

Although this particular comparison was an assignment, it would be very useful for teachers to systematically analyze the various textbooks that they may assign for their courses. Even if the instructor is at a location where a specific textbook is assigned, browsing through alternative materials might give shape to ideas for assignment prompts, lesson plans, and activities. Textbook comparisons may also facilitate looping back to your teaching journal and help brainstorm ways your reading influences your work. Finally, textbook comparisons allow you to start "testing" your understanding of the different theories of

- content and
- pedagogy

in your discipline. You can examine how specific textbooks integrate different types of knowledge into their structure, organization, and content.

Introduction to Film Textbooks

A Comparison

This comparison analyzes and comments on the differences between the following introduction to film textbooks:

- Bordwell, David., and Kristin Thompson. Film Art: An Introduction. 14th edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993.
- Giannetti, Louis. Understanding Movies. 8th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ.: Prentice Hall, 1999.
- Lehman, Peter., and William Luhr. Thinking About Movies: Watching, Questioning, Enjoying. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1999.

In order to remain brief, I “only” focus on the following three criteria: content, examples, and format. I describe how the texts handle each criteria and then speculate on how that would impact my teaching of an introduction to film course. Since I have only really worked through Lehman and Luhr’s text, I speak as a teacher making future plans. I realize that courses like this are always up for revision and admit I could possibly filter through all three texts if I were to continuously teach this kind of course.

Content Covered

Lehman and Luhr’s text briefly starts out with chapters on narrative and formal elements. They then move on to broader topics such as authorship, genre, series and sequels, actors and the star system, plus audiences and reception. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 cover the relationship between film and other mediums. The text ends on an ideological note with chapters on sex, race, and class.

Both Bordwell and Thompson’s plus Giannetti’s texts spend more time on formal and narrative elements, with Bordwell and Thompson including entire chapters on mise-en-scene, cinematographic properties, editing, sound, and formal style. Giannetti includes whole chapters on photography, mise-en-scene, movement, editing, and sound. Both texts also include multiple

chapters on narrative elements. Bordwell and Thompson on film form, narrative formal systems, and nonnarrative formal systems. Giannette covers chapters on drama, story, and writing.

Like Lehman and Luhr, Giannette dedicates some space to ideological concerns. Bordwell and Thompson's text seems to lack ideological concepts, only briefly mentioned in the final chapter. Bordwell and Thompson have a strong introductory chapter on the film production process and a concluding, almost appendix like, chapter on film history (including International connections).

I have to start by admitting that I think spending a quantity of time teaching formal and narrative elements is extremely important. However, I also believe it is just as important to spend time discussing the ideological constructions and ramifications of these films. With this in mind, I would probably initially choose Giannetti's text. However, it is relatively easy to construct handouts and lectures that cover formal and narrative elements, therefore leaving Lehman and Luhr's text in the running. Since Bordwell and Thompson's text does not firmly cover ideological concerns, I don't think I would be happy using it; but, their chapters on the production process and film history point back to weaknesses in the other two texts.

Examples

All three texts tend to handle film examples differently. Lehman and Luhr's text includes a solid, in-depth analysis of at least two films at the end of each chapter. At the extreme opposite end of the spectrum, Giannetti's text only includes brief paragraphs, next to film stills, that explain how the film fits with the content of the chapter (except his concluding chapter on Citizen Kane). Bordwell and Thompson's text seems to fall somewhere in between, with some chapters including more in depth analysis of particular texts, others not. All three books briefly mention films, and include supporting stills, through the actual content readings.

Lehman and Luhr's plus Giannette's texts end with concluding chapters on Citizen Kane that discuss all of the covered topics in reference to the film. Bordwell and Thompson instead end with a chapter of example film criticisms that covers 17 different films in relative detail.

Lehman and Luhr, plus Giannette, emphasize the need to include both canonical and popular texts. Both also include some international works, obviously Giannette more since he has more films as examples. Bordwell and Thompson on the other hand tend to stay focused on primarily canonical texts, both American and International.

I think that it depends on both the student-audience and the types of films that the instructor would like to show that dictate which type of text to use. If I were working with a high school or freshman audience, I might want to use something like Lehman and Luhr's or Bordwell and Thompson's that give more detailed examples. That student audience might need to read, see, and hear about the particular example for the point to be learned. On the other hand, a little more sophisticated audience might be interested in the variety and exception that occur with every rule and convention. Giannetti's text would then be the one to use.

I believe in showing the connections and interfaces between canonical and popular texts, thus, again, I would be more interested in Lehman and Luhr's or Giannetti's. At this point, if I were happy with the films that Lehman and Luhr used, I would probably use that text and screen the

films used as examples. If I wanted to show different films, I would then probably use Giannetti's, with the hope that the multitude of his examples would relate to and/or shadow what was happening in the films I screened.

Format/Layout

Lehman and Luhr's text constructs its chapters with bold and centered section headlines that occur rather frequently. Almost every page includes at least one, rather small, picture from a film being discussed as an example in the main text of the chapter. The end of each chapter includes at least two detailed analyses of different films, also with small example pictures around the borders of the page. Each chapter concludes with a brief "selected readings" paragraph.

Giannette's chapters open with a brief chapter overview. The major chapter sections are separated by a bold black line that cuts through the entire page border, next to the bold, all caps, section title. Key words and vocabulary are put in bold type within the main text. Almost every double page spread contains at least one, usually two, example photos and explanatory captions. Each of the photos takes up about 1/4 of the page, the caption taking up the remaining section for a total 1/2 page chunk. Giannette is taken to creating lists and diagrams to help reach a different learning style, and occasionally emphasize and distill the point. Giannette also includes a "further reading" section that just has bibliographic entries, no explanation of what and why for each text.

Finally, Bordwell and Thompson break their book into both "parts" and chapters. Each part has a brief introduction, as does each chapter. They also bold and center their chapter section, along with using fat red spot color lines to separate the headline. Terms and vocabulary are bold type faced. Like Lehman and Luhr, the majority of the example photos are rather small and pushed to the border of the pages. Each chapter ends with a summary, and a section called "notes and queries." The notes and queries section includes bibliographic references along with commentary about why the student may want to read further. These sections can be rather lengthy, especially in comparison to the other two texts.

All three texts include color sections within the book. This is crucial, especially when talking about formal elements, color in particular. First and foremost, I like when texts somehow emphasize main points, ideas, and terms. Whereas most of the points make it to Lehman and Luhr's headlines, many of the important terms can be lost in the text. Bordwell and Thompson's plus Giannetti's texts do not allow that to happen with the bold type vocabulary and supporting glossaries. I really like how Giannetti gave privilege to the size of the pictures; however, this did not allow him to show a series from each film, like Lehman and Luhr plus Bordwell and Thompson. Finally, I think that Bordwell and Thompson's use of red as spot color was way overdone and a waste of design energy and printing costs.