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Overhearing Film Dialogue

Sarah Kozloff

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Since the birth of cinema, film has been lauded as a visual rather than a verbal medium; this sentiment was epitomized by John Ford's assertion in 1964 that, "When a motion picture is at its best, it is long on action and short on dialogue." Little serious work has been done on the subject of film dialogue, yet what characters say and how they say it has been crucial to our experience and understanding of every film since the coming of sound. Through informative discussions of dozens of classic and contemporary films—from *Bringing Up Baby* to *Terms of Endearment*, from *Stagecoach* to *Reservoir Dogs*--this lively book provides the first full-length study of the use of dialogue in American film.

Sarah Kozloff shows why dialogue has been neglected in the analysis of narrative film and uncovers the essential contributions dialogue makes to a film's development and impact. She uses narrative theory and drama theory to analyze the functions that dialogue typically serves in a film.

The second part of the book is a comprehensive discussion of the role and nature of dialogue in four film genres: westerns, screwball comedies, gangster films, and melodramas. Focusing on topics such as class and ethnic dialects, censorship, and the effect of dramatic irony, Kozloff provides an illuminating new perspective on film genres.

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