Until recently there were only scattered essays and one book attempting to apply cognitivist assumptions to film and emotions. The very question seemed strange: how could cognitivism, with its emphasis on rational processes, hope to explain the irrational world of filmic emotion? Yet in the past few years several landmark books have appeared which pose compelling answers to that question. It now seems easier to discuss a cognitivist perspective on film emotions.

Overturning long-held Romantic notions about the opposition between emotion and cognition, a cognitivist can emphasize emotions as a structured complement to cognitive processes. Emotions, to this way of thinking, motivate people to move more quickly toward their goals. Whether the goal is to remove oneself from a threatening lion's presence or to achieve intimacy with a loved one, emotions provide us with an impetus that logical deliberation alone cannot provide. Emotions are not dysfunctions that interfere with our rationality; instead they are functional processes. Emotions, to the budding cognitivist perspective, are functional action tendencies that motivate us toward goals and that are shaped by our situational expectations.

While I agree with the thrust of this argument, I believe we must ask, in what ways is it productive and counterproductive to view the emotion system with these assumptions? The relatively straightforward fit between traditionally cognitivist concepts (such as goals and expectations) and the functionalist explanation of emotions is tempting. Before we embrace a particular understanding of the emotion system to guide our investigations into film, however, we should investigate if our current cognitivist assumptions leave out important parts of the emotion system.

The emotion system is more complex—messier, if you will—than such functionalist assumptions would indicate. While retaining a cognitivist understanding of emotions as structured phenomena, I wish to muddy the waters by portraying the emotion system as based on a looser connecting...
principle (associations), not on the tight trajectory that links action and goal. As important as action tendencies, "object" orientation, and goal orientation are to the emotion system, they are not the whole story.

This chapter attempts to add an associationist model of the emotions that parallels, but is not identical to, the functional one emphasized in film cognitivism thus far. This model enlarges the focus of our attentions from the emotions proper to include other emotion-related states such as "mood," and I argue that these less intense states are as vital to understanding filmic emotion as are more prototypical emotions. In the first half of this chapter I articulate this alternative model of emotions in some detail, so readers more interested in film than emotion theory perhaps should skim this argument and move fairly quickly to the second half, where I discuss what this model's assumptions might tell us about emotions and film narration.

While film cognitivism is in its early stages, we need to make sure that our basic conception of the emotion system does not needlessly limit our understanding of filmic emotions. This chapter sketches an approach to analyzing the emotional appeals of particular film texts, an approach that can provide nuanced insight into the broad range of complex emotion cues within a film. The first step toward creating such an approach to films is to ensure that our theoretical understanding of the emotion system is not too narrowly defined to discuss the breadth of emotional experience.

Film Cognitivism and Emotion Thus Far: The Emotion Prototype

Emotions are a real-world category, and, like many real-world categories, they are arranged around a prototype. Trying to determine if an egret is a bird, under ordinary circumstances, involves comparing the individual to a prototype (e.g., a robin). It is much simpler to recognize that there are numerous similarities between the egret and the robin than it is to ascertain if an egret has all the Linnaean factors required to classify it as a bird: Does it have feathers? Does it lay eggs? Is it warm-blooded? Prototypes allow us to recognize category members quickly and efficiently.

What, then, are some of the characteristics of the prototype of emotion? The emotion prototype is structured according to the principles that film cognitivism has embraced. Emotions are prototypically thought of as being action tendencies: for example, fear spurs us to run away from a menacing animal. Such emotions have a goal (to remove the animal menace from our presence). Emotions are intentional, in Franz Brentano's term; they have an object (I am not merely afraid; I am afraid of something).4 Definitions of emotion rooted in cognitive philosophy tend to have some combination of these central characteristics of the emotion prototype: an action tendency, an orientation toward objects, and a goal orientation. Film cognitivism has inherited these assumptions.

These assumptions make prototypical emotions seem not unlike other goal-oriented phenomena that film cognitivists have explained. David Bordwell,5 for instance, has argued that canonical narrative form (in the classical Hollywood cinema) tends to put individual protagonists in pursuit of a clear goal. The actions characters perform to achieve their goals become the basis for the forward movement of the plot. Spectators make hypotheses about what will happen next based on their expectations. Seen in this way, the connection between comprehending film narration and experiencing film emotions seems more straightforward, since expectations, goals, and purposive actions are at the heart of both processes.

Relying on the prototype of emotions has helped film cognitivists Noel Carroll, Ed Tan, and Torben Grodal provide admirably specific accounts of filmic emotions. Carroll is able to discuss with considerable particularity the characteristics of the monster, the central object of horror in the horror film. Tan's model explains how spectators assemble narrative information into cohesive emotional scenarios, and this model provides specific, testable hypotheses concerning how actual viewers understand characters' actions, motivations, and goals.6 Grodal's system provides a rich array of terms to describe the emotional experiences of a spectator identifying with characters as those characters try to achieve their goals.7 Considering the emotions using prototypical assumptions helps these theorists to describe filmic emotional experiences with insight and specificity.

With these advantages come certain disadvantages, however. If one understands filmic emotions as object-, action-, and goal-oriented, then this privileges the portion of the film that most clearly fits these criteria. For Carroll, Tan, and Grodal, this means that filmic emotions are inextricably character-oriented. Dramatic characters provide clear objects for our emotions. They have goals, and they pursue them through a course of action. Because of the tightness of fit between the functions of characters and the functionality of emotions, these theorists privilege our understanding of characters' actions, motivations, and goals over other considerations. For Carroll the key to understanding horror is to understand the qualities of a particular kind of character: the monster. Tan argues that action/plot structures and character structures are the primary determinants guiding our emotional expectations. Grodal places strong emphasis on the identificatory link between spectator and character as crucial to understanding filmic emotion. The prototypical understanding of emotion helps foreground the importance of characters and actions in filmic emotions.

But what about other features that are less clearly object-, goal-, and action-oriented? What about style, for instance? Carroll, Tan, and Grodal all recognize that style helps films provide their emotional appeals. However, none of them give style a central place in their system's concept of emotion.
Carroll provides an indicative case. Instead of examining the *mise en scène* or musical conventions of horror films, he concentrates on the qualities and actions of a particular character: the monster. In Carroll’s wide-ranging career, he has clearly paid much attention to style. However, when he examines film music, a stylistic element that is less clearly person-centered, he notes that its primary function is to “modify” the more important emotional cues provided by character, plot, situation, and so on. All of these theorists agree that style has a valuable modifying role, but their assumptions about emotion (as object-, action-, and goal-oriented) keep style in a secondary role. In each cognitivist theory the dominant mechanism engaging filmic emotions depends on characters and their actions.

Considering that the Hollywood cinema encourages us to concentrate on characters and relegate stylistic matters to the background, this approach makes sense. But should we, as critics examining filmic emotions, follow this foregndrounding of character and action? The answer is not obvious. Perhaps broadening our understanding of the emotion system beyond the prototype may provide richer readings of films and their emotional appeals.

The emotion system is accessed by emotion states that do not fit the emotion prototype so clearly. Depression, for instance, is not a functional action tendency. If I am so depressed that I am immobile, it is difficult to view such an emotional, self-perpetuating state as an “action tendency” toward a goal. Emotion states such as depression do not promote the subject’s well-being, and yet a depressed person alone in his or her room is experiencing an emotion state that is no less forceful simply because it is not functional. Emotion states can have nondirected expression (like depression) and can be elicited by extremely diffuse stimuli (like a sunny day). If I feel happy because it is a sunny day, my emotion has a cause, but the “object” (everything surrounding me) is too diffuse to be an object in any strongly meaningful sense. Wait a minute, you may interject. Depression and positive feelings on a sunny day are not clearly emotions, one could argue. Such states are a far cry from the fear one experiences in being chased by an animal or the love one feels for Mother. These may be emotion-related or emotional states, but many would argue that such less-focused, less-intense, and less-cognitively elaborated states are not emotions proper. For instance, Carroll (see chapter 1) notes the existence of bodily states that have an affective tendency, but he brackets these off from emotions proper.

To bracket off these emotional states from the “real” emotions, I would argue, tends to encourage the critic to afford them less attention. Subtle critics well versed in the research on emotion and the body (including Carroll, Tan, and Grodal) may acknowledge the existence of such related states, but it is easy to let such states slip into the background, since they are not truly considered to be emotions per se. Such emotion states tend to be excluded from the primary mechanisms in filmic emotion theories.

This exclusion does make a certain sense, if one is trying to explain the major mechanisms governing filmic emotions. Providing an explanation for intense, focused filmic emotions seems intuitively to be more important than explaining lesser emotional states. Intuition can be deceiving, however. A better measure would be to determine if the emotion system reacts similarly to both prototypical emotions and other, more diffuse emotional states. If it does, this would argue for the potential usefulness of expanding our concept of the emotion system to include nonprototypical emotion states. For the moment, let us entertain the possibility that just because certain emotional states are at lower levels, are less focused, and are less forceful than the emotion prototype does not mean that they are less important to understanding how the emotion system works.

The Emotion System: An Associative Model

We need a model of the emotions which links responses and stimuli in flexible but stable connections. The model proposed here asserts that associations can provide just such a linkage, and that the primacy of associations is supported by the physiological and neurological structure of the emotion system.

Emotions are what may be called multidimensional response syndromes. They are groups of responses (including action tendencies, orienting responses, and expressions) connected to several possible eliciting systems. Emotions differ from reflexes in that they can be expressed through differing responses, depending on the individual’s predispositions, the characteristics of the social situation, and cultural mores. A person might respond to embarrassment by blushing, cringing, making a self-deprecating joke, or deflecting attention away from oneself. One cannot specify with absolute certainty which of a group of responses a specific person might have to an emotional situation, but one can enumerate a group of likely responses.

Not only can emotions provoke a range of responses, but the emotion system can also be invoked by several possible subsystems. Those subsystems that have been discussed as being important to eliciting emotions are facial nerves and muscles, vocalization, body posture and skeletal muscles, autonomic nervous system, conscious cognition, and the nonconscious processing by the central nervous system. Each of these plays a part in the general process of producing emotion.

Psychologists have investigated these six areas in search of the underlying bases of emotions. Various researchers have found that all of these systems have a contributing or mediating effect on the emotion system, but
none of these subsystems is sufficient to cause emotion by itself. Only one of
the components of the emotion system has been shown to be necessary to
emotion: the limbic system in nonconscious central nervous processing.

The limbic system is a highly interconnected neurological center that re-

cieves information from a wide range of input systems. Its function is to
evaluate that information, to provide an emotional coding based on this
evaluation, to trigger an initial response, and to monitor the stream of emo-
tional stimuli and responses (in conjunction with conscious processing).
The limbic system (particularly the amygdala) is the common neural path-
way traveled by emotional data.

This model therefore locates the connection between stimuli and emo-
tional responses in nonconscious processing. The limbic system makes an
initial emotional evaluation of stimuli received from the other subsystems,
and it does so without assistance from conscious processing. The limbic sys-
tem "shades" the data with an emotional "coloring" and produces an action
response to the situation. After the initial evaluation, the limbic system and
conscious processing interact to monitor and coordinate the processes of
emotional expression and emotional experience. The limbic system (amyg-
dala) is the core of the emotion system.

The limbic system's structure provides us with clues concerning how the
emotion system is structured. Since none of the emotive subsystems except
the limbic has been shown to be necessary for emotion—yet all of them con-
tribute to emotion in some way—a simple model of an emotion system is
not possible. The emotion system requires a model that allows multiple causes
without fixed sequencing, since all potential causes except one can be circum-
vented. Since no one of the subsystems has been shown to be sufficient to
cause emotion (not even the limbic system) without help from the others,
the model must allow for joint causation.

I propose an associative network model of the emotion system which is
consistent with the highly interconnected structure of the limbic system.11
In my model, the various components of the emotion system are connected
by a series of associative links. Emotions and emotion states (the nodes of
the system) are tied to particular thoughts and memories as well as patterns
of physiological reactions. Conscious cognitions (such as memories, social
mores, and emotional labels), autonomic and central nervous system pat-
terns, action tendencies, vocalizations, and facial patterns are all interrelated.

For example, a node in the network labeled "fear" might be associated
with a childhood memory of falling from a height, a trembling voice, run-
ned, increased heart rate, increased right frontal hemispheric activity in the
brain, and widened eyes. If only one of these six systems is activated, the
chances of the fear node being activated in an associative network is small. If
two are activated, the chances of being afraid increase, perhaps providing an
"as if" emotional experience.12 As more nodes are activated (i.e., as more
channels of input provide emotion cues), the emotion is more likely to be
experienced and expressed. Whether or not an emotion occurs in a situation
depends on how many channels of emotion provide emotion cues and how
intense those signals are.

This yields a system that is flexible—one that is not tied to any particular
input channel but can receive emotion cues from any of several different
sources. There are many possible ways to access the emotion network, since
any one component can initiate an emotive sequence of events, but no sin-
gle one of them (except for the limbic system) is required.

Yet the system is not flighty; it does not activate the "fear" node every
time one's heart starts beating faster. To experience and express an emotion
requires redundant cues, such as those that occur most frequently in the rich
environments of real life. In most everyday emotional occurrences, multiple
stimuli (such as cognitions, facial expressions, and body postures) provide
overlapping cues telling us what emotion is called for. The associative model
of the emotion system relies on the redundant cuing of the real world to
elicit forceful emotions, but it also explains the lesser emotional phenomena
produced with constrained stimuli in laboratory conditions.

The notion of an associative network model is supported at the neuro-
logical level because the limbic region of the brain is so richly intercon-
ected.13 This interconnection among various emotion-eliciting subsystems
makes the emotions different from the sensory systems. There is only one
channel for visual input (the eyes), but having several input channels makes
the emotion system simultaneously more complex and better protected. This
distributed system insures that if any path becomes inoperative, other paths
can compensate. Unlike the senses whose inputs come through specific loca-
ized channels, the emotions must handle a broad range of stimuli from a var-
ity of sources. A distributed network of interconnections ensures that the
emotions can still provide their motivating urgency even if some input chan-
nels are not functioning properly. If a threatening stimulus does not gain the
attention of one subsystem, other systems monitoring the environment can
also instigate an emotional action to deal promptly with the threat.

The associative model begins with the parallel processing of cognition
and emotion. Sensory data are sent to the cortex for conscious processing
while the same data are sent to the emotional center of the brain (the limbic
system) to gain feeling tone. One process is primarily cognitive, the other
primarily emotive, but both begin simultaneously. Once cognition and emo-
tion are separately activated, the two processes begin to interact heavily. Nei-
ther cognition nor emotion requires the other as a prerequisite, but, once ini-
tiated, the processes are almost always yoked together, particularly in strong
emotions. Thoughts become one of the inputs to the emotion system, and
emotional signals are sent to the cortex for processing. In a model based on interconnection, the link between cognition and emotion becomes crucial, providing an explanation for the malleability of emotional expression and behavior. Parallel processing of thought and feeling allows a person to react quickly to an emotion subsystem, but the interconnectivity permits us to inhibit or intensify feelings based on social situations.

Significantly, this connection between conscious thought and the limbic system allows the emotion prototype and scripts to shape emotional experience and expression. Such cognitive scripts allow us to store a rich set of information about an emotion: what responses are appropriate, what kinds of objects tend to be causes of the emotion, and the script of how the emotion tends to change as it progresses. This information is fed into the limbic system, altering the responses it calls for in the autonomic nervous system, the face, and so on. These subsystems report their altered functioning back to the limbic system, and a cycle is in place that alters emotional experience in light of the emotion prototype and emotion scripts. Cognition and emotion begin as parallel processing, but they soon begin to exchange data.

This interchange between separate cognition and emotion systems helps explain how action-, goal-, and object-orientation can be prototypical characteristics of emotions and yet not necessary to them. Cognitive concepts of emotions (prototypes and scripts) powerfully organize and direct our emotional experiences by interacting with the emotional core of the system. These cognitive schemas are important in ensuring the efficiency of emotional responses, providing scripts for how we should interpret and respond to fearful or loving situations. The emotion prototype is useful in the majority of real-world situations we experience. When we are afraid, usually we are afraid of something and we want to take action accordingly. The real world, however, is also full of hidden and partial information. The emotion system needs to be able to respond to such cues, even if they don't fit the prototype. A network based on associations allows this flexibility, giving us a lower-level experience of emotion which encourages us to examine our world more closely for possible emotion cues. An unexpected snapping of a twig in the forest or a dissonant musical interval in a film may be enough to trigger a fear association.

Treating the emotion system as if it functioned according to the prototype would make the model in this chapter considerably simpler. To do so would be to treat emotion more like cognition, as it is traditionally understood. Leaving out considerations of nonprototypical emotionality, however, would rob this model of some of the complexity that makes the emotion system more responsive. The flexible emotion network allows us to create a variety of associations with an emotion (a gray rainy day, a slouched posture, a frown, an oboe playing in a minor key, all associated with sadness) which can cue us to experience and express an emotion, even if the situation does not fit our prototypical understanding of what the emotion is. Because of the flexibility of such associations, the emotion system cannot be limited to the prototype.

The system outlined here uses the emotion prototype, but it does not rely solely on it. While fully acknowledging the importance of the emotion prototype, an associative network model relies on neurological structures in asserting that associations are the foundation of the emotion system. Since nonprototypical and prototypical emotion states both rely on the same highly interconnected emotional core (the limbic system), prototypical structures might be viewed as a special kind of association that is organized around goals, objects, and action tendencies. Associations are the building blocks of the system, the basis for all emotional functioning.

In summary, I propose an associative network model of emotions with multiple sources of input (such as facial feedback, autonomic nervous system, and conscious cognition) feeding into a system of emotion "nodes" and interconnections. No one single input is required to initiate the emotion, but if several different subsystems are initiated, it is likely that the emotion node attached to them will be activated, even if the stimulus and the emotional response are not purely logically connected. This emotion system can be initiated without relying on conscious cognition. Emotional evaluation takes place in parallel to the conscious assessment of stimuli. If the emotion system's signals become strong enough to reach consciousness, emotional experience results. Once both conscious thought and the emotion system are initiated, they tend to interact through a highly interconnected linkage, allowing thought to influence the course of an emotion and vice versa.

The system is not completely malleable; there are undoubtedly system limits. It is impossible to raise the system threshold so high that one cannot feel emotion, nor is it probable that one can significantly alter the emotional evaluation that occurs before conscious awareness. Given certain limits, however, the emotion system is remarkably flexible. Associations can link emotions to seemingly unconnected objects (as Freud noted in fetishes), and the emotion system can connect emotions that appear to be opposites. A rollercoaster aficionado can tie enjoyment to the fear activated by falling, and horror-film fans can have rollicking fun when their uncontrollable startle reflexes are jolted. Because associations are the basic connective tissue of the emotion system, this provides the network with the necessary flexibility to become well suited to an individual's environment.

Mood

Before I discuss how to apply insights from this model to filmic emotional appeals, let us consider one more finding, this one concerning emotions and
time. Memories of emotional episodes seem to indicate that emotions can have considerable longevity. According to my memory, I was angry at my boss for a full day, or I was happy all weekend long. However, memories of emotions are notoriously suspect sources of evidence about actual emotions. Humans can be remarkably bad at remembering specifics of their own experiences, and for good reason. Instead of storing all the details of our experiences, it is much more efficient to put a summary, a condensed version with a clear label, into memory. If a script labeled "jealousy" covers much of our experience during a particular episode, then we can label that memory as a jealous episode, even if that label does not fit all the emotional ups-and-downs we felt. Recalling an emotional experience often brings to mind the way we labeled that experience as much as the details of that occurrence.

Once again the power of the emotion prototype is important. Prototypes and scripts organize not only the way we interpret our surroundings but also the way we store and retrieve information about our experiences. Emotional memories are better at providing evidence about our emotion scripts than furnishing the details of emotional experience. This may be particularly true of the way we remember emotional duration.

More precise attention to emotional experiences and expressions as they occur is yielding a different picture of emotional longevity than the one we tend to remember. We do not remain angry for an entire day. Instead, evidence suggests that emotions are relatively brief states, measured in seconds rather than hours or days.

Studies indicate that emotional expression changes frequently during an emotional episode. Paul Ekman observed that most emotional expressions on the face last between one-half and four seconds. Other subcomponents of the emotion system (for instance, the autonomic nervous system) change less rapidly. Heartbeat frequency does not alter as quickly as facial expression, and so emotional expression has different longevity in different subsystems. Emotional longevity may differ from emotion to emotion. For instance, Pio Ricci-Bitti and Klaus Scherer suggest that sadness tends to last longer than fear.

Although there is variation in emotional longevity among emotions and emotional subsystems, overall the duration of emotions seems to be relatively brief. This has been found by researchers with quite different methodologies, from studies of EEG patterns to observations of marital interactions. Studies have found fairly little variation in emotional duration across European cultures, suggesting that there may be limits to the system's emotional longevity. When one examines actual emotions in progress rather than self reports of memories, one discovers that emotions are relatively brief states.

The counterintuitiveness of this important finding needs some explanation. How can we seem to have a coherent long lasting emotional attitude toward a situation when we experience a series of short bursts of emotion? The answer lies in an additional faculty of the emotion system. The emotion network can also orient us toward our environment.

Emotions not only provide urgency to a chosen course of action; they also can provide urgency to the way we gather information. Surprise, for instance, is an emotion-related state that quickly prepares an organism for response when that organism is not already in an appropriate preparatory state. After evaluating the stimulus quickly, the orienting state of surprise is immediately followed by the appropriate action-oriented response (such as fear or joy). Such an orienting response is a preparatory state that encourages us toward the more action-oriented emotion state.

Orienting emotions tend to be preparatory states. They ready the body and turn the attention toward particular stimuli, thus changing the way we interpret our environment. The orienting function of emotions highlights those portions of our situation which are emotion-congruent. For instance, a person in love might interpret the day's weather in relation to his or her positive feelings, and so a lover might perceive a sunny day very differently than an angry or fearful person. The orienting function of emotion encourages us to seek out environmental cues that confirm our internal state. We interpret our environment in light of the orientation provided by our emotions. It is this crucial orientation that provides a consistent framework for brief emotional experiences.

The primary set of orienting emotion states is mood. A mood is a preparatory state in which one is seeking an opportunity to express a particular emotion or emotion set. Moods are expectancies that we are about to have a particular emotion, that we will encounter cues that will elicit particular emotions. These expectancies orient us toward our situation, encouraging us to evaluate the environment in a fashion congruent to our mood. Moods influence us to interpret our environment as consisting of emotion-producing cues. A cheerful mood leads one to privilege those portions of one's environment which are consistent with that mood. Moods act as the emotion system's equivalent of attention, focusing us on certain stimuli and not others.

These expectancies are themselves low-level emotional states that tend to be more diffuse and longer-lasting than emotions. They are not emotions per se but tendencies toward expressing emotion. A mood, therefore, is a longer-lasting but less forceful emotion state whose orienting function encourages us to express a particular group of emotions. While they are not as intense as emotions, their longevity helps make them a crucial part of the emotion system.

Moods have an inertia. They tend to keep us oriented toward expressing and experiencing the same emotion. They encourage us to revisit the stimu-
lus again and again, each time refreshing the emotional experience with a new burst of emotion. These surges of emotion in turn support the mood, making us more likely to continue to view the world emotionally. A fearful mood puts us on emotional alert, and we patrol our environment searching for frightening objects. Fear makes us notice dark shadows, mysterious noises, and sudden movements and thus provides more possibly frightening cues. Once we see a frightful sight, this bolsters the mood and makes it more likely that we will continue to evaluate future stimuli as frightening, thus sustaining the fearful mood. This cycle continues as long as emotional stimuli are present.

A mood requires these brief, stronger doses of emotion in order to continue. If the mood cannot find emotional stimuli, however, the mood will eventually extinguish. Without dark shadows or other cues providing opportunities to experience fear, our fearful mood will gradually subside. Mood, therefore, is in a partnership with emotion. A mood is a predisposition that makes it more likely that we will experience emotion. Mood supports and encourages the expression of emotion. At the same time, brief bursts of emotion encourage the mood to continue. Without occasional moments of emotion, it would be difficult to sustain a predisposition toward having that emotion.

The emotion system, then, is a combination of longer orienting tendencies and briefer emotional states arranged into a process that allows us to evaluate and act upon our environment. Brief emotions allow us to respond quickly to changes in the environment. We can constantly reevaluate the complexities of changing real-world situations and respond with appropriate emotion. However, the orienting capacity of the system acknowledges that most situations do not change second by second. Most environments change only incrementally, and therefore a consistent emotional stance toward that environment is required. Brief periods of emotion can provide the urgency and speed needed to deal with sudden changes in the world, but they cannot provide the steady emotional orientation required to deal with a stable environment.

Mood provides that consistency of expectation, which means that we do not constantly have to attend to the variability of our emotional experiences. Mood helps us select stimuli that are most likely to be important. It filters out extraneous emotional stimuli and gives coherence to events, which usefully simplifies our experiences and our memories. Long-lasting mood and brief emotion combine with external stimuli to create emotion episodes, which allow us to store our experiences in memory as consistent units. Together these different temporalities help give the emotion system a sophisticated combination of flexibility and efficiency, speed and stability, adaptability and coherence.

The Emotion System and Film Structure

What does this understanding of emotion suggest to the person interested in filmic emotions? Given the flexibility of the emotion system I just described, it would seem difficult for a mass media form to elicit emotional responses with any degree of consistency across a wide range of viewers. If the emotion system is so highly flexible that it provides for such a range of emotional responses, how can films be structured to elicit dependable responses from a wide variety of audience members? If emotions are such brief states, how can a film maintain a consistent emotional appeal throughout its running time? What part do the emotion prototype and emotion scripts play in film, and how do emotional stimuli that are not part of the prototype factor into a film's emotional appeal? Having summarized my basic model of the emotion system, I now turn to presenting a useful approach for analyzing the textual structures that narrative films use to make emotional appeals based on the associative model.

Following Kristin Thompson's usage, I am formulating an approach to film criticism, not a methodology. An approach is "a set of assumptions about traits shared by different artworks, about procedures spectators go through in understanding all artworks, and about ways in which artworks relate to society." I am not outlining a method ("a set of procedures employed in the actual analytical process"). An approach guides the critic, but it is no substitute for the critic's activity. Instead it relies on and encourages the critic's close attention. The goal of this approach, which I call the mood-cue approach, is to help critics to be able to see and articulate the cinematic structures that appeal to audience emotions.

I argue that the primary emotive effect of film is to create mood. Because it is difficult to generate brief, intense emotions, filmic structures attempt to create a predisposition toward experiencing emotion. Moods prepare us to express or experience emotion. They are orienting states that cause us to interpret stimuli in a particular emotional fashion. A mood encourages us to look actively for opportunities to express and experience bursts of emotion. If we do not find any opportunities to experience these brief emotions, our particular mood will erode and change to another predispositional state.

In order to sustain a mood, we must experience occasional moments of emotion. A mood makes it more likely that we will experience such moments, since mood predisposes us to treat stimuli as possible emotional elicitors. Therefore mood and emotion sustain each other. Mood encourages us to experience emotion, and experiencing emotions encourages us to continue in the present mood.

Film structures that attempt to elicit mood can take advantage of the various means of access to the emotion system. Films provide a variety of
redundant emotive cues, increasing the chance that differing audience members (with their differing preferences of emotional access) will be nudged toward an appropriate emotional orientation. Redundant cues, including facial expression, narrative situation, music, lighting, and mise en scène, all collaborate to inform the viewer what emotional mood is called for. The viewer need not focus conscious attention on each of these elements. The associative network of the emotions is activated by some of these cues, and this creates a low level of emotion. If a film provides a viewer with several redundant emotive cues, this increases the likelihood of moving the viewer toward a predispositionary mood state.

This emphasis on emotive redundancy echoes the Hollywood cinema's tendency toward narrational redundancy of story information. Just as it repeats its commentary through character, event, and environment to assure that viewers will comprehend the necessary story information, the classical film gives us redundant emotional data to assure that we are cued toward the appropriate emotional orientation. A mournful mood can be signaled by character dialogue, lighting, music, mise en scène, facial expression, and narrative situation, and generally it is cued by some combination of these elements. Just as narrational redundancy exists because viewer attention frequently varies, emotive redundancy exists because the viewer's emotion system can be accessed through a variety of associative channels.

Redundant cues can fairly reliably create an emotive predisposition (a mood); once that mood is created it has a tendency to sustain itself. A mood is not entirely self-perpetuating, however. It requires occasional moments of strong emotion to maintain the mood. One cannot look for an opportunity to express an emotion indefinitely; emotional experiences are required in order to reinforce the mood.

Films use emotion cues to prompt us toward mood, a predisposition toward experiencing emotion. Moods are reinforced by coordinated bursts of emotion cues, providing payoffs for the viewer. These payoffs may occur during narratively significant moments (like obstacles), or they may occur in instances that do not advance or retard the plot progress. Cues are the smallest unit for analyzing a text's emotional appeals. Emotion cues of narrative situation, facial and body information, music, sound, mise en scène, lighting, and so on access the emotion system in prototypical and nonprototypical ways. Films call upon prototypical scripts when asking us to interpret characters' actions, given their narrative situations and their facial expressions. But emotion cues also provide the possibility of nonprototypical access to the emotions, and therefore they tend to be used redundantly so that they may more predictably gain access to the flexible emotion system. Emotion cues are the building blocks used to create larger narrational structures to appeal to the emotions. Mood is sustained by a succession of cues, some of which are organized into larger structures, some of which are not.

The basics of the mood-cue approach to analyzing a film's emotional appeal are simple. The critic's task is paying attention to small emotion cues and how they are coordinated. A basic assumption is that a film will encourage viewers to establish a consistent emotional orientation toward the text (a mood), and so the critic looks for highly coordinated sets of emotion cues that will communicate the proper orientation to the viewer. Once the mood has been established, the mood must be bolstered by occasional bursts of emotion, and so the critic looks for a series of emotionally marked moments that will sustain or alter the basic emotional orientation. The critic should pay attention to how long-term mood and brief emotion interact across the film. Both emotional associations and emotion scripts are centrally important factors in analyzing the film's emotional appeal. The critic should pay attention to how prototypical scripts shape our experiences of cinematic emotions while simultaneously being sensitive to the many possible cues that can activate the emotion system nonprototypically.

**Informativeness, Goal Orientation, and Emotion Markers**

Using these few basic components, the mood-cue approach allows us to discuss with particularity the different ways texts make emotional appeals. Although this approach does not prescribe a set of narrational structures to search for in the text, I have found that applying this approach tends to produce new terms that describe narrative structures. In the brief case studies that follow, I will introduce neologisms such as emotional informativeness and emotion markers. The purpose is less to nominate these terms as the keys to understanding filmic emotional appeals than to demonstrate that the mood-cue approach is literally productive. While it allows us to analyze emotional appeals with particularity, it simultaneously begins to produce a vocabulary for describing emotional film structures. Rather than imposing a top-down terminological system onto the text, this approach values the structures uncovered by the bottom-up process of examining and comparing particular texts. Using the mood-cue approach across a variety of texts will slowly produce a more specific language for describing filmic emotional appeals.

If the assumptions guiding the mood-cue approach are correct, we cannot reduce a film to its most narratively significant elements (actions hindering or furthering a character's goal achievement). Few texts can rely only on narratively significant moments to provide mood-sustaining emotion. We should therefore be able to find highly coordinated bursts of emotion cues that have little or no effect on the overt diegetic aim (the achievement of a goal).
Applying the mood-cue approach to several films, I have found such bursts, which I label “emotion markers.” Emotion markers are configurations of highly visible textual cues for the primary purpose of eliciting brief moments of emotion. These markers signal to an audience traveling down the goal-oriented path of a narrative, cuing them to engage in a brief emotional moment. These emotional moments reinforce the mood’s predisposition and encourage the mood to continue.

It is important to recognize that the emotion marker is not there simply to advance or retard the narrative’s progress. Obstacles to a goal may contain several strong emotion cues that provide significant payoffs for the viewer, but I wish to distinguish such obstacles from what I term “emotion markers.” The emotion marker is neither an informative device offering more detail about the story nor an authorial commentary on the diegesis. The primary purpose of an emotion marker is to generate a brief burst of emotion. Often such moments could be excised from a film with little or no impact on the achievement of narrative goals or the state of story information. However, these markers fulfill an important emotive function in the text. For the viewer engaged in an appropriate mood, they give a reward that helps maintain that predisposition toward expressing emotion.

Let us look closely at what would seem to be an intensely goal-oriented, action-driven sequence: the opening of Steven Spielberg’s *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). The initial sequences of the film follow Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) through the jungle and into a booby-trapped cave in search of a golden statue. These sequences are packed with redundant cues that signal an appropriate emotional orientation toward the film, as the mood-cue approach would predict. The mood is suspenseful, apprehensive of the imminent attacks of jungle savages or the swift triggering of hidden death traps. The musical score is an unsettling mix of unusual melodic intervals and percussion; the environment is full of deep shadows, and the camera tracks behind Jones. One of Jones’s trail guides tries to shoot him from behind, and Jones saves himself with a quick lash of his whip, establishing his character’s skill with the weapon. That whip helps Jones and his remaining guide cross over a deep pit, only to have their support slip, almost plunging the guide to his death. This whip-and-pit obstacle must be crossed again on their way out of the cave. These obstacles use multiple emotion cues (musical stingers,21 facial closeups) to signal emotional expression of fear, both serving important narrative functions (impeding progress toward the goal and providing the setup for future narrative occurrences) and providing emotional payoffs. Perhaps not surprisingly, the opening sequence of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* contains many redundant cues that can appeal to our flexible emotion system and evoke an appropriate mood orientation.

Along the way are moments that are highly emotionally marked without serving such significant goal-oriented narrative function. One of the guides traveling through the thick jungle uncovers a grotesque stone idol and screams, accompanied by the loud flapping of a flock of flushed birds and a musical stinger. Clearly this is a concentrated organization of emotion cues coordinated to prompt a startle reflex in the viewer, but unlike the previously discussed emotional elicitors, this emotion marker neither hinders nor helps the protagonist’s progress toward his goal. Neither does it provide new story information. What this moment does do is provide a reliable burst of congruent emotion which helps maintain the sequence’s suspenseful mood. This is the primary purpose of the stone idol scare.

It is difficult to argue, given the interconnected nature of narrative, that any moment has absolutely no bearing on goal progress or story information. The stone idol scare may have some minor contribution to the state of story information (letting us know that Jones is near the place where the golden treasure is housed), but clearly the functionality of this narrative incident exceeds its narrative informativeness. The main purpose of the stone idol is to shout “Boo!” to the audience, marking this moment as fearsome. This emotional marker is a sort of red herring, a scare precipitated by some
thing that poses no real threat to the narrative goals. However little function it has in retarding or forwarding the narrative, the stone idol scare primarily bolsters the mood's predisposition toward emotion, a necessary function given the structure of the emotion system.

A primary task for a film's early sequences, according to this approach, is to establish a emotional orientation that will guide the audience through the film, encouraging them to evaluate cues in mood-congruent ways. Establishing this mood requires coordinated cuing, potentially involving a broad range of cinematic signifiers. Some of these cues are coordinated with the pursuit of broader narrative goals, but we must also pay attention to the cues that do not have a bearing on narrative outcomes. Even a highly goal-oriented and plot-heavy film such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* needs emotion markers (highly coordinated bursts of emotion cuing that do not advance the plot) to bolster the mood. The concept of emotion markers reveals that the need for structured appeals to the emotions exceeds the functional information that is organized by narrative goals and actions.

Using a range of goal- and nongoal-oriented cues, each text builds an emotionally interpretive framework guiding our hypothesis formation concerning what kinds of emotion cues a film will use and how these cues will be structured. Comparing how different texts arrange their cues begins to give us a language for classifying and discussing filmic emotional appeals. For instance, we can classify a text's framework as following more or less consistent genre expectations. In addition, film texts can be classified according to how densely informative they are regarding emotions. The concept of densely informative emotional narration gives us a way to begin talking about the connections and differences among films which are not always apparent.

A film with dense emotional information attempts to elicit emotions with great frequency and specificity. These texts use many redundant cues and use them frequently in a highly foregrounded manner. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is such a densely informative text, providing us with many cues as to how to respond. For example, *Raiders* strongly marks the introduction of each major Nazi character, using loud musical stingers, low-angle dolly shots, and menacing facial features to mark them clearly as characters to be hated. Such coordination of many redundant emotion cues is characteristic of a densely informative film. A sparsely informative text would provide fewer redundant cues. These terms are necessarily comparative, and so they help us to see connections and differences among films which are not always apparent.

These terms allow us not only to compare different films but also to describe variations in how single films cue emotions. For instance, a film does not maintain a uniform level of emotional informativeness. Instead, its level of emotional information varies. Even a densely informative film like *Raiders* does not provide the same quantity of emotion cues throughout the film. Texts are more densely informative at certain points and less densely informative at others. *Raiders* stages the Nepalese barroom brawl without music, helping to make it a less emotionally marked sequence than the chases and confrontations at the film's climax.

Texts also may be classified according to how strong or weak their goal orientation is. A highly goal-oriented narrative like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* presents actions moving toward a clear series of goals (rescue the damsel, find the ark). Such narratives provide easier comparisons with prototypical emotion scripts. Given clear goals, it is easier to label the emotional states of a character like Indiana Jones and to make sense out of other emotion cues. Just as the density of emotional information may vary across a film, so may the level of goal orientation vary throughout a film. *Local Hero* (1983) openly lays out a clear narrative goal: to purchase a Scottish town to prepare the way for the construction of an oil refinery. McIntyre (Peter Riegert) is designated to bring about the deal, and in the initial stages of the film he pursues that goal in a businesslike fashion. However, the middle portions of *Local Hero* do not share this strict pursuit of the overt narrative goal, making the viewer more dependent on subtler emotion cues, not on a goal-oriented emotion prototype. Later the film returns to its earlier strong goal orientation.

In the terms outlined here, *Local Hero* is a less densely informative film with varying degrees of goal orientation. It is a film with relatively few clear generic expectations (perhaps films about quaint magical communities or films about technology encroaching on old value systems are the principal intuitive points of comparison). As such, the film was referred to as a "mood film" or a "slight" or "subtle" film by reviewers. The textual approach and the terms outlined here help us better specify how such a "mood film" is constructed, which I will examine in some detail.

*Local Hero* begins with a clear narrative goal orientation communicated through a fairly standard series of scenes. In a board meeting we are given an expository summary of the importance of the refinery and this particular Scottish site. We see McIntyre in his office preparing to leave for Scotland, letting us know through dialogue that he's not particularly excited about his assignment to this job. These scenes are standard instances of character and situation exposition, each with a slight twist foregrounded in the mise en scène. The board meeting is conducted entirely in a whisper, so that Happer (Burt Lancaster) is not awakened. McIntyre discusses his assignment with officemates only a few feet away, but he uses the telephone to communicate. In each situation the actual narrative information is almost overshadowed by an unexpected element emphasized in the mise en scène (the sleeping Happer, the telephones and glass walls). *Local Hero* presents straightforward narrative exposition while upstaging this information with comic cues, cre-
McIntyre arrives in Scotland and initiates negotiations with a solicitor to buy the entire village. The solicitor says he will handle the situation and suggests that McIntyre spend some time getting to know the area while the solicitor negotiates. At this point the narrative pursuit of McIntyre's overt goal grinds to a halt because there are no obstacles. The townspeople are delighted to sell the land, and Knox Oil and Gas is delighted to pay for it. The solicitor stalls so not to appear too eager, but we are shown that there are no known forces opposing the achievement of the goal. Local Hero at this point becomes a significantly less goal-oriented text.

What we are left with is a series of comic cues and markers. McIntyre and his assistant eat a meal, squirting juice into their eyes as they dine. A loud motorcycle whizzes by, nearly hitting McIntyre and the assistant. We hear overhead the solicitor and his wife giggling during sex play. The early goal-oriented scenes prepared us to expect such comic cues, and when the primary goal pursuit vanishes, this comic mood must be supported by a continuous stream of emotion cues and occasional emotion markers (like the loud motorcycle zooming past). These cues are usually not highly redundant or marked, but in the absence of the clear initial goal they serve as the primary emotional elicitors in this sparsely informative text.

Local Hero does not lose all goal orientation when McIntyre reaches the village, however. Instead, it replaces the initial goal (to buy the village) with a much less concrete goal, a goal that can be pursued in small increments through this series of sparsely informative cues. The outcome of most of the Scottish portion of the film is to change yuppie careerist McIntyre into a gentler, more easygoing fellow who learns to fit in with the town's slower paced rhythm (paralleling the film's change to a less strongly goal-oriented narrative). McIntyre's dress becomes progressively more casual; he loses his watch in the ocean; he learns to pause before leaving the hotel to avoid being run over by the motorcyclist. We learn slowly about McIntyre's conversion through a series of accumulating details presented in brief vignettes.

The classical cinema is traditionally concerned with change in its protagonists. In order to achieve the overt narrative goal, classical protagonists must often undergo character change themselves. This internal change makes the achievement of the action-oriented goal possible. In this fashion, overt goal orientation and character change are inseparably linked.

In Local Hero, however, character change and the overt narrative goal are separated. When the pursuit of the land deal comes to a halt, McIntyre begins his transformation to a less driven person. This transformation, once isolated from the clear initial narrative goal, becomes a goal in and of itself, but this goal is pursued intermittently in brief comic cues. Instead of character change being organized by the pursuit of an action-oriented narrative goal, Local Hero presents its hints about McIntyre's metamorphosis as part of a relatively unhierarchized series of comic moments. Vignettes giving us details about McIntyre are not marked more pronouncedly than other vignettes primarily concerned with the townspeople. The overt narrative goal established early in the film no longer lends its narrative force to organize the scenes in a strong linear progression toward the goal's achievement. Instead, the progression is intermittent rather than strongly goal-centered, episodic rather than simply linear, sporadic rather than steady. Local Hero does not abandon its goal orientation entirely, but the text becomes less strongly organized around goal achievement during most of the Scottish portion of the film. This relatively weaker goal orientation makes labeling filmic emotions less clear-cut.

On first impression Local Hero does not seem to be a particularly fast-paced text. On closer examination one discovers that it presents a remarkably speedy series of emotion cues. These cues are brief (McIntyre's assistant practicing holding his breath underwater, snippets of conversation with bit players) and are rarely redundant. These fragmentary cues fit the brevity of the audience's emotional experience and allows the filmmakers to string together a rapid-fire series of emotion cues. Although Local Hero is not fast-paced in its progression toward a goal (thus explaining the impression of the movie as a "gentle" film), without the benefit of a goal-oriented emotion prototype or strong genre framework the film must put together a rapid succession of emotion cues in order to sustain the comic predisposition. The fact that these cues are not highly marked or redundant helps us position Local Hero as a "subtle" film.

Local Hero uses music selectively to help convey its "subtle" quality. Highly foregrounded music (such as the music in Raiders of the Lost Ark) would too obviously telegraph its emotional appeal, so Local Hero almost entirely abandons music when McIntyre arrives in Scotland. Music is used only occasionally in the early Scottish portions of the film, and then it functions as a transition device when the film moves to a very different time and space. Because such music cues are so clearly motivated functionally, they are not foregrounded as highly visible (or rather, audible) emotion cues.

Music is next heard in the film as a clearly marked diegetic source while people dance. Only after the community dance scene does Local Hero use highly foregrounded nondiegetic music. Not coincidentally, the appearance of nondiegetic music occurs when Local Hero resumes its initial goal orientation. Immediately after the community dance scene, the solicitor discovers that the beach is really owned by an old man who refuses to sell. This is the
first obstacle to the initial goal's achievement, and we encounter it three-fourths of the way through the film. The final quarter of the film is goal-oriented and uses highly foregrounded nondiegetic music.

In summary, *Local Hero* spends the majority of its time in Scotland without a strong goal orientation and without musical accompaniment. Music is first introduced as a brief and functional transition device. Then music is used in a fashion clearly motivated by the diegesis (dancing). Finally, *Local Hero* uses nondiegetic music to signal emotional responses, and it uses it redundantly in conjunction with such emotion cues as lighting and *mise en scène*. A film that early on used few redundant emotion cues relies on more and more redundancy later in the film. This progression allows us to label *Local Hero*’s emotional appeal as “subtle” (unlike *Raiders*) and yet takes advantage of the emotional power provided by redundant cuing late in the film. The early lack of redundancy sets our expectation for relatively sparse emotion cues, and the gradual progression toward more and more redundant emotion cues near the film’s climax provides a significant emotional payoff.

This small exercise in analyzing a subtle “mood film” emphasizes the fact that such textual qualities as density of emotional information and level of goal orientation are comparative terms. We can only say that one text is more densely informative (emotionally) than another. We cannot point to these qualities in the texts without using intertextual comparisons. For example, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, a much more densely informative text than *Local Hero*, uses a progression of gradually more foregrounded music similar to the one in *Local Hero*. After the initial whiz-bang find-the-treasure-and-escape scenes, *Raiders* becomes relatively silent musically, using music only as a transition device. The next action sequence, the Nepalese barroom brawl, is done without music at all. When Jones and Marian (Karen Allen) enter the marketplace, we hear exotic Eastern music motivated by the diegesis. Only after this diegetic music does *Raiders* return to a relatively dense use of musical cues. This pattern of increasingly prominent music (beginning with no music, then music as transition, then diegetic music, and finally nondiegetic music) is the same as the one *Local Hero* uses to make “subtle” emotional statements.

Notice that very different kinds of texts can use similar patternings of emotion cues. The *Raiders* score has a subtle progression of its own, but its foregrounded redundant cues (e.g., stingers introducing Nazis) help make *Raiders* a more densely informative text. Texts are not either emotionally informative or emotionally uninformative. They are more or less densely informative compared to other texts.

The comparisons between such seemingly dissimilar films as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Local Hero* make the point that the mood-cue approach can help us talk about similarities and differences in emotional film structures with more precision. These brief case studies are meant to be indicative of how a critic might examine a film text, guided by the assumptions of this analytic approach.

The associative model of emotions discussed in this chapter provides the key assumptions for the mood-cue approach to analyzing a film’s emotional appeals. This model suggests that films initially work to establish a mood (an emotional orientation toward the film) through early clusters of emotion cues. The viewer progresses through the film, tending to pick up cues that are congruent with the established mood. Scripts based on real-world emotions and previous cinematic experiences create expectations that guide the viewer in making hypotheses concerning what kinds of emotion cuing will follow. The mood must be bolstered by occasional highly concentrated bursts of emotion cues, or the mood will be extinguished. Scripts and the emotion prototype help us label appropriate emotional states, and coordinated patterns of emotion cuing encourage us to execute these scripts on our own emotion systems.

The critic guided by this model should examine how the multiple cues in the early portion of a film establish a mood. Then he or she should note the
scripts that guide the viewer in understanding the film’s emotional progression, paying particular attention to the series of highly concentrated moments of emotion cuing that reaffirm and realign the viewer’s emotional orientation toward the text.

The advantages of the mood-cue approach are several. This approach recognizes that the emotion prototype and emotion scripts provide strong explanations for most emotional experiences. Much of my analysis of Local Hero depends on goal orientation, a prototypical quality of emotions. I believe that learning more about specific emotion scripts (such as the particular characteristics of concepts of fear and sorrow) is one of the most vital areas for emotion research, and I applaud the continuing efforts of psychologists, cognitive philosophers, anthropologists, and sociologists who are helping us to articulate these shared scripts. However, this approach asserts that actual emotional experiences can be messier than our action- and object-oriented prototype. The emotional appeals of Local Hero and Raiders do not depend solely on plot-significant actions. An associative model of emotions reminds us of the importance of the vast range of signification outside a character’s action trajectory toward a goal, and the mood-cue approach begins to give us a language to describe these structures.

In order to access the emotion system, cues need not be linked to representations of human actors in any strong way. Emotional associations provided by music, mise en scène elements, color, sound, and lighting are crucial to filmic emotions, and this approach provides a way to talk about their importance without necessarily harnessing them to onscreen representations of persons. If we are ever to understand the cultural and social nuances of the interactions between film and real-world audience members, we need to begin by more fully understanding the complex range of emotional appeals that films make.