

Answer one of the following questions in a 1000-1250 word essay:

~ **Question #1** ~

Discuss the ideological implications of *The Little Mermaid* (1989). What is the preferred reading of the text, and how does it exhibit the narrative characteristics of classical Hollywood? Provide an oppositional reading of the text, and discuss how it functions to reinforce hegemonic values in American culture.

~ **Question #2** ~

Analyze the representation of young men and women in *Fast Times At Ridgemont High* (1982). How do the characters subvert the stereotypical representation of excessively masculine men, and dichotomous women in film? How does the film function to challenge the typical patriarchal perspective offered in classical Hollywood films?

~ **Question #3** ~

Discuss the representation of race in *Do The Right Thing* (1989). How does the film challenge the typical patriarchal perspective of mainstream and Hollywood films? How do the characters function to subvert the stereotypes that have often been perpetuated against marginalized groups throughout film history?

~ **Question #4** ~

How does *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) go about constructing a more diverse representation of transgender characters? Discuss the ways that the film subverts the traditionally negative representation of transgender identity in popular mainstream cinema.

essay guidelines

The following essay is an example of an *A* paper turned in by a student. It provides thoughtful, detailed analysis of the question at hand, while using specific examples to support the writer's ideas. Some further formatting guidelines you should be following include:

- ~ Use specific, detailed examples from the film to support your analysis. This is crucial for writing successfully in this class.
- ~ Avoid using too much summary/exposition. Assume the reader (me) has seen the films, and understands them intimately (because I have, and do).
- ~ Dispatch of any review-type language (ex: The film is a blockbuster extravaganza!).
- ~ Do not ask rhetorical questions, and do not raise questions you do not attempt to answer. Also, do not talk about what the film doesn't do, but rather, what the film *does* do. Be critical and express your ideas.
- ~ Use *italics* for all film titles, i.e. *Citizen Kane* not **Citizen Kane** or Citizen Kane.
- ~ Do not qualify your analysis (ex: I think, perhaps, probably, sort of, etc.). Do not be afraid to make statements and support them with examples/analysis.
- ~ If you refer to a character in the film, research their name (as well as directors, writers, etc.). www.IMDB.com is a great site for information about the films (though not an outside source; see below).
- ~ Don't use quotes as stand-alone analysis, but rather, as support for your own thoughts about the films. I'm interested in *your* perspective, not someone else's.
- ~ Do not simply copy down the readings/interpretations of your fellow students during the discussion and pass them off as your own. I expect you to express your own perspective in this class.

~ Use present tense for film criticism (ex: *Citizen Kane* is a good example of... not, *Citizen Kane* was a good example of...).

You are also required to use **at least two** written sources to support your ideas in your papers. For each paper you are to use **a)** one of the chapters/essays read in class as a source, along with **b)** a source outside of the class materials that you have researched either in the library, or online. Wikipedia is not a source. In addition to your two written sources, you may also use other shows/texts as references. Be sure to cite your references appropriately using any citation method of your choosing (MLA Style, Chicago Style, etc.).

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

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You are responsible for emailing me your papers by the start of class time on the assigned due dates. Upon receipt of your paper I will email back a response that I received it, and will email back your graded paper with comments, usually a week after I receive them. If I don't email you back, assume I have not received your paper, and re-send it to me. You are not bothering me if I receive your paper multiple times; it's better to be safe than sorry!

sample essay

Analyze the style of continuity editing in *Psycho*. How is the film cut together to ensure narrative continuity? How does the film make use of the four dimensions of film editing to ensure that the spectator remains oriented in the film space?

Continuity Editing in *Psycho*

Continuity editing guides the spectator through the narrative of a film as seamlessly as possible. It serves to bring realism to the story so we can "suspend disbelief easily and comfortably"(Reed, 1). The use of this technique in *Psycho* keeps us on the edge of our

seat waiting for the next event. We start to anticipate what will happen, which allows the filmmaker, Alfred Hitchcock, to cleverly lead us down one path, and then place a curve in the road that obliterates our assumptions. The use of continuity editing starts before we ever see any actual footage of the movie, as the credits move quickly across the screen, in and out from both sides. This rhythmically matches the up-tempo, non-diegetic introductory music, which is syncopated with a driving beat to build excitement. The opening establishing shot, or extreme long shot (Etkin,1), orients the spectator in the space of the story with non-diegetic graphics that tell us where we are, and when (Phoenix, AZ - Friday, November 11th). As the camera pans right and zooms in, a series of cuts places us closer to a seemingly random hotel window, where we are introduced to the main protagonist Marion, and her boyfriend Sam. This careful juxtaposition of shots establishes the exposition of the film, and is an indication that the editing will play a key part in advancing the film's narrative action.

For modern audiences, one of the first surprises in the film is the time and location of the "shower scene". Based on the notoriety of the scene, it being one of the most talked about in film history, one would think it to be the climactic scene in the movie. While it is certainly the climactic moment in the Marion's life, because it happens relatively early in the film, it is not the climactic action of the film. It is, however, a surprise twist in the plot, set up specifically by the films' editing. Prior to this scene, we see that Marion is planning to take back the money. She says this to Norman rather cryptically, but we also see it when she does the calculations of how much of the \$40,000.00 she has remaining. The shower scene itself has no dialogue but conveys a whole lot simply through its images, and their juxtaposition in the mise-en-scène. When Marion gets in the shower we see

short duration shots of different parts of her body, the showerhead, the water, and the bathtub. We see her smiling, perhaps thinking about going back home and getting out of the “trap” that she has stepped in, when all of a sudden, the bathroom door opens, and an obscure figure enters quietly into the room. When the curtain is pulled back, Mother raises her knife and slashes down at Marion, violently stabbing her over and over. The sharp sounds of a screeching violin is heard, and the cutting moves quickly from shot to shot, faster and faster, to rhythmically match the action of the knife and the music, heightening the suspense of the scene. We see close ups and extreme close ups of the knife, Marion’s mouth, and parts of her body. We never really get a look at the attacker or the stabbing because of the speed of the cuts, and the shot/reverse shot pattern between Marion and the attacker, however, the sounds of the knife hitting her flesh provide enough detail for the spectator to fill in the gaps with his/her own mind. Overall, the scene has “70 shots in 45 seconds,” and this editing style functions to create a sense of tension and anxiety, that the spectator shares with Marion, the unfortunate victim (Coyle, 1). Today’s technology allows filmmakers to show much more graphic images, but at its time, the editing in *Psycho* “created a sense of panic and energy throughout the audience” without graphic violence (Wainwright, 1). As the scene ends, a graphic match of the drain carefully dissolving into a shot of Marion’s eye signals to us that “the woman’s life has been washed away”(Wainwright, 1).

As far as spatial relations are concerned, *Psycho* leads us through the story and keeps us oriented into the action with use of the 180° rule, or the axis of action (Bordwell/Thompson, 223). Spatial relationships in the film are maintained by eyeline matches, with characters looking in the proper direction while speaking with one another,

and shot/reverse shot patterns that are used to show reactions to between characters. These conventions help maintain the spectator's orientation in the space of the film, and foster their identification with the characters.

There are many instances where the shot/reverse shot is used where there is no dialogue at all, forcing us to imagine what the characters may be thinking. When Marion is driving from phoenix, and is looking at the policeman in her rearview mirror, we see a medium close-up of her through the windshield juxtaposed with close-up shots of the mirror from her point-of-view. When Norman pushes the car into the lake after cleaning up Mother's mess from the shower scene, he chews his fingers nervously as we see shot/reverse shot of a close-up of Norman, and a long shot of the car as he watches it sink. When the car stops sinking, the duration of the images shortens, and the shot/reverse pattern speeds up to heighten the tension. As is the case with Marion, the point-of-view shots of Norman also function to place the spectator into his perspective, heightening our sense of identification with the characters. When Marion is in her apartment alone preparing for her trip, she looks over at the money sitting on the bed. As she walks around the room, the shot/reverse shot pattern between Marion and the money functions as a conversation of sorts. It's as if the money is saying "don't do it, you'll get caught", and she's replying, "Yes, I have the money now to escape with Sam!"

Temporal relationships are exhibited when Marion is driving and we hear the non-simultaneous sound of Sam's voice, reacting to her unexpected arrival. Non-simultaneous sound is "sound we hear that is occurring earlier or later in the story than the events we see," and it functions in this scene to this lets the spectator know that Marion is on her way to see Sam (Bordwell/Thompson, 277). We also hear the voice of her boss, her co-

worker and the customer whose money she has stolen talking about her, and how to find her. Each these conversations would have occurred in the future, and all are good examples of non-simultaneous sound that adds an air of tension to the scene.

Most of the shots in the film transition with a cut, such as Marion's driving montage, and the sequence when Arbogast is poking around the motel looking for clues. The major shifts in time and location use dissolves. Dissolves help bridge between locations. When Marion leaves her office after taking the money, the scene dissolves to her at her apartment, signaling that time has elapsed, and she's driven home. This ellipses cuts out the frivolous action of her getting into her car and driving home, as this is not relevant information for the advancement of the story. Fade-ins and outs are also used to signal that time has elapsed. A good example is when Marion gets sleepy while driving, she pulls her car over, and the shot fades to black, signaling that she's gone to sleep. The next shot is a fade-in from black, signaling her waking up when the police officer is knocking on her car window. Another key fade in the film occurs after Arbogast is killed. We see him stabbed twice after being pushed down the stairs, and as the scene fades to black we hear him scream, signaling that he is dead.

Continuity editing plays a huge role in the narrative of *Psycho*. The cuts, fades, and dissolves all function to create certain graphic/rhythmic/spatial/temporal relations, that ultimately create a continuous flow of events for the spectator to engage with. The eyeline matches, point-of-view shots, and shot/reverse shot patterns create smooth transitions between characters, and help us to identify with them. With continuity editing we don't have to speculate about where we are, or who we are looking at on the screen, or their relationship to other characters; it's all laid out for us. Overall, these conventions serve to

heighten the suspense, and keep the spectator glued to the screen. For all of these reasons, *Psycho* is still being studied and dissected 53 years after its release.

Works Cited

David Bordwell/Kristen Thompson, *Film Art, An Introduction: Tenth Edition*. McGraw-Hill, 2013

Grant Reed/Ben Etkin, Collegefilmandmediastudies.com/editing

Harry Wainwright, *Psycho* editing methods: wainwrightthriller.blogspot.com, October 2012.

Jake Coyle, *After Psycho a shower of violence in movies*, salon.com, November 2012