



SYNOPTIQUE 5 • Montréal, Canada

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The Synoptique Style Gallery

by Brian Crane

The gallery can be found at <http://www.synoptique.ca/galleries/style>

This Link Opens a New Window

The following text can also be found at the above link.

The SYNOPTIQUE STYLE GALLERY springs from film lovers talking about film and realizing that whether they were arguing about films they loved, films they hated or films that just seemed unavoidably "important" most of their talk was about film style. But we (yes, this writer was among these talkers) also realized that the same aspects of film style were not equally important to each of us. We also began to suspect that our ideas of what style meant varied wildly. How to peg the concept down?

At first the task seemed daunting: as the conversation spread wider and more people became involved more films began to be cited, more differences seemed to creep in, and the talk tended to become more abstract and hypothetical.

This gallery became a way to capture this expanding conversation without closing it off or narrowing it down. It became a way to collect concrete examples from actual films that individuals were willing to stand behind and point to and say, "Yes, this is a moment of film style." It became a way of helping us to see and to hear what the conversation is about and to give us hints of what still manages (somehow) to slip through the cracks. More importantly, it became a way to expand the conversation into new territory.

The Gallery you see is composed of people's responses to a prompt : we asked people to identify and describe a moment of film style. That moment could be anything and was. A raised eyebrow, a sequence, a motif recurring throughout the film, all of these and more were potential style moments. Everyone approached the question differently and talk about what should be in the gallery quickly produced a variety of alternate prompts:

1. Free associate on film style: what example keeps coming back to you? Do you have an acid test moment you compare all other style moments to?
2. Do you have a favorite film moment? Would you call it "stylish"?
3. What was the first moment where you remember watching a film and thought of its "stylishness"?
4. If you were a teacher and someone asked you to explain film style, what example would you use to do so?

But The Gallery is not finished and the conversation about style has barely begun. We want more examples of films style, more descriptions of what makes them valuable, more arguments about why style matters and how. We want this so we can begin to see films better. This gallery is full of moments chosen for one of the best possible reasons: they moved us emotionally, mentally, aesthetically, etc. Let's speak about style in these moments and see what sense we can make of them.

Please use the link at the top of this page to visit the gallery.

COMMENTS:

Dear Synoptique editors: I think your Style Gallery is a fantastic idea and applaud your choices and comments. I am afraid you are going to be inundated with follow-up suggestions. May I be so bold to offer two: The opening montage in End of The Road (1970) directed by Aram Avakian, the legendary sixties film editor of Jazz for A Summer's Day, The Miracle Worker, Lilith, and Mickey One. The montage intercuts newsreel footage, rostrum camera work, and dramatic footage to depict the childhood and formative years of the burn out college graduate played by Stacy Keach. The sequence is edited to Billie Holliday's "Don't Worry 'Bout Me" and concludes with Keach's character standing in a catatonic state on a New England railway station platform. I have also been haunted by the sequence in Alan Pakula's Kluge (1972), when Jane Fonda as the call-girl Bree Daniels visits her elderly client at his garment district office. As part of a recurring fantasy of the client's, she plays a European sophisticate. Set to a haunting and far too brief piece of music by Michael Small, the sequence reminds us that Daniels is also playing out a fantasy - of the beautiful and talented actress she has failed to become - and that her interaction with the client is one of affection rather than the contempt or alienation she feels for many of her other clients. ...a great site by the way which I will be recommending to other friends and colleagues. Best, Lee Hill

By Lee Hill on 2004 11 06

Style is the point a film is built through. But to talk about a film director's style, i don't all the way understand the question. Which is maybe what we're all looking to define in here. A clear question to answer. Because what is wes anderson's style is most easily answered, wes anderson's style (or whatever director.) To extrapolate from there it is too easy to mistake his concrete, elaborately detailed sets, quirky wardrobe, soft humor, awkward beats but all to what end, where's the point. Where's the end obviously within in him. We have to go too deep to find it. We may have to ruin it to find it. Because our style could be a collection of insecurities or vanity. But it could be a collection of hopes, aspirations and imitations. Because whatever we do or why we do it can't be broken into degrees. How much of our doing was imitation of our idols, how much was spite, how much was instinct? In this case Wes Anderson made a sweet sad visual interpretation of the modern fiction set in new york that he loved as a teenager. That's what he made but a style in which it was made is faceted to the point of blinding. What makes a person fill a house top to bottom with surreality? Why is he attempting to create a believable unreality? Why does he leave out: graphic sex, human deformity, bowel movements. Why are his movies safe and classy? Because of his style. So I don't know what we're trying to get at here. His style is everything within him, everything he'll tell us on the bonus features is just the part of what he knows about his style that he's comfortable to share. What he has in his head and heart that he doesn't tell us or know about is probably what we're trying to get at. Or else we can repeat the following ad infinitum adlibbing all along. ____ spends his time on ____, placing ____ into his films. Most of the time to the benefit of his _____. The _____ is an interpretation of the ____ we imagine when _____ ing about it. And so on. What's interesting is that this is the first comment on either of wes anderson's movies. All the other eight or so clips have comments. Is that an effect of his style? Is it in admiration for the guy or being too cool for him or what. My generation, born in the late seventies, sees in his movies a contemporary artist that has come the closest to painting a true emblem of our spirit. A sad optimism. We've been hurt, all of us along the way. And we delight in a combination of self-pity and having endured. And also of our potential as underachievers.

By Jayson Rahmlow on 2004 11 06

I believe you may look to Kenneth Burke's definition of form , the creation of a desire and then fulfilling that desire. My first experience noticing style was in 1979 when my parents took me to see Apocolypse Now. Three scenes created and fulfilled a desire for me, the surfing scene with Robert Duvall and Timothy Bottoms, he played Bush in Thats My Bush, The scene at the last base before Kurtz, and the ending Napalming of Kurtz's compound. The Scene in Ran with the Telephoto view of the Samurai spilling onto the battle field though is the most beautiful. The opening scene of Patton is as well.

By Jason Garrett Hitzert on 2004 11 15

http://articles.synoptique.ca/style_gallery/

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