

The following essay is an example of an *A* paper turned in by a student. It provides thoughtful, detailed analysis of the film's visual and narrative elements, 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. If we talk about something in class, I expect you to elaborate with your own perspective to support.
- ~ 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 films as references. Be sure to cite your references appropriately using any citation method of your choosing (MLA Style, Chicago Style, etc.). If you are unsure of how to cite your paper properly, see the below website:

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

I do not accept physical papers, so please email all of your assignments to **adam@apwadenius.com**. Please send your paper in an editable format such as Microsoft word, Open Office, Text Edit, Notepad, or Pages. **No .PDF or .WPS files!** Adhere to standard formatting conventions (one-inch margins, 12 pt. font, double spaced, etc.). Your works cited page does not count as one of the 4-5 pages, and if you format your paper incorrectly (16pt. font, 2.5 spacing, etc.) I will simply reformat it as I'm grading and you'll be docked points for improper submission. Do not try to skim on providing analysis.

When saving your papers, format the file name thusly or I will not accept your paper:

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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

Discuss the cinematography in *Requiem for a Dream*. What is significant about the photography, framing, and duration of the images? How does the cinematography function as a visual representation of the core themes of the film?

Cinematography in *Requiem for a Dream*

Directed by Darren Aronofsky, *Requiem for a Dream* is a whirlwind of a film, particularly because of the way the cinematography represents the realism of drug addiction, and its devastating side effects. According to Roger Ebert, "Aronofsky is fascinated by the way in which the camera can be used to suggest how its characters see things" (Ebert). The director takes great care in staging the photography, framing, and duration of his images to provide a realistic and haunting film that draws the spectator in, and allows them to feel the emotions of the characters as they spiral into the abyss of their addictions.

The camera is used throughout the film as a window into the perspective of the characters. Techniques such as point-of-view shots, close-ups, and mobile framing function to grasp the spectator's attention. Aronofsky plays with extreme close ups to show the emotion of the characters. In the scene when Sara Goldfarb has locked herself in the closet, the light from outside gleams through the keyhole, and a close-up of her eyes reveals the fear she has of her son Harry, on the other side of the door stealing her television. Later in the film, Aronofsky frames a close-up of her hands as she takes her diet pills and pops them into her mouth. In his book Film an Introduction, William Phillips suggests that, "we tend to see camera movement as a substitute for our own movement," and the intimacy of the close-up gives the impression that the spectator is looking into his/her own hand. After the shootout in Brody's limo, the point-of-view shot of Tyrone while he is running is juxtaposed with a snorricam shot of him running from the police.

The close framing reveals the fear in his face, and the glistening beads of sweat and blood.

According to David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in Film Art, “filming with a handheld camera while moving through a crowd usually results in footage that might make viewers feel something like movement and excitement” (Bordwell and Thompson, 101). Filming his running with the handheld camera makes the image move, and seeing it from his viewpoint makes it seem as if the viewer is running as well, experiencing his terror at having been shot at.

Focal length, duration, and speed of motion are effective ways of directing the spectator’s eyes to specific objects or characters in a scene. The focal length used during the opening credits, when Harry and Tyrone are pushing the stolen television on its cart, alternates between wide-angle, normal, and telephoto. These focal lengths offer a range of perspectives of the two addicts, which in conjunction with the medium close-up, long, and extreme long shots, emphasize the great distance the two have to walk to get their fix of heroin. Upon arriving at their destination, there is a cut to an extreme close-up of a twenty-dollar bill in exchange for the television. Next, a quick cut to the image of heroin being cooked, drawn into a needle, and intravenously injected into their bodies. Extreme close-ups of their pupils flashing open, and the drug coursing its way through their veins are detailed, all in short duration shots, alluding to the speed with which the effects of the drug takes place. In Film an Introduction, it is suggested that, “by choosing the duration and speed of the camera movement the filmmaker can pace our understanding of the plot action” (Phillips, 203). This sequence captures the realism and fast reaction the characters have under the effect of the drugs, and the cinematography does a great job of representing those feelings visually for the spectator to experience.

Shortly thereafter, in a scene that depicts Marion snorting a line of cocaine, she immediately sits down to start designing some clothes, and the speed of motion picks up to show how fast the drug takes effect. Fast motion images zip by on screen, and Marion’s rapid movements emphasize the frantic mood that the drugs have put her in. Similarly, when Sara takes her weight loss pills, we watch as several hours of her cleaning the house is condensed into a

thirty-second fast motion shot; the frantic pace detailing the anxiety of her burgeoning addiction. As she collapses down onto her chair, the fast motion photography slows to a normal 24fps pace, to show she is coming down off of her high. Roger Ebert states, "These sequences are done in the fast-motion to show how quickly the drugs take effect and then how disappointingly soon they fade" (Ebert). The fast and slow motion shots used throughout the film are motifs that illustrate the different effects of the various drugs used, and the spectator is invited to feel the same way as the characters through these cinematographic techniques.

The zoom lens can effect the way a spectator perceives a specific object or person(s). According to Film an Introduction, "a zoom lens is a lens that can change from wide angle to telephoto range while the camera is filming a shot" (Phillips, 89). When Harry and Marion are laying across her designing table, the overhead camera spins in a circle while simultaneously zooming out on them as they lay next to one another; both high on heroin. The spectator gets a sense of floating along with them, zooming out of control as the drugs take control of their bodies. Another scene depicts Tyrone having sex with his girlfriend, and the camera once again is on a crane overhead, zooming out from a medium close-up shot to a wider image of the two as their bodies move together in unison. A similar shot depicts a close-up of the mailbox as Sara and her neighbors drop off her application to be on television; a slow fade to white signaling her hope of being accepted as the camera zooms out. Zoom lenses can change perspective by zooming in to show specific details, or zooming out to take in the entirety of a given situation.

Aronofsky plays with split screen shots, color, and focus throughout the film as well to emphasize certain moods. When Harry and Marion are lying in bed together, they are right next to one another, yet they are filmed in separate frames. The split screen creates a sense that while they are together physically, they are in drastically different worlds mentally. The close-ups and extreme close-ups of their faces, hands, and fingertips during the scene also functions to enhance the intimacy of the moment. The same is true when Sara locks herself in the closet in the opening scene, and a split screen of her and Harry emphasizes the divide between the mother and son. On

one side, the spectator watches as he steals her television, while simultaneously, the other side depicts her huddled on the floor whimpering in fear.

Color tones and contrast help visualize the emotion and themes of the film. When Sara is introduced at the beginning of the film, her house is bright with color and seemingly full of life, yet when she starts taking the diet pills, the tones of her scenes gradually become darker. The use of tonalities and contrast shows the evolution of happiness to sadness and the effects of the drugs on her wellbeing. The same is true for Harry. Throughout the film, he daydreams about Marion standing at the end of the pier, and each time he does so, his fantasy is basked in bright white light. When he slips back into reality, however, there is a stark change in the tone and contrast of the lighting from bright to murky grey, reflecting the gloomy nature of his real-life situation.

In Film Art it is stated, “viewer attention is directed to the subject depending on the context, unfocused subjects maybe ambiguous, disturbing, threatening” (Bordwell and Thompson, 82). When Sara leaves her home after experiencing a breakdown, she is seen walking the streets in her red dress. While she is captured in sharp focus during this scene, the mass of people who are walking alongside and around her are shot in shallow focus, as a means of emphasizing her confusion. Aronofsky also plays with speed of motion here, in that Sara is moving in slow motion, and the people around her are all moving in fast motion, furthering the idea that she is losing her mind.

The use of close ups during the final moments of the film is a good way of representing the downward spiral of all four of the characters who have ruined their life behind drug use. Roger Ebert states, “the virtuoso closing sequence cuts between all four major characters as they careen toward their final destruction” (Ebert). Close ups of each of the actors alternate, from Harry’s face on the stretcher, Tyrone in prison working, Marion’s face while performing a sex show, and Sara having shock therapy. These shots provide an intimate, and scary glimpse into the dangers of drug abuse, seen in vivid detail on the characters’ faces. These shots are the ultimate culmination of a film that presents a realistic and heartbreaking perspective of drug use and drug addiction.

The cinematography plays a key role in allowing the viewer to understand and realize how serious drug use can really be, the consequences of using them, and the notion that only a small bit of drug use can lead to a lot of pain, devastation, and personal loss.

Works Cited

1. Bordwell, David, and Kristin Marie Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2004. Print.
2. Ebert, Roger. "Requiem for a Dream." *All Content*. N.p., 3 Nov. 2000. . 04 Nov. 2013.
3. Phillips, William H. *Film: An Introduction*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999. Print.