**Student-Led Scene Analysis – Description and Model**

In addition to completing unit response essays throughout this course, each student in this course will present a close-reading of a scene from one of the films in the course. This close-reading will occur on Day 1 of our class sequence for the week. Your presentation should be approximately **15 minutes** long. This includes:

* **3 minutes:** screening the scene in class
* **4-5 minutes:** presenting on one formal aspect of that scene and how it contributes to the film’s meaning, such as how the sound in the opening sequence of *But I’m a Cheerleader* shapes the scene’s meaning and prepares the audience for the mood of the film
* **6-7 minutes:** asking the class 3-5 discussion questions related to other formal aspects of the scene, such as how the costumes, color, and editing reinforce the meaning and message you have addressed in your presentation. You can also ask additional questions about how the plot, narrative, and themes connect to these formal elements.
* **1-2 minutes:** leave time for any questions from the class about your presentation or the scene.

In order to lead an effective close-reading:

* Choose a scene, and communicate with your teacher in advance about which scene you’d like to analyze. The scene you choose should be no longer than three minutes. (You can select part of a scene to focus on.) Identify timestamps on the scene so you can prepare to share the scene in class efficiently.
* Prepare a 5-minute “lecture” on one formal element (mise-en-scène, sound, cinematography, or editing) of the scene you think significantly contributes to the film’s meaning. You can address multiple aspects of that element. For example, if your presentation focuses on cinematography, you can address camera angles, camera movements, and shot scale, but try to stay focused on just that topic, rather than also discussing that scene’s sound and editing. You can write this out in essay form, or write notes that you plan to use as you present.
* Prepare to lead a 7-8 minute discussion of other formal elements of the scene. For example, if your presentation involves the scene’s cinematography, ask the class questions about the scene’s sound, editing, and mise-en-scène. Feel free to ask about connections between these elements. You should have an idea of what strong answers to your questions would be so you can guide the class in a useful direction.
* Anticipate questions the class might have. You don’t have to have all “the answers” to any question from the audience, but you should be prepared to take questions and think them through with students who ask questions of you.

The following page includes a model set of notes for a presentation. Follow along and prepare to participate in discussion as I model this presentation.

**Model Presentation: *But I’m A Cheerleader***

**Topic:** Cinematography in Megan’s “Intervention” Scene

**Timestamps:** 6:43-9:35 (on Amazon Prime)

**Argument:** The cinematography throughout this scene emphasizes 1) Megan’s innocence about her family’s intentions, 2) her isolation from her friends and family in contrast with their unity, and 3) the absurdity of the “warning signs” that Mike claims as proof of Megan’s homosexuality.

**Evidence:**

* The camera tilts upwards from the True Directions Warning Signs pamphlets up to Mike, and then pans to Megan’s mother and friend. The tilt upward to Mike first highlights the significance of the pamphlets, and also emphasizes Mike’s power in this moment as he lectures the family on his approach. The pan to Megan’s mother and friend highlights that the pamphlets are being distributed by Mike and circulated through Megan’s friends and family. This ideology about particular “warning signs” of homosexuality is spreading from True Directions, a conversion therapy camp, and being distributed within communities.
* In the next shot, as Megan and her boyfriend get out of the car and approach the house, a high angle camera tracks Megan’s feet and pompoms as she approaches the house. As she walks casually towards the house, it is clear she has no idea what is coming. The close-up shot on her pompoms also highlights a central prop that will be significant throughout the film and represents her identity.
* As Megan enters the house, a medium shot on Megan highlights her confusion and disorientation when she sees all her friends and family in the living room.
* The following shot is a long shot, which includes Mike, four friends and her parents. The juxtaposition of these two shots is one of the first of many throughout this scene that highlight the unity of the group vs. Megan’s isolation.
* The next shot is a POV shot, in which the viewer is placed in Megan’s shoes as her mother and Mike approach her, offering brownies and explaining that they want to discuss something with her. Her mother’s arm, shoving a plate full of brownies towards Megan, is slightly out of frame, emphasizing the uncomfortable closeness of these two people to Megan as they explain their intentions.
* This juxtaposition is echoed in the next pair of shots, as a long shot captures every person in the room except for Megan (from Megan’s POV), and the following long shot highlights Megan’s isolation on the couch.
* A close-up shot shows Megan’s father trying to explain his thoughts and feelings calmly, but the camera quickly pans over to her mother who interjects, “Honey, we think you’re a lesbian.” The extended close-up shot on Megan’s father, followed by this abrupt panning camera and her mother’s interruption, highlights the anxiety buried beneath Megan’s parents’ calm demeanor.
* Throughout the scene, as Mike speaks, shots of him are closer in than shots of Megan are as she responds to him—his shots are close-ups, whereas hers are more medium shots. The close-up shots on Mike as he comments, “I myself was once a gay” and narrates the evidence of her sexuality presented by her family and friends illustrates his confidence and calm demeanor as he commands this room. In contrast, the medium shots of Megan show her face, highlighting her confusion, while also showcasing her isolation on the couch.
* As Megan’s friends and family present “evidence” of her homosexuality, the camera zooms in on significant parts of these object, including the breasts of the woman whose photo is in her locker, Melissa Etheridge’s name, and the alleged “vaginal motif” on her pillow. These zoom-ins emphasize her family and friends calling attention to details that had not previously seemed significant, but are now being treated as critical proof of her sexuality.
* After a close-up shot of Megan’s boyfriend shows him saying “you don’t even like to kiss me,” a medium shot of Megan’s friends saying “it’s true” suggests that sexuality is not just something that two people in a relationship experience together, but a more collective understanding; her friends seem to believe they are the authority on Megan’s relationship as much as she is.

**Discussion Questions (on other formal elements of the scene and connections between elements):**

* Color: Consider the costume and set colors throughout this scene. Why do you think Megan’s friends, family, herself, and the living room all share a brown/yellow/beige color palette? Why is Mike in blue?
* Score: Consider the score throughout this scene. At what moments does it stop, and start again? Why? At what points does the pace of the music slow or accelerate? Why? How does the instrument (perhaps a xylophone?) shape the mood of this scene?
* Prop: In my lecture, I mentioned a close-up shot on Megan’s pompoms as she entered the house. Why do you think this object is featured in this scene, and in other close-up shots throughout the film? What significance does this prop carry?
* Lighting: Throughout the close-up shots in which Mike speaks, he is backlit with a bright white light. Why do you think Babbit chose to light Mike this way?
* Mise-en-scène/performance: This scene involves the introduction of Mike’s character, played by RuPaul. RuPaul is the most famous drag queen in America, and his performance in this film is somewhat unusual because he appears out of drag. What is the effect of casting him in this role? Consider especially the close-up shots in which he explains his beliefs. How might the audience’s knowledge of his persona outside of this film shape our reading of this scene?