

Analysing a scene: Key Elements of Film Form

When you are asked to analyse a sequence closely it can seem overwhelming. The trick is to break down the task into manageable chunks. Start by identifying the purposes of the extract, and then look at how the filmmakers have used film language to achieve them. Remember, don't just describe what you see and hear. You need to analyse and evaluate – to explain why these techniques have been used and their likely effect on the audience. Audience effects include emotional response and the process of meaning construction.

Introduction

Introduce the extract:

- Briefly introduce the extract: what do you think its purposes are?
- What genre is the film?
- What events does it present?
- What narrative information does it present?
- Does it portray particular aspects of any characters?
- Are important aspects of the location represented?
- Does it develop any relationships between characters?
- Does it aim to create an emotional response in the spectator, such as sadness, excitement or laughter?

Mise-en-scene

Mise-en-scene refers to settings, sets, props, costume, make-up, lighting and the body language of the actors. Discuss important aspects of the *mise en scène*: What messages do these elements communicate to the viewer?

- How have elements of the mise en scene been used to enhance character, plot, emotion, mood or themes?
- What sort of location/s is/are represented?
- If interiors are used, how are they made realistic through details of set decoration?
- If exteriors are used, what kind of landscape is presented, and are there any buildings?
- Has casting been used to help construct characters?
- How does costume contribute to the viewer's understanding and enjoyment of the sequence?
- What important props appear in the sequence? How do they create meanings for the viewer?
- Is there any symbolism? (images or sounds with specific meanings that are communicated to the audience)

Cinematography

Discuss the cinematography (use of the camera – framing, camera movement, etc.):

- How has cinematography been used to enhance character, plot, emotion, mood or themes?
- Are there any unusual shots, or is the sequence shot conventionally?
- Which characters receive most close ups?
- Are there close ups on props or other elements of *mise en scène*?
- When and why are long shots used?
- Are objects or characters presented using high or low angle shots at any points in the sequence?
- Is kinetic camerawork used - moving the camera around to create a sense of energy or action (tilts, pans, tracks, dollies and cranes)?
- Is handheld camerawork used?
- Is energy created through camerawork and/or editing?
- Do you notice anything interesting in the framing and/or composition of any shots?

Lighting and Colour

Discuss the lighting

- Would you describe the lighting as realistic or stylised?
- Is the lighting low-key or high key?
- What colours are dominant in the scene? What are they linked to or associated with?
- Are lighting and colour used to create mood and/or interest?
- What moods are created?
- What aspects of the *mise en scène* does the lighting emphasise?
- How have lighting and colour been used to enhance character, plot, emotion, mood or themes?

Editing

Editing is concerned with the way that different shots are put together. Discuss the editing: How does it create rhythm and meaning?

- How has editing been used to enhance character, plot, emotion, mood or themes?
- Does this sequence mostly use traditional continuity editing?
- Are there any distinctive and/or unusual edits, such as jump cuts?
- Has film been slowed down or sped up at any point?
- Did you notice the use of any common techniques, such as establishing shots at the start, master angle, eyeline match or shot-reverse-shot?
- Does the editor use any dissolves, wipes or other transition effects?
- Are there more cuts in some parts of the sequence than others?
- Is there crosscutting between two locations?

Sound

Discuss the use of sound

- What are the main sources of sound in the sequence?
- Diegetic (sound that is in the world of the story, as experienced by the characters rather than the audience)
- Non-diegetic (sound not produced by a source in the world of the story, e.g. voice-over, music)
- Is there music? If so, what does it add to the sequence?
- Does the scene use parallel or contrapuntal sound?
- Are particular diegetic sound effects used to enhance the experience of the audience?
- Are any sounds exaggerated or processed in any way?
- Are any sounds synchronised with edits or action?
- What does dialogue add to the sequence?

Performance

Discuss elements of performance and how they create meaning.

- How does expression, body language, eye movements, gestures, tone of voice and movement convey meaning about the characters?
- Consider how close characters stand to each other and what this conveys about their relationship
- Analyse aspects of speech – tone of voice, volume, pauses, pitch, pace, accents and consider what they tell us about the character or affect what we think
- Is the performance realistic or formalistic (a bit more exaggerated/over the top). Why?
- Do you think the actor is improvising? If so, does this affect the authenticity and realism of the performance?