 – 5:00 Databases & Indexes



# What Librarians Need to Know about Film Studies

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1. Why do people write about movies?
2. How do people write about movies?



# Why do people write about movies?

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Timothy Corrigan: *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 2004

- To increase our enjoyment of movies
- To better understand movies
- Aims/Functions of Film Criticism (and student papers!):
  - Understand your own response to a movie better.
  - Convince others why you like or dislike a film.
  - Explain or introduce something about a movie, a filmmaker, or a group of movies that your readers may not know.
  - Make comparisons and contrasts between one movie and others, as a way of understanding them better.
  - Make connections between a movie and other areas of culture in order to illuminate both the culture and the movies it produces.

# How do people write about movies?


Timothy Corrigan: *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 2004

## 3 Types of Film Writing:

- Movie Review
- Theoretical Essay
- Critical Essay

## 6 Approaches of Film Writing:

- Film History
- National Cinemas
- Genres
- Auteurs
- Formalism
- Ideology



# Characteristics of the Critical Essay

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- Between review & theoretical essay
- Writer presumes that audience has seen or is familiar w/ the film, but perhaps has not extensively analyzed it
- “Remind” readers of key elements/themes, but avoids retelling the story
- Writer tries to reveal subtleties/complexities
- Focus may be on a specific portion of the film, such as one scene or shot, or one camera angle



## 6 Approaches to Film Writing: Film History

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- One of most widely used methods
- "Writer using this approach organizes and investigates films according to their place within a historical context and in light of historical developments."
- Some historical awareness informs most writing about film
- Examples:
  - Historical relationships between films (compare/contrast)
  - Relationship of film to its broader social/historical context
  - Relationship of films to their conditions of production
  - Relationship of movies to their reception



## 6 Approaches to Film Writing: National Cinemas

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- Discussing film in terms of cultural or national character
- "Ways of seeing the world and ways of portraying the world in movies differ for each country and culture, and it is necessary to understand the cultural conditions that surround a movie if we are to understand what it is about."
- Examples:
  - What distinguishes a particular foreign film from an American one?
  - How is this film understood outside of its "home" culture?
  - Audience reaction in different time/place





# 6 Approaches to Film Writing: Genres

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- Classifying films in terms of common patterns of form & content
- Identify similar themes, characters, narrative structures, & stylistic techniques
- Examples:
  - When did this genre first appear?
  - Analogs/predecessors in literature or other fields?
  - Changes in genre over time
  - How well does the film "fit" the genre in which it's been placed?
  - Is film a mix/match/amalgam of several genres?
  - Parodying genre to expand it or show limits of genre?



# 6 Approaches to Film Writing: Auteurs

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- Widely accepted, often unconsciously practiced
- Identifies and examines a movie by associating it w/ a director or, sometimes, with another dominant figure such as a star.
- Implies that the director has a unifying vision behind the film (director is the auteur who anchors and unifies our perception of the film)
- Caveats:
  - Directors usually do not have the total control suggested by the term "auteur"
  - "Auteur" means different things in different eras
- Examples:
  - Studio system control vs. director's control
  - Identify the most distinctive signs of the filmmaker's control
  - How is audience perception swayed by filmmaker's reputation?
  - Changes in director's work over course of career



# 6 Approaches to Film Writing: Formalism

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- Structure and style, & how they are organized in particular ways
- Combine formal matters w/ major themes of the film... but "chief focus of a formalist essay will be on:
  - patterns such as narrative opening & closings,
  - the significant repetition and variation of camera techniques,
  - or the relation of shots & sequences to each other."
- Does not (strictly speaking) emphasize matters outside of the film
- Usually becomes part of other arguments
- Examples:
  - Investigate narrative unity
  - Stylistic or formal repetitions in editing or lighting & how they work w/ the rest of the film
  - Describe one visually complex scene & discuss how it works and/or its significance to the rest of the film



## 6 Approaches to Film Writing: Ideology

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*"In critical writing attuned to ideology, any cultural product or creation carries, implicitly or explicitly, ideas about how the world is or should be seen and how men and women should see each other in it...."*

- Ideological critic asserts that movies are not innocent entertainments & that the social/political/personal messages (implicit or explicit) need to be analyzed
- Usually avoid overtly political/propagandist movies
- Discuss more than the content of movies

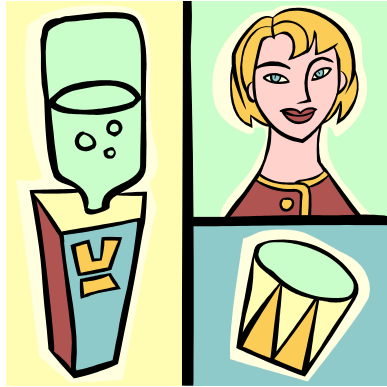


## 6 Approaches to Film Writing: Ideology (cont'd)

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### **Six principal ideological schools of film criticism:**

1. Hollywood-ism/Hollywood-ness (hegemony)
2. Gender
3. Race
4. Class
5. Postcolonialism
6. Queer theory



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**BREAK!!!**  
**(10 minutes)**



# Reference Materials

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## Types of Cinema Reference

1. General: facts, dates, terms
2. People: info on directors, actors, etc.
3. Genre: terms, people, films particular to one genre
4. Cultural Groups & Women in Film: often are filmographies; cover underrepresented groups
5. Film Theory: terminology



# Reference Materials: Hands-on Time!

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## Questions to consider:

- Why would a student need a resource like this?
- How “far” does this resource go?
- Does this resource give options for further investigation?
- What are the limitations of this resource?
- How can this resource help me:
  - At the reference desk
  - With collection development
  - In an instruction session
- In a class setting, how would I explain the use of this resource?

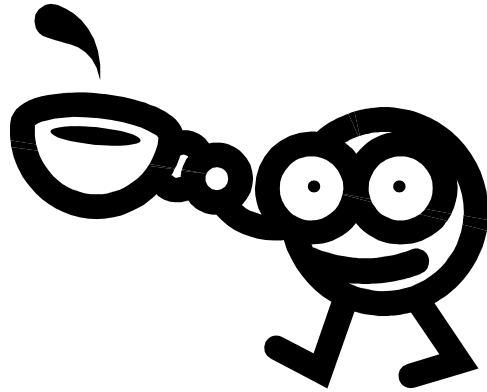




# Reference Materials: Online Hands-on Time!

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- Internet Movie Database:
  - <http://www.imdb.com>
  - Free web site
- Film Index International / Film Indexes Online
  - From Chadwyck-Healey
  - FIO combines FII (from British Film Institute) & AFI catalog in one database
- Complete Index to World Film since 1895:
  - <http://www.citwf.com>
  - database of over 379,000 films from 175 countries
  - Compiled by Alan Goble
  - CD-ROM loads onto your server for multiple concurrent users; now available on the web, too.



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**COFFEE BREAK!!!**  
**(30 minutes)**



# Books

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## 5 Major Types of Books:

1. Screenplays\*
2. History & Analysis
3. Biographies, Memoirs\*, Interviews\*
4. Technical
5. “Fan” Books / “Making of...” Books\*

Check out the  
catalogs!

*\* Indicates primary source material*



# Screenplays

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- What are they? Why use them in research?
- “Shooting Script”
- American Film Scripts Online
  - From Alexander Street Press



# Periodicals

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## 5 Major Types of Periodicals:

1. Scholarly Journals
2. Moviemaking
  - Useful for director/filmmaker interviews, also for formalist articles
3. Trade\*
  - Useful for box office numbers, primary historical audience research
4. Newspapers\*
  - Useful for primary film reviews, audience response
5. Popular Magazines
  - Useful for gauging popular response to films and/or impact on popular culture (and vice-versa)



**BREAK?**  
**(5 minutes)**



# Indexes

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## Macmillan Film Bibliography

- Use the Subject Index (in vol. 2) to find books on films. (Books are listed in vol. 1.)

## Index to Critical Film Reviews

- A guide to articles in scholarly journals... OLD, but has citations for foreign & obscure films. Films are listed alphabetically by title.

## Film Review Index

- Vol. 1: 1882-1949; Vol. 2: 1950-1985.
- Citations for periodical articles (mainly from newspapers) from on or near the release date of films.



# Databases (the “biggies”)

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## Film Literature Index:

- <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/fli/simpleSearch.jsp>
- Online is FREE; date coverage: 1971-2002
- Indexes 150 film and television periodicals from 30 countries.
- Soon to be released: *Film & Television Literature Index* (EBSCO)

## FIAF International FilmArchive Database

- Served by SilverPlatter (Ovid)
- Coverage: 300 periodicals since 1972, also print sources
- Consists of four databases:  
International Index to Film/TV Periodicals, Treasures from the Film Archives,  
International Directory of Film/TV Documentation Collections, Bibliography of  
FIAF Members Publications





## Databases (the “others”)

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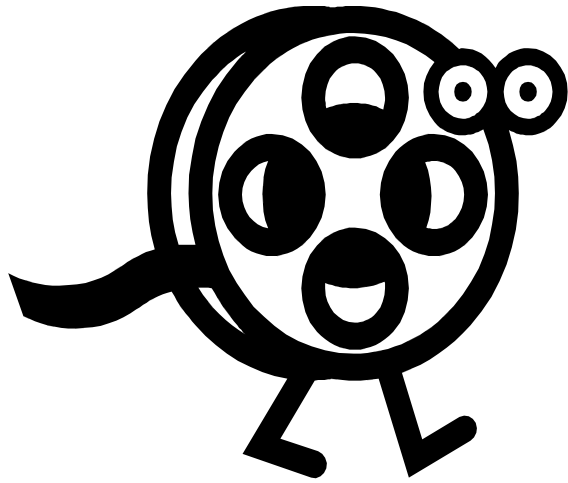
### International Index to the Performing Arts:

- From Chadwyck-Healey
- 1864-present;; avail. with or without full text

### Art Abstracts:

- From HW Wilson
- Date coverage: 1929-present.

*Also: MLA International Bibliography, Communication & Mass Media Complete*



# It's a wrap!

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Questions?

Comments?

Other ideas to share?

*Powerpoint slides & handouts will be posted to the ARLIS/NA  
Web site, under "Conference Proceedings"*