

English 345: American Independent Film

Questions for Film Analysis

As you view films, consider how the cuts, camera angles, shots and movement work to create particular meanings. Think about how they establish space, privilege certain characters, suggest relationships, emphasize themes, or forward the narrative. In addition to shot distances, angles, editing, and camera movement, note details of the narrative, setting, characters, lighting, props, costume, tone, and sound. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How is the story told (linear, with flashbacks, flash-forwards, episodically)? What “happens” in the plot?
- How does the film cue particular reactions on the part of viewers (sound, editing, characterization, camera movement, etc.)? Why does the film encourage such reactions?
- Is the setting realistic or stylized? What atmosphere does the setting suggest? Do particular objects or settings serve symbolic functions?
- How are the characters costumed and made-up? What does their clothing or makeup reveal about their social standing, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or age? How do costume and makeup convey character?
- What is illuminated, what is in the shadow? How does the lighting scheme shape our perception of character, space, or mood?
- What shot distances are used? Do you notice a movement from longer to closer shot distances? When are the various shot distances used (e.g., the opening of the scene, during a conversation, etc.)? What purposes do the shot distances serve?
- How do camera angles function? How do they shape our view of characters or spaces?
- How do camera movements function? What information do they provide about characters, objects, and spaces? Do they guide the viewer’s eye toward particular details? Do they align the viewer’s perspective with that of a character?
- What types of cuts are used? How are the cuts used (to establish rhythm, shift between characters, transition between spaces, mark passage of time)? Does editing comment on the relationships between characters and/or spaces?
- Do different characters use different kinds of language? Do certain characters speak through their silences?
- What is the music's purpose in the film? How does it direct our attention within the image? How does it shape our interpretation of the image?
- How might industrial, social, and economic factors have influenced the film? Do conditions in the filmmaking industry limit the way in which the film can represent particular subjects? Does the film follow or critique dominant ideologies? Does it reflect and shape particular cultural tensions?