

## At Edusites, we explain "film aesthetics".

### Aesthetics in Film and Cinema

In Edusites' mission statement, we aim to define "film aesthetics" and provide a foundation for more complex ideas.

First, what is aesthetics? Aesthetics is the philosophy of art. It seeks to answer questions about what art is, its role in life, and how we can judge art. Different schools of aesthetics offer different answers, and while we won't explore those now, it's important to note that aesthetic perspectives are influenced by broader philosophical views. Aesthetics often relates to other important ideas, making their relationships interesting to explore.

Despite the various schools of aesthetic thought, some basic concepts are common across the field. In all art forms—painting, poetry, music, or film—there are two main aspects: what is shown and how the artist shows it. The "what" is called the "subject," and the "how" is known as the "style."

The forms in a painting, the words in a poem, the notes in music, and what appears on screen in a film are all subjects. Art must provide us with something to experience at a sensory level, and that experience is the subject.

Separate from the subject is the piece's style, which includes the various methods the artist uses to convey the subject. A piece's style is largely determined by its medium, and different forms of art will be associated with different styles. However, within each medium, there are many stylistic choices aimed at affecting the audience and presenting the subject in a specific way. The interplay between subject and style creates the characteristics of a piece of art that generate passionate responses from the audience. An artist's skill lies in unifying stylistic choices with the subject to convey a unique message or statement.

Since Edusites focuses on films, it's essential to identify the specific concepts in film that generate both subject and style. In film, the subject is created through storytelling elements like plot, characterisation, and theme. Ayn Rand in *Basic Principles of Literature*, defines plot as "a purposeful progression of logically connected events leading to the resolution of a climax". Characterisation involves creating and displaying characters—introducing us to the important people in the story and showing their reactions to events. The theme of a work is its overall goal or focus, dealing with what the film means to say rather than what it shows or how it shows it.

Summing up a film's style is more challenging because, while the concepts involved in generating a subject are broad and limited, those detailing the style are specific and numerous. Elements of a film's style include cinematography (composition, aspect ratio, camera movement, black and white vs. colour, etc.), acting choices, direction, use of voice-over, storytelling methods, and editing choices. The interaction between a film's subject and style provides the means for informed analysis of cinematic aesthetics.

Superficial analysis of a film often leaves much to be desired. While there's some value in merely providing one's opinion on a film, understanding subject and style offers a more objective approach to analysis. This process involves first identifying the film's subject, especially its theme, and then analysing how the specific aspects of style express that subject.

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For example, in Christopher Nolan's *Inception*, he chose to use a complex narrative structure with multiple layers of dreams. The plot deals with a team of thieves who enter dreams to steal secrets, and the theme explores the nature of reality and the subconscious mind. Nolan's decision to use a non-linear narrative creates a sense of disorientation and complexity, reflecting the film's subject. Thus, a single stylistic choice effectively portrays aspects of plot, characterisation, and theme—showing how style informs subject.

Another example is Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. Anderson's distinct visual style includes symmetrical compositions, vibrant colours, and meticulous set designs. The plot revolves around the adventures of a concierge and his protégé, and the theme focuses on nostalgia and the passage of time. Anderson's stylistic choices create a whimsical and nostalgic atmosphere that complements the film's subject.

Films that achieve such artistic feats deserve praise for uniquely using the tools of their medium (style) to tell a compelling, important story (subject). When analysing a film, we should look beyond whether we enjoyed it and appreciate its artistic merits, determining why it elicits a particular response. It's crucial to realise that these are distinct concepts: one can evaluate a film as "great" while simultaneously admitting, "I didn't really like it."

Edusites aims to provide well-reasoned arguments and passionate opinions on films, exploring each idea in detail.

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