

We can do this page-at-a-time exercise using other art forms as well.

For example, there's a sequence in the film *Bicycle Thieves* that starts about fifty-four minutes in. The events in that sequence are: A father and his son are searching for the father's stolen bicycle. A lead they're following slips away, because of a mistake the father makes. When the son asks him about this, the father slaps the son, who starts crying. The father tells the son to wait on a bridge while he goes down to search by the river.

Then the father hears some commotion: a boy is apparently drowning. He thinks, and we think, that it might be the son. But no: the son appears at the top of a long flight of stairs, on the bridge, just where he was told to wait.

Father and son walk along the river. Feeling bad about that slap, the father checks his wallet, then proposes an extravagance: they'll go for pizza. At the restaurant, they're seated near a wealthy family. The son curiously observes a rich boy his age. Noting this, the father, moved to honesty, opens up to the boy. (The wound of the slap is healed.)

In class, watching this sequence over and over, we start noticing things we missed the first time through. For example: When the father and the son are walking sadly along the river, the boy walks on one side of a tree, the father on the other. But as they approach the next tree, the boy swerves over, and father and son pass on the same side of it. (We read this as "possible reconciliation pending?") A truck full of celebrating soccer fans goes past (they, unlike the father and the son, are happy). The father notices his son noticing the young men in the truck and this, we suspect, combined with the shame he feels about that slap, produces the idea of taking the boy to a restaurant. (But first, he checks his wallet.) As this sweet little scene of reconciliation plays out, behind them in the frame is a loving couple, looking out at the river.

It's a lesser sequence without those trees, that truck full of happy fans, that wallet check, that loving couple.

One of the pleasures of this exercise is watching my students as they start to realize that, yes, wow, the director, Vittorio De Sica, really did take that much care. Every aspect of every frame has been carefully considered and lovingly used, and this is part of the reason the sequence moved them the first time they watched it. That is: De Sica was taking responsibility for every single thing in his film.

Of course he was. *Bicycle Thieves* is a great work of art and De Sica is an artist, and that's what an artist does: takes responsibility.