

## Film Sequence Analysis Work Sheet

Adapted from Professor Anton Kaes, University of California at Berkeley, and Professor Eric Rentschler, University of California at Irvine.

### NARRATIVE

What "happens" in the selected sequence on the level of plot?

What is the function of this sequence within the larger narrative action (foreshadowing, climax, transition, exposition, etc.)?

How do the various channels of information used in film--visual image, print, speech, sound, absence--interact to produce meaning?

Divide the segment into individual scenes (indicated for instance by shifts of location, changes in time, etc.).

### COMPOSITION

Frame (open form: frame is de-emphasized, has a "snapshot" quality; closed form: frame is composed and self-contained, the frame acts as a boundary and a limit)

signifies:

Space (cluttered or empty; is space--landscape or interior--used as a "comment" on a character's inner state of mind; does space overwhelm the human beings in its midst; does it figure as a character-like presence; does it exude a certain atmosphere, etc.)

signifies:

Sets (studio, location; are props used symbolically; do certain objects stand out, things like mirrors, crosses, windows, books, articles of clothing, etc.)

signifies:

Design (symmetrical or asymmetrical; balanced or unbalanced; stylized or natural; does it belong to a certain period or artistic style)

signifies:

View of characters (isolated or closed-in; center or off-center; background or foreground; obscured by objects or linked to them; do they move toward or away from the camera; are they stationary; do they exchange gazes with other characters)

signifies:

## SOUND

Music (what kind: popular, classical, familiar; diegetic or extra-diegetic, i.e., on- or off-screen source; is it linked to a certain character; does it comment on the action; does it irritate, etc.)

signifies:

Sound effects (artificial or natural sound; on- or offscreen source; does the sound belong to the action; is there subjective sound, etc.)

signifies:

Dialogue/silence (stilted or artificial language; different characters use different kinds of language; slang; allusions to other texts; do certain characters speak through their silences, etc.)

signifies:

Voice-over/Narration who is speaking and from where; are they part of the action or outside of it; what do they know and what is their relationship to the action; are they reliable, omniscient, unreliable, etc.)

signifies:

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Shot (extreme long shot, long shot, medium shot, close-up, extreme close-up, etc.)

signifies:

Lens (normal, telephoto, wide angle, distorting lens, macro)

signifies:

Focus (who or what is in or out of focus; deep focus; soft focus; rack focus; sharp focus)

signifies:

Camera movement (panning shot, tracking shot: from above, below, in/out/circular; zoom in or out, slow or fast; zip pan; tilt shot; handheld shot; camera on vehicle)

signifies:

Angle (high angle, low angle, eye-level, oblique angle, extreme angle, etc.)

signifies:

Lighting (realistic, high contrast, high key/low key, special lighting effects, natural lighting)

signifies:

Color (black and white/color/sepia; warm/cold/strong/washed-out colors; symbolic use of colors; subjective use of colors; colors linked to certain characters; progression of the use of colors throughout a film)

signifies:

Special effects (freeze frame/slow/fast/reverse motions/filters/odd or impossible point of view/matting/computer-generated images, etc.)

signifies:

Types of shot (establishing shot/point-of-view shot/reaction shot/shot-counter shot/insert shot/subjective cutaway/flashback shot)

signifies:

## EDITING

Position of segment (what comes before and what comes after)

signifies:

Transition techniques (cut/dissolve/fade in or out/wipe/jump cut/iris in or out)

signifies:

How do the images flow together: cutting for continuity, thematic or dialectical montage, cutting on motion, invisible cutting, shock cutting, cross-cutting, etc.

signifies:

Length of individual shots (do shots seem extremely long in duration or particularly short, does the director hold on a certain face or landscape after the action has been played out, etc.)

signifies:

Rhythm/pace (flowing/jerky/disjointed/more panning shots than cuts/fast-paced/slow-paced/unusually long takes/ do certain sequences "feel" different than others in terms of their rhythm?)

signifies:

## AUDIENCE ADDRESS

Does the film acknowledge the spectator, or do events transpire as if no one were present? Do characters look into the camera or pretend it is not there, for instance?

signifies:

How does the film position the spectator vis a vis the onscreen events? Are we made to favor certain characters, to respond in certain ways to certain events (say, through music that "tells" us how to respond or distances us from the action).

signifies:

Does the film appeal to certain expectations, i.e. generic conventions? (We expect a man dressed in black shrouded in a shadow to be sinister, for instance.) Does the film subvert these conventions or conform to them? What kind of conventions are they?

signifies:

Does the film address contemporary social issues? Does it intend to convince its audience? Does it dare to divide its audience and present an unpopular or controversial view?

signifies:

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Acting (stylized/natural/idiosyncratic; does one actor use a different style than others)

signifies:

Costumes (social coding; symbolic use of clothing; clothing as an extension of personal style; clothing as an extension of decor)

signifies:

social and cultural coding (contemporary/historical/foreign/strong or weak sense of time and place, etc.)

signifies:

## OTHER MATTERS TO KEEP IN MIND

This inventory for the most draws attention to formal concerns, to matters grounded in the work of the film, documentary, installation, photograph. Every work of film, documentary, installation, photograph, though, is a function of certain contexts, the context in which it was made, the context in which it is received.

Every artefact speaks in a number of different ways, i.e., it recycles the givens of tradition, engaging various forms of discourse, putting them together in a way to produce an aesthetic whole. These artefact elements are something like a stringing together of quotations, of reworking conventions, of adding together a number of impulses from the world in which one lives, appropriating various elements in a way that leads to something different, and in that sense, new.

The work that goes into ferreting out the different voices in an artefact involves, among other things, an awareness of historical situations, the assumptions and background of an artist and his/her co-workers, the motivation behind a certain production.

Beyond that, to talk about a filmic text means that we engage in a dialogue that brings us into the scene as a participant in an exchange: we make certain assumptions, both methodological and theoretical ones. Even the statement "I didn't like this film" carries with it a decisive amount of discursive baggage, even if we are loath to admit it.

Any thorough-going analysis of a film involves the following:

- the socio-historical background to the work of the film, documentary, installation, photograph, economic and political factors that conditioned its making;
- the traditions out of which a given work of film, documentary, installation, photograph arises: the sorts of cultural quotations it partakes of, the conventions it makes use of, the degree to which it participates in certain specifically national patterns of expression;
- the institutional positioning of a given artefact : its status in the public sphere in which it is received;
- the director/author's larger body of work, of which the film is part of a larger whole;
- scrutiny of the "work" of the text, never forgetting, though, that films issue from a larger extra-filmic whole;
- the question of a film's reception in time and how this has pre shaped our own expectations as well as the film's place in history.