

# Analyzing films essay



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Analyzing Film Camille D. Beasley Instructor: Matthew Norsworthy July 24, 2010 The development of film can be a process that is extensive and complex. Film analysis helps the viewer to understand what the director is trying to convey to the audience. To analyze a film successfully, it is important to understand how collaborative filmmaking really works. There are a number of elements that must work together not only to have a successful production but also to guide the audience through the story.

Some such elements are the film's narrative structure, colorization, director's style, camera shot, and actor selection. While the actor is the most visible of the elements on screen; there are many craftsmen that perform behind the scene functions in order to get the finished product in front of a viewing audience. To really have a handle on how movies work, it is helpful to watch a number of films in different genres to understand the conventions of each. Knowing and understanding all of the technical elements of film can help the viewer to analyze the film more carefully.

Furthermore, they may gain an emotional attachment to the film, and find some level of truth as they become more aware of what has taken place in order to bring it to life. When sitting down to watch a film one of the first elements a viewer should use to analyze a movie is its narrative structure. The film should be structured to help the viewer to understand the message contained within and give meaning throughout. However you need to keep in mind that narrative structure only applies to the way in which a story is told not the story itself.

This means that the narrative structure is the chronological stages or steps that progress from one to the other throughout the story. There are two types of narrative structures: linear and non-linear. The linear structure tells the story of a film in chronological order, while the non-linear structure tells the story in a non chronological order usually using flashbacks (Boggs & Petrie, 2008). Both structures contain the same elements: exposition, complication, climax, and denouement. They differ only in the arrangement of these elements.

On film classic that is an example of linear structure is “ Gone with the Wind” (1939). The film stars Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh. The familiar love story of Rhett Butler and Scarlett O’Hara is told from beginning to end in chronological order. This keep the audience engaged and makes them want to see how the story turns out as the characters go through many ups and downs, while maturing throughout the process. Another film that tells the story in linear structure is “ Junebug”. This movie gives the riveting account of family conflict in the American South.

The story is told in strict chronological order (Boggs & Petrie, 2008). The recent Sci-fi psychological thriller “ Inception” is an example of a film that uses non-linear structure. Inception which stars Leonardo DiCaprio and Ellen Page starts its story at the end and moves backwards. It tells the story of Cobb (DiCaprio) and how he had the ability to possess the power to enter into the dreams of others (Rotten Tomatoes-Inception, 2010). During the movie Cobb has flashbacks that help the audience to understand his mental state as the movie progresses.

Both linear and Non-linear structures help to build the audiences suspense for the films outcome. While linear structure is the more popular of the two, non-linear structure helps the audience to see everything from the main character's point of view. The use of color is another element that is used in film to tell the story. When analyzing a films color scheme, the viewer can get the feel of its meaning. Cinematographers make use of warm and cool colors to give an impression of a films temperature. The warm color such as red, orange, yellow and lavender are often used to represent fire, sun, or the sunset.

Warm colors are usually associated with violence and danger. In the movie “Machete” (2010) a wide array of warm colors are used to show some of the films violence with fire and gunfire. Because color is so versatile warm colors not only represent violence and danger, but also happiness, joy and a fairy-tale like quality such as “ the yellow brick road” in “ The Wizard of Oz”(1939). Analyzing colors can give the viewer a sense of the characters moods and characteristics. One of the most important elements to film is the director's style.

A motion picture is always a cooperative effort, a joint creative interaction of many artist and technicians working on diverse elements, all of which contribute to the finished film. Cinematography, sound, editing, dialogue and actor selection all reflect the director's style. The director serves as the unifying force and makes the majority of the creative decisions, so it is perhaps proper to evaluate the films style with the director's style (Boggs and Petrie, 2008). Cinematographers oversee the camerawork and play a

significant role in the conceptualizing and treatment of the visual elements to include lighting.

Cinematography is an important aspect of the director's style. It would be hard to say how much of the visual imagery of film is conceived directly from the director, but it would be fair to say that they are responsible for the visual features because cinematographers are chosen based on the compatibility of visual philosophies (Boggs & Petrie, p371). An accurate analysis of visual style would be to consider the composition and the director's preference for a formal or informal affect, the camera position and even the arrangement of people in a scene.

Editing is another important stylistic element because it affects the overall rhythm or pace of the film (Boggs & Petrie, p373). Many film critics say the real movie begins in the editing room. The film director is responsible for putting the pieces together into a coherent whole. He or she must guide our thoughts, associations, and emotional responses effectively from one image to another, or from one sound to another, so that the interrelationships of separate images and sounds are clear and the transitions between scenes and sequences are smooth.

To achieve this goal, the editor must consider the aesthetic, dramatic and psychological effect of the juxtaposition of image to image, sound to sound, or image to sound, and place each piece of film and soundtrack together accordingly (Boggs & Petrie, p 190). The setting and set design is another component of the director's style. As with other elements of the director's style, the set design is also done with the director's preference in mind.

Director may favor a set that is stark, barren, or drab, or he/she may choose a set that has a great natural beauty.

To analyze the director's style through set design, we must explore if the director's focus is on settings that are rural, urban, and whether the director favors contemporary, historical or futuristic time periods (Boggs & Petrie, p. 374). The director's taste is reflected in the set design. Soundtracks and musical scores are also set the director's unique style. A director may use music to correspond to the immediate action, or they may consider sound almost as important as the image and use off-screen sound imaginatively to create a sense of total environment. A director may see music as an impression or symbol. Some directors choose to use a combination of sounds. For example, Sam Mendes, utilizes Public Enemy, T. Rex, and Social Distortion (among others) -in addition to a unique orchestral score composed by Hollywood favorite Thomas Newman (Boggs & Petrie). The way the director chooses to tell the story is also an important element of style; this is where the writer plays an important role. The writer and director must work together as a cohesive unit to get the story told in a successful manner. The director may choose to tell the story in a linear or a non-linear structure.

He/she may choose to tell the story from the viewpoint of a single character or they may prefer to relay the story through many viewpoints. The screenplay " Vantage Point" (2008), written by Barry Levy is an example of a story being told from different viewpoints. The movie is about the attempted assassination of the American President. It is told in eight different perspectives of the same event. The performance of individual actors should

be considered when analyzing film. The ultimate goal of any actor should be to make us believe completely in the reality of the character (Boggs & Petrie).

It can be easy to look at a particular lead character's performance and fail to notice the supporting actor's efforts. When analyzing a film, we should pay attention to what the other characters are doing when they are not a part of the main action. Evaluating film is not as simple as judging whether it was good or bad, or whether you liked or not without having a sound reason for those judgments. Film should be evaluated based on careful analysis of construction and composition and whether the intended targeted audience was able to connect with it emotionally. Knowing and understanding all of the technical elements of film can help the viewer to analyze the film more carefully. Furthermore, they may gain an emotional attachment to the film, and find some level of truth as they become more aware of what has taken place in order to bring it to life. References: Boggs, J. M. , & Petrie, D. W. (2008). *The Art of Watching Films*. Boston: McGraw-Hill. Rotten Tomatoes- Inception. (2010, July 20). Retrieved July 24, 2010, from Rotten Tomatoes: [www.rottentomatoes.com](http://www.rottentomatoes.com) Gone with the Wind, 1939 Machete, 2010 The Wizard of Oz, 1939 Vantage Point, 2008