

Viewing a Movie or Film: Some Questions

1. Like any text, there are **conventions and codes** implicit in films. Some of these are brought to light by contrast with other forms of communication. How is the film you are viewing different from:

- a television show
- a radio program
- a video on your television
- a theatrical production

2. What are the **narrative conventions** that this movie holds to? That is, how is the story told?

- How does time flow? Is this past-present-future, or something else?
- Who is assumed to be the narrator? Through whose eyes are we looking? Does this remain constant through the movie? How would we know if it does not? Is the narrator assumed to be omniscient, or are there limits to the knowledge of the narrator?
- Who is the audience?
- Imagine different audiences viewing the same segment. What do you think they would notice, and would they analyse the segment the same way you did?
- Is a literal narrator or visual text used? Is there a reason for this?
- What is the sequence of narrative used here? That is, what comes after what?
- What might have been included, but was not? How would things be different if other choices were made?
- What is the preferred reading?
- How is the narrative implied by shot selection?
- Are there heroes and villains? Who are you meant to sympathize with, and what are the visual cues that lead you to believe that? Who are you meant to be suspicious of, and what visual cues indicate this?

3. What are the **historical precedents** for this movie or film?

- Can you identify the genre that the movie belongs to? What are the conventions of the genre? Does the film or movie deviate from those conventions?
- Can you identify films or movies similar to this one? Are there direct quotations occurring?
- Can you identify non-film/movie precedents (e.g., books, TV, art, etc.)
- What cultural assumptions are made? How far does this reflect or depart from dominant cultural values?

4. **Space**

- What is the set like? Is it "on location", or on a constructed set?
- Is the space made to look "natural", or is it constructed (that is, does it show evidence that it is a set)?

5. **Claims to reality**

- Does the movie claim to be fact or fiction?
- What references (if any) are made to the "everyday" world?
- To whom would this movie seem realistic?
- What is presented as "natural"? What is assumed to be the natural order of things, the natural relationships between men and women, whites and blacks, parents and children, state and citizen, etc.?
- What is being hidden in the claims to reality?
- Are there "contrasting pairs" (good/evil, male/female, etc.) that are part of the movie?

6. **Tropes**

- What kinds of metaphors or analogies are used in this movie?
- Is there synecdoche (a part representing the whole)? Are there other literary forms in the movie?
- Are characters or other elements of the movie supposed to "stand for" something?

7. **Technical matters**

- Describe the predominant shot choice. Why are these shots used? What would other options be, and what if those options had been chosen instead of what is on the screen?
- Describe the acting style. Why this style? Are there other options (imagine different actors and how they would be in a specific role)?
- Describe the music or sound used. Why this sound? What if it was different?
- Describe the visual "texture". Grainy or slick? Washed out colour or saturated? Strong lines or indistinct? Why this? What are other choices for texture, and how would it be different if a different texture was present?