

Textual Analysis in Film



Camera Analysis

- Composition
- Framing
- Camera Height
- Angle of view
- Depth of field
- Choice of lens

Mise en Scene Film Analysis questions

- Dominant: Where is our eye attracted first? Why?
- Lighting Key: High Key? Low Key? High Contrast? Some combination of these?
- Shot and Camera Proxemics: What Type of shot? How Far away is the camera from the action?
- Angle: Are we (and the camera) looking up or down on the subject? or is the camera neutral (eye level)?
- Color values: What is the dominant color? Are there contrasting foils? Is there color symbolism?
- Lens/ Filter/ Stock: How do they distort or comment on the photographed materials?
- Subsidiary contrasts: What are the main eye-stops after taking in the dominant?
- Density: How much visual information is packed into the image? Is the texture stark, moderate, or highly detailed?
- Composition: How is the two dimensional space segmented and organized? What is the underlying design?
- Form: Open or closed? does the image suggest a window that arbitrarily isolates a fragment of the scene? or a proscenium arch, in the visual elements are carefully arranged and held in balance?
- Framing: Tight or loose? Do the characters have no room to move around, or can they move freely without impediments?

Editing Analysis

- How much cutting is there and why?
- Are the shoots highly fragmented or relatively lengthy?
- What is the point of the cutting in each scene? To clarify? To stimulate? To lyricize? To create suspense? To explore an idea or emotion in depth?
- Does the cutting seem manipulative or are we left to interpret the images on our own?
- What kind of rhythm does the editing establish with each scene?
- Is the personality of the filmmaker apparent in the cutting or is the presentation of shots relatively objective and functional?
- Is editing a major language system of the movie or does the film artist relegate cutting to a relatively minor fraction?
- What style of editing does the clip represent and why?
- Sequence shot / Cutting to continuity / Classical Cutting / Thematic Montage / Abstract

Motion Analysis

- Does the director keep the camera close to the action thus emphasizing motion? Or does he or she deemphasize movement through the use of longer shots, high angles, and slow-paced action?
- Are the movements in a scene naturalistic or stylized? Lyrical or disorienting?
- What are the symbolic implications of such mechanical distortions as fast and slow motion, freeze frames, and animation?
- The director has dozens of ways to convey motion, and what differentiates a great director from a merely competent one is not so much a matter of what happens, but how things happen- how suggestive and resonant are the movements in a given dramatic context? Or, how effectively does the form of the movement embody its content?

Sound Analysis

- How is sound orchestrated in each scene?
- Is the sound distorted? Why?
- Is the sound edited down and simplified or dense and complex?
- Is there any symbolism in the use of sound?
- Does the film employ repeated motifs?
- How is silence used?
- What type of musical score does the film feature?
- Is the score original or derived from outside sources?
- What types of instruments are used? How many? A full Orchestra? A small combo? A solo instrument? Or was it all Synthesized?
- Is music used to underline speech or is it employed only for action scenes? Or not at all?
- How is language used? Is the dialogue spare and functional? Or "literary" and richly textured?
- Does everyone speak the standard dialect or are there regional accents?
- How does dialogue correlate with class?
- What about the subtext, the emotional implications beneath the dialogue?
- How do we know what characters want if they don't talk about it?
- What about the language choice? Any fancy words? Swearing or coarse expressions?
- Is there a voice-over narrator? Why was he or she chosen to narrate the story? Why not another character?

Acting Analysis

- What type of actors are featured and why- amateurs, professionals, or popular stars?

- How are actors treated by the directors- as camera material or as artistic collaborators?
- How manipulative is the editing? Or are the actors allowed to recite their dialogue without lots of cuts?
- Does the film highlight the stars or does the director encourage ensemble playing?
- What about the star's iconography? Does he or she embody certain cultural values or does the star change radically from film to film, thus preventing iconographic buildup?
- If the star is highly iconographic, what does he or she embody?
- How does the cultural information function within the world of the movie?
- What style of acting predominates? How realistic or stylized is the acting style?
- Why were these actors cast? What do they bring to them to enhance their characters?

Costume Analysis

- Period. What era does the costume fall into? Is it accurate reconstruction? If not, why?
- Class. What apparent income level of the person wearing the costume?
- Sex. Does a woman's costume emphasize her femininity or is it neutral or masculine? Does a man's costume emphasize his virility or is it fussy or effeminate?
- Age. Is the costume appropriate to the character's age or is it deliberately too youthful, dowdy, or old-fashioned?
- Silhouette. Is the costume formfitting or loose and baggy?
- Fabric. Is the material coarse, sturdy, and plain or sheer and delicate?
- Accessories. Does the costume include jewelry, hats, canes, and other accessories? What kind of shoes?
- Color. What are the symbolic implications of the colors? Are they "hot" or "cool"? Subdued or bright? Solids or patterns?
- Body exposure. How much of the body is revealed or concealed? The more body revealed the more erotic the costume.
- Function. Is the costume meant for leisure or work? Is it meant to impress by its beauty and splendor, or is it merely utilitarian?
- Body Attitude. What about the wearer's posture? Proud and tall? Or caved in and embarrassed?
- Image. What is the over all impression that the costume creates- sexy, constricting, boring, gaudy, conventional, eccentric, prim, cheap looking, elegant?

Story Analysis

- Narration. Who's telling the story? Is it a voice-over narrator? Why him or her? Or does the story "tell itself," like most plays?
- Who's the implied narrator of such stories, the guiding hand in the arrangement of the narrative's separate parts?
- What do the spectators supply to the story?
- What information do we provide in order to fill the narrative gaps?
- How is time presented- chronologically or subjectively rearranged through flashback and other narrative disjunctions? Is it realistic, classical, or formalistic?
- What genre, if any? What phase of the genre's evolution?
- What does the movie say about the social context and period that it was made in?
- What does the narrative embody mythical concepts or universal human traits?

Writing Analysis

- How "literary" is the film?
- Is there emphasis on lengthy speeches, verbal wit or adroitness, talky scenes?
- How articulate are the characters? If not how do we get to know what's bothering them?
- Who contributed what to the screenplay?
- Is the dialogue stylized or does it aim to sound like realistic speech?
- Does the movie contain any figurative tropes: motifs, symbols, or metaphors? How does these deepen and enrich the movie? Or, do they?
- Who's point of view is this film told from?
- What kind of rapport does the narrator establish with us? Is the movie is a literary adaptation, is it loose, faithful or literal?

Ideology

- In analyzing a film's ideology, we need to determine its degree of explicitness. If the values are implicit, how do we differentiate the good guys from the bad?
- Do the stars embody ideological values or were the actors cast precisely because they don't convey a ready-made set of moral assumptions?
- Are the cinematic techniques ideologically weighted – the mise en scene, the editing, costumes, décor, dialects?
- Is the protagonist a spokesperson for the filmmaker? How do you know?
- Is the protagonist primarily a leftist, centrist, or rightist?
- What cultural values are embodied in the film?
- What role – if any – does religion play?
- Are there any ethnic values present?
- What about sexual politics? How are women portrayed?
- Are there any gay characters?
- Does the movie adhere to the genre's usual conventions or are they subverted?
- What is the film's tone?
- Does the tone reinforce or mock the values of the characters?