Looking at Movies

From the text by Richard Barsam.

In this presentation:

Beginning to think about what Looking at Movies in a new way means.
Cinematic Language

• The visual vocabulary of film

• Composed of many integrated techniques and concepts

• Connects the viewer to the story while deliberately concealing the means by which it does so.
Actively Looking at Movies

- Recognize the many tools and principles that filmmakers employ to tell stories, convey information and meaning, and influence emotions and ideas.

- Understand movies as narrative, as artistic expression, and as a reflection of the cultures that produce and consume them.
What Is a Movie?

- A popular entertainment
- A narrative
- A presentation of a story affected by cultural differences
- An art form influenced by less conventional approaches and emerging technologies
Film Analysis

• *Analysis* – the act of taking something complicated apart to figure out what it is made of and how it all fits together.

• Step 1 – Identify the tools and techniques within a scene, sequence, or movie

• Step 2 – Investigate the function and potential effect of that combination
Basic Construction of a Movie

- **Shots** – unbroken span of action captured by an uninterrupted run of a motion-picture camera
- **Editing** – the joining together of discrete shots
- With each transition from one shot to another, a movie is able to move the viewer through time and space
Invisibility and Cinematic Language

• Movies rely heavily on largely invisible techniques that convey meaning intuitively
  – *Fade-in / Fade-out* – viewers understand that significant story time has elapsed
  – *Low-angle shot* – viewers associate power with figures that they must literally look up to

• *Cutting on action* – common editing technique designed to hide the instantaneous and potentially jarring shift from one camera viewpoint to another
Cultural Invisibility

• Filmmakers favor stories and themes that reinforce viewers’ shared belief systems
Implicit and Explicit Meaning

• No matter how many different layers of meaning are in a movie, each layer is either implicit or explicit.
• Implicit – lies below the surface of a movie’s story and presentation, more interpretive than explicit meaning
• Explicit – available on the surface of the movie, obvious
Viewer Expectations

- Viewers harbor essential expectations concerning a film’s form and organization
- Viewers must be alerted to these expected patterns in order to fully appreciate the significance of deviations
Formal Analysis

• The analytical approach primarily concerned with film form
• *Form* – the means by which a subject is expressed
• Every element in every frame is there for a reason
Formal Analysis:
Waiting-Room Sequence in *Juno*

- 13 shots, 30 seconds of film time
- The formal analysis shows us how the filmmakers conveyed how the seemingly insignificant fingernail factoid infiltrates Juno’s thoughts and ultimately drives her from the clinic.
Alternative Approaches to Analysis

- Alternative approaches analyze movies more as cultural artifacts than as traditional works of art.
- Explore cinema’s function within popular culture as well as the influence of popular culture on the movies.
1. What term describes the integrated techniques and concepts that connect us to the story while deliberately concealing the means by which it does?

a. Cinematic creativity  
b. Cinematic narrative  
c. Cinematic entertainment  
d. Cinematic language
2. Even though every movie employs narrative in some form, what primarily affects how stories are presented?

a. Cultural values  
b. Cinematic creativity  
c. Cinematic language  
d. Formal analyses
3. Which of the following is NOT a device used for cinematic invisibility?

a. Cutting on action
b. Jump cut
c. Continuity of screen direction
d. fade-in
4. If someone asked you to interpret a film or “say something arguable about it,” what kind of “meaning” are they looking for?

a. Conventional
b. Fundamental
c. Implicit
d. Explicit
5. Which of the following is a formal analysis option for *Juno*?

a. The movie’s treatment of class
b. The movie’s depiction of women and childbirth
c. The implications of the t-shirt messages displayed by the film’s characters
d. The motif of the empty chair that frames the story