**Advanced English: Film – Midterm Prep.**

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**1. Film Analysis**

First, you see the movie, and understand the movie. After that you can either just enjoy the movie, but also you can evaluate it. Going deeper, you analyze the film, and interpret the film.

- Text and Context

**Text** is the film itself. Motifs, parallels, themes, narrative, mise en scene, cinematography, editing and sound. **Subtext** is the implicit or underlying meaning or theme. Things that are not shown explicitly.

**Context**, on the other hand, refers to things outside the film. Historical/contemporary reference, cultural/political/social context, the star(s), director, film industry and technology, genre/type/trope, intertextual reference.

**2. Important Terms**

Now we go over the important terms for further analysis of the films.

A **frame** is a single still image, shown in rapid succession, that make up a motion picture. It can also mean the rectangular area within which the film image is composed by the film-maker. Roughly speaking, it’s what we see within the screen.

A **shot** is a single, continuous series of frames that are uninterrupted by editing or cuts. Shots are the basic building block or the unit of film narrative. *Long take* is an interrupted shot of more than some amount of time.

A **take** is a single, continuously recorded performance that may or may not be included in the film; It’s the every single version of a shot. Usually, multiple takes are made of the same shot during filming before the director approves of the shot.

A **scene** is a shot or series of shots that together comprise a single, complete and unified dramatic event, action, or element of film narration. Scene is the smallest unit that contains an event. Usually, one can tell what is happening in the scene. It also usually takes place in a single time and place, often with the same characters, but sometimes it may contain two lines of action, occurring in different spaces or different times. Then end of a scene is often indicated by a change in time, action and/or location.

A **sequence** is a scene or connected series of related scenes that comprise a single, unified event, setting or story within a film’s narrative. It usually refers to a longer segment of film than a scene.

To summarize,

**Take → Shot → Scene → Sequence → Film**

**Foreground/background** refers to the things that are relatively near/far from the camera.

Something is **diegetic** if it is part of the story world. Otherwise, if it exists outside of the story world, it is called **non-diegetic** or **extradiegetic**.

**3. Narrative**

**Narrative** is an account of a series of events and/or facts, given in order and with the establishing of connections between them. Roughly, it’s the *story*. We study the **narrative structure**, which is the way the story is told.

**Elements of Narrative**: We have the story, and the usual 5W1H about the story. The story is rearranged and represented, and it becomes a **plot**.

To understand the narrative, one must focus on: the **protagonist, antagonist**, **motivation or goal,** **conflicts**.

- Important parts of Film Narrative

Opening and ending are important. Turning point is a moment when a crucial change that affects a character or situation occurs. Often it is signaled through visual or sound techniques.

Climax is also important. Closure is the concluding moment that tie up all the loose ends, leaving no unanswered questions. A film may or may not have a closure.

**4. Themes and Motifs**

A **theme** is the central idea of the film. It’s what a film is really about.

A **motif** is an element that is repeated in a significant way or pattern. It may be an image, object, word, spoken phrase or sentence, symbol, stylistic device or sound. It is repeated throughout the film and *helps reveal the theme*.

The **theme** is usually an *abstract idea* such as freedom, ambition, violence, human dilemma, or lose of innocence/coming of age, while a **motif** is a *concrete and specific element* such as windows, birds, piece of music, shape of X, a color, a contrast between colors, or some act.

**5. Mise en Scène**

**Mise en Scène** is the arrangement of everything that appears on the screen. It refers to the things that already exist before the shooting. Note that *cinematography* comprises the techniques involving the camera and film stock (or its digital equivalent). It is everything that creates the visual ‘world’ of the film.

There are four elements of mise en scène: **setting, human figure, lighting,** and **composition.**

**Setting** is the place and time where the story of the film or the scene is happening.

**Human figure** is the costumes, props, makeups that appear in the movie with human.

In **lighting,** we see brightness/dimness, softness/harshness, contrast of such things, etc.

**Composition** refers to how objects are placed in the screen.

**6. Cinematography**

**Cinematography** is the aspect of film making that involve photographic or electronic process of producing images. There are four elements of cinematography: **camerawork, lenses and filters, film stock, special visual effects.**

**Camerawork** is everything that is done by cameras. For instance, manipulation of time by using slow motion, fast motion, time lapse, etc. Placement of cameras, such as height, angle and distance. Also the movement of camera, horizontal/vertical, 3-D movement, pan, tilt, and other techniques.

**Lenses** also play an important role. Lenses typically can manipulate depth, size and focus. The *depth of a field*, which is the perceived distance between foreground and background, can be controlled by the use of lenses. *Shallow focus* focuses on the foreground and blurs background. On the other hand, *deep focus* makes everything on screen remain in focus. **Filters** can manipulate color, contrast, sharpness, and light intensity in the images. It can be used to create the overall atmosphere/mood.

**Film stock** can affect colors, depth and contrast inside the film. These are increasingly being replaced by digital cinematography.

**Visual effects** consist of optical illusions and digital techniques. It is applied during principal photography, and in post-production.

Note: Film stock = Film strip. Traditional film format.

Cannot distinguish easily between mise en scene and cinematography

Development of technology, lot of settings are created by computer generated images, lot of characters are made from special effects. It is hard to tell which is computer graphics and special effects. (Computer graphics these days blend in to the scene very naturally)

Animated films, nothing is mise en scene, everything is drawn with computers. Heavily computer graphic movies (planet of the apes) …

**Just remember how to watch, how to see.**

**You must be able to explain why something is interesting.**

Low height of camera – everything looks bigger

**For which purpose are those techniques are used?**

High angle – character looking up: shows anxiety

Low angle – character looking down: intimidating character

Shallow focus – emotional distance, perceptual distance

Deep focus – everything is focused (usually in action scenes)

Colors may give you a certain feeling.

Depending on the film stock, the picture may be more accurate with no distortion involved.

**Inception**

**- Plot**

Mal is confused between dream and reality because of Cobb’s inception

Mal commits suicide; Cobb is framed for murder; Cobb must leave his children and cannot return home

Saito offers Cobb a job involving inception. Cobb accepts this.

Cobb gathers a team for inception

The team goes to Fischer Jr.’s dream and incepts an idea.

Saito dies in the process and falls in to Limbo

Cobb meets Mal for the last time, and deals with his guilt

Cobb goes to limbo and gets Saito back

Cobb finally returns to his children

The **narrative structure** is very confusing. It is not in chronological order. There are additional rules about dreams, and the audience may have a hard time discerning between dream vs reality. Ending is also ambiguous.

**Discussion**

**What do you think are some big and abstract ideas centering the film? Why?**

It talks about the subconscious of each person. Planting an idea to someone else, or stealing an idea from someone. Distinguishing reality and dream.

**What are the possible themes?**

Danger, or power of manipulating one’s ideas – this resulted in conflict between Cobb and Mal

Guilt and reconciliation with oneself – Cobb’s guilt is shown as the main problem. Thus his internal resolution is equivalent to the resolution of the film.

Illusion of utopia: It may not be as beautiful as it seems. Also shows danger of living in one’s dream – Cobb and Mal built their world in their dreams, but they commit suicide eventually to return back to the real world.

Blurred line between dream and reality – Dream vs Reality

Importance of living in the present, and embracing the imperfect reality. Dreams may not be good enough compared to reality.

**Dracula**

We focus on the **visual effects** for this short clip from Dracula.

Dracula’s shadow – Shows true intention of Dracula, his supernatural power, and creates uneasiness for the audience.

Dracula’s Looks – Vivid red robe, old fashioned clothing and makeup, interesting hairstyle, very pale skin: Shows that he is different from other people. He cannot face the sun, he is inhumane, lives long.

Dracula’s skin heals really fast, and is very white.

Blue flame in the entrance of the castle

Crossing the door of Dracula’s house – the camera and sound work very well

Wolf pack …

Castle is surrounded by dead trees

Images of blood – ink flowing, red seal, red robe

**Children of Men**

Battle in the camp

Lots of religious symbolism and metaphor – the baby stopping the battle, failure to save the Pieta, Kee giving birth in a barn, ‘virgin’ joke may refer to Saint Mary, Name “Theo” (related to God)

Government supporting euthanasia (Quietus)

20th century, old-fashioned look

Lack of plausibility (*Well, it’s a movie after all...)*

Why is Kee black?

Unusually old people… Moving camera : going through the crowd

The city looks realistic and terribly ugly. Policemen are everywhere. Dysfunctional society – trash is also everywhere, this is a society where that is normal. Thing that should be invisible – trash, water etc. not working well (sign of dysfunctional society)

Long take after the TV scene. This gives you authenticity. Documentaries usually have longer shots – low budget, so less camera… less shots…

**Grand Budapest Hotel**

Multiple frame structure – Starts from a girl reading a book. Goes one step deeper to the narrator of the book. Inside the book, Zero tells the story to another man. Finally, it goes one step deeper to the story of Gustave H. and Zero’s past.

For each frame of story, different screen ratio is used.

It feels like a book. Chapters show the ‘parts’ of the film explicitly, and also the narration.

It also feels like a story, there are colors assigned for each space.

Feels like a picture – Lack of realism. Symmetrical figure appears a lot, lack of diagonal lines and static, flat background is used.

Goes deeper and deeper into the past.

Camerawork – Speed of characters match the speed of camera, which makes the movie seem very static, with minimal movement.

Snow mountain sleigh chasing scene seems to be highly fictional, and artificial.

Uses of miniature – Since the movie was intentionally made to look old, computer graphics cannot be used heavily. The miniature is also designed to give us feeling that the whole thing is made up.

We can see a lot of people talking directly to the camera, or 2 people symmetrically talking to each other. The characters are faced in 0 or 90 degrees respect to the camera.

Usually, movies want the audience to forget themselves and get absorbed into the movie, since the focus should be the world inside the movie. But the characters talking directly to the camera makes the audience constantly recognize themselves, which makes the audience constantly keep a distance from the world inside the film.

Symmetry – A lot of things are symmetrical, but we don’t see them usually in a perspective such that the view is symmetrical.

This whole unrealistic view may imply that Zero might not miss the past that much.

**Question for Next Class:** Why does the movie prevent us from being absorbed into the movie? What kind of effect does it have?

Hint: This is a story about someone’s past.

Does the story itself make sense? Does it seem realistic?

Why does the film wants us to view the whole story as a fiction?

**How nostalgia functions, what kind of value does nostalgia have?**

**Nostalgia** is really important in explaining the obvious fictionality in the film.

Then what is nostalgia? It’s about the past. It is associated with good feelings of the past.

Why does the film want us to realize nostalgia… Why are we told this story at all?

Personal memory turned into a book, all the events in the past, eventually passes through time. What is heard and recorded remains as an artistic object so there’s value inside it.

Nostalgia is what makes things beautiful. It’s how you keep the beauty of the world.

**Artistic Motif of the film** – there’s a lot of art in the film. The painting “Boy with an Apple”, cake, perfume (artificial beauty object). Visual art + Literary art – Gustave H’s poetry, Zero’s beautified memory is transformed as a novel, which is a literary art object.

Zero accurately remembers the death of Gustave H, since it cannot be beautified as anything else. It was the only black-and-white scene in the entire movie.

Despite the murder case which would have normally made the overall mood serious, everything is kinda comical… It gives us the feeling that everything will eventually turn out alright.

How is the visual style opposite from Inception? - Christopher Nolan tries to make everything real, while this movie has a lot of made up stuff.

**Exam Overview**

Exam will be composed of 3 questions, will have to answer in paragraph format. Rule is that the question will ask you to combine the 1 of the film watched and 1 of the things that we learned in the classroom

Text / context, narrative structure, protagonist and conflicts, themes and motifs, visual style, mise en scene, camera, etc. ← How these emphasize a certain thing in the film.

Pick any of films and discuss any motif.

Particular film, discuss theme.

Any unique visual style from the films assigned?

Zootopia, Dracula, Age of Innocence, Shining

Either talk specifically about a film that you have seen.

If you choose to discuss the films that are mentioned in the class, you may choose to do so, but if you rather pretend that never happened… That’s completely okay.

One question may ask you about one specific film.

Additional information. Explain why you think so! It has to have deeper meaning than superficial function in the movie. In that case, you will be asked to clearly do that. At least 2~3 examples, etc.

Circular Motif - Inception

Religious Motif – Children of Men

Visual element of the film…