How to Analyze Movies #1: The Introduction

This lead me to learning more about the *language of film*, which is what I’ll focus on in this introduction. The posts in this series will probably all be longer ones (and I have planned quite a few for you), so bear with me! In the posts coming up in the next few weeks, I’ll discuss semiotics (the study of signs, codes and conventions in film), the analysis of a scene, how camera angles and movement, lighting, special effects and even sound can all tell you more about the message the creator of the movie conveys. You’ll learn how to detect certain subtle hints at ideas or philosophies, hints you previously missed and can have a great influence on how people see the world.

So, before I carry on for too long, let’s get started.

**The Language of Film**

The language of film (or video or TV) can only be detected by analyzing the “moving image texts”. The idea is that every image conveys a meaning, like a photograph would convey a feeling or a message:

*Photograph by World Photography Finalist Alessandro Grassani/LUZphoto*
With a picture, it’s a little easier to distill its message than with a movie. You just have one frame or scene to analyze, the “image text” is the message it is trying to convey. In this case, that would probably be a sense of desperation, sadness, to illustrate the circumstances this person is in. You can tell a lot about this person’s life from just looking at this picture (for what is the actual context and story behind the picture, click on the image).

Just like one would read a book, one can “read” a movie – though instead of reading the actual text, you have to distill the “text”, its meaning, from the (moving) images. It’s like they say: a picture is worth a thousand words, and that’s certainly the case with a movie.

**Meaning of Film and Decoding It**

The film language is how the movie “speaks” to its audience. Those who create the movies (the great coöperation of directors, producers, editors, et cetera) want to tell a certain story, transfer a certain idea. Even if they just aim to entertain, their movie will likely carry some meaning, because the audience can create meaning, even when it’s not there. This is called decoding. We “decode” a story’s meaning, just like we would interpret spoken language or written texts. We take to a movie all our previous experiences and our knowledge and subconsciously apply it to what we see – we interpret the film with pre-existing expectations.

We can’t watch a movie in a vacuüm – we will always relate what happens in a movie to things we experienced in our own lives (e.g. you can relate to a mother getting a baby, a pair going through a divorce, a teen going to school, etc.), or even relate the movie to a movie we’ve seen before. On the one hand, film reflects how we think about certain issues (political, social, economical, what have you), but on the other hand, film also molds the way we think about those issues.

**The Window on the World**

What makes a movie so infinitely compelling to us – curious creatures as we are – is that it offers a “window on the world” – it creates a (appearance of) reality. It’s like peeking through the window when you hear commotion in your street, or (collectively) slowing down on the high way to watch when an accident happened. The guessing what the commotion will lead to is what fascinates us.

In the 1920s and 30s, movies were considered “truth machines“, able to reveal certain social and political truths. In the 1960s, famous French philosopher [Jean Baudrillard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeannot_Baudrillard) said that fiction as well as non-fiction are merely simulations. Today, though, it’s understood
that film should not be compared to reality, either to measure the gap between reality and
depiction, or to measure the accuracy of the depiction. Instead, we should look at how
movie and reality are related to each other: movie draws from real life, but also influences
it. It’s not so much about the gap between movie and reality, but the interaction between
them. Lines between reality and fiction have blurred (and not just in film!).

*The Book Thief (2013) – Behind the Scenes*

No depiction in a movie is objective or neutral. This is why we can’t speak about a movie’s
“truth”, “reality” or “authenticity”: film is in the eye of the beholder.

**And on a final note...**

Not only does film entertain, it also informs us and even educates us about the world
around us, and most importantly, persuades us to see the world in a certain way. Most are
not aware of this persuasion, but if you *are*, trust me, it’s so much fun to encounter,
analyze and criticize the way the movies persuade us into thinking about things in a
certain way. It gives watching a movie a whole new dimension, which is what I enjoy about
film most of all. Although, I have to admit that some movies carry meaning I do so
absolutely not agree with that it can be a tad frustrating that people are not aware of the
way they’re being influenced. Nevertheless, the deeper understanding of the world that
film analysis can offer is, in my opinion, definitely worth it!
Next in this series is *How To Analyze Movies: Signs, Codes & Conventions*. I’ll discuss semiotics, the study of meaning in a film through decoding symbols and conventions.

**Do you enjoy thinking about or discussing the meanings of a movie after you’ve watching it? How do you go about “reading” a movie’s meaning? Can you think about any movies that have made you understand the world better, even fiction?**

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**Some books and articles I used for this article and can heartily recommend**


How to Analyze Movies #2: Signs, Codes & Conventions

This is part two in the How to Analyze Movies series (find part 1 here!), and today we’ll be discussing the signs, codes and conventions in a movie that can tell you a lot about the message that the creators are trying to convey. Some creators are very aware of the use of signs, codes and conventions in their movies, though some are not – then the symbolism is there but not on the surface, which makes it a little harder to interpret.

Semiotic Analysis

The study of these signs, codes and conventions in movies is called semiotics. Semiotic analysis is a way to explain how we make meaning from codes – all meaning is encoded in that which creates the meaning. No object or word goes without a meaning – we cannot read or see something without associating it to a certain idea – the meaning. In our youths, we have all been taught how to decode what we see, read and hear, we have all learned to decode meaning.

However, what we should realize is that the decoded meaning is not our own idea, but somebody else’s. For example. If you read the word “failure”, you decode it by relating it to the value your culture adheres to the concept of failure and its antonym – success. Although it’s not said we cannot create meaning on our own, 99% percent of the time, the meaning comes from some pre-established (cultural) idea.

Signs and Codes

In semiotic analysis, the smallest units of meaning are signs. For example, the way you dress is, to others, a group of signs that tells them something about you – clothing encode the smallest of signs, e.g. your popped collar means you’re preppy. Your band t-shirt and over-sized pants are signs that you are a music fan, but together create a group of signs (t-shirt + baggy pants + maybe even black nail polish?), a code, that suggests that you are perhaps also a bit of a rebel.
Everything here signifies that Juno is really rebellious.

You could say meaning has two “levels”. On its most basic level, there is the sign: the denotation, which is the literal meaning. But when a sign occurs in a group, or in a particular context, it becomes a code, and it can suggest or connote extra meaning. For instance, the color red simply denotes a color, but in a certain context it can connote emotion, like anger, or love. These codes are often used in media to reinforce, subtly, the way we should think about certain things or how we should behave (a culture’s dominant ideologies), i.e. a long-standing cultural ideology is that diamonds (or chocolate) represent love and that you give this to your significant other to relay it.

These codes are groups of signs that seem to fit together naturally. Together, they create meaning. To stick to the signs of romance: the sign of a broken heart means lost love, put them with the sign of a boy and girl and together, you know that together these signs – the code – mean this couple broke off their relationship.

In Film

To create filmic code you need a lot of equipment – cameras, microphones, lighting, et cetera. Four types of signs and codes exist in semiotic analysis of film:

Indexical Signs
These are the most basic. Indexical signs indirectly point to a certain meaning – they act as cues to existing knowledge: e.g. smoke means fire, panting means exercising, a ringing bell means end of class. This type of signs are constantly used in (all types of) media and are really very common.

**Symbolic Codes**

Symbolic codes often denote something they have nothing to do with. For instance, the red heart symbolizes love, the white dove symbolizes peace, the color green symbolizes jealousy.

*In Blade Runner, they used a lot of doves*

**Iconic Signs and Codes**

These are the literal signs and codes: a cop means a cop. They are meant to appear like the thing itself. However, they always represent *more* than just the thing itself. When we see a cop, we also associate this with our cultural ideas of “justice” or “the law”, or even masculinity or toughness. These codes also reinforce the ideas we have about these concepts in our culture, it reinforces the ideological meaning of those concepts.

**Enigma Code**

This is an important type of code used in film: it creates a question which the film “text”
will then go on to answer. This is often used in trailers of movies (as well as the posters): they create a question to create curiosity and intrigue the viewers – with the intention of making people want to see the movie.

**Convention**

Convention is another important term and concept. It indicates the “establishment”, the established way of doing something, or understanding something. It’s what we see as natural, we’re so used to these conventions that we don’t even see them anymore, and definitely don’t see what their effect is, or how they affect us. However, they are nothing but natural! Conventions like the following are often culturally accepted, but if you scrutinize them, they’re not at all like reality.

*Phyllis Dietrichson in Double Indemnity (1944) – a real film noir femme fatale*

In film, convention can be recognized in how women are portrayed. For instance, in film noir, they are either the helpless dame in distress, or the femme fatale – there is no in between. Or, in how a cop or the bad guy are portrayed: like when a cop can kill bad guys without consequences, and the bad guy has not a grain of good in his heart.

Moreover, genre and narrative can add to the sense of convention (like the film noir), just like the way a movie is edited or certain shot types (e.g. a close-up of the poor dame in distress).
Culture

As I’ve already mentioned once or twice before – culture is very important in the way we interpret signs and codes. It is important to realize that culture always determines the meaning a sign or code communicates. Your interpretation of a Bollywood movie, if you’re anything other than an Indian, will most likely be very different to the interpretation of an Indian.

Practice!

Recently, I reviewed *Only God Forgives*, a movie by director Nicolas Winding Refn. This movie is riddled with signs, codes and convention – it is incredibly symbolic. Go watch it if you haven’t yet and practice semiotic analysis – read my review afterwards to see if you’ve picked up on some of the symbolism, too. You’ll see – most people consider *Only God Forgives* a tough and boring movie to get through, but if you dig in a little deeper, it gets a lot more interesting.

What are some of your favorite codes or symbols? Do you often pick up on them or are you usually unaware of them? If you have any questions at all, please let me know in the comments!

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How to Analyze Movies #3: Mise-en-Scène & Editing

In the last part of How to Analyze Movies, we discussed signs, codes and conventions. In this episode we’re moving on to the scene and editing, and what that means in film language.

Mise-en-Scène

Everything you see in a movie or TV episode is constructed to fit in the screen. The creators think about every element that is shown in that scene, nothing is accidental (generally, of course, I’m leaving mistakes out of the equation). By controlling what is shown in the boundaries of that screen, the creator controls the understanding of the audience. All that the director puts into the scene and films is called the “mise-en-scène”. To help you analyze as well as understand a scene, you have to ask who and what is in the scene and consider their relative position – also think of make-up, expressions, costume, scenery, appearance, props, sounds and lighting.

Bane in The Dark Knight Rises (2012)

Questions you have to ask yourself:

- What effects are created in a mise-en-scène?
- What meaning do they have (connotation and denotation – link)?
• How were they created?
• Why were they created in that way - what is the director’s purpose? (e.g. to develop a character, set the mood, increase realism, to explore the deeper meanings of the plot and theme)

You could try this out with the image of Bane, above.

Editing

Editing is a way to compress time and space into one coherent, natural-looking sequence of shots. It’s usually seamless. It consists out of cutting and joining pieces (shots) of recorded film together, while still maintaining a sense of continuity and connectedness. Usually, shots are edited to suggest a realistic flow of what’s happening.

A montage is a series of edited shots that works as a cohesive unit, which has greater meaning than the individual mise-en-scènes.

There are different kinds of editing techniques:

• **Continuity editing**: with this technique, the editor tries to keep the sense of realistic flow of events and to create a coherent sequence of shots. It is the most common editing technique.

• **Jump-cut**: this is a dramatic cut in the flow of events, which breaks the time/space continuum (which is why it’s considered a violation of continuity editing), yet it still feels natural. Quick jumps between camera positions that differ only very little is an example. It can also give the sense of jumping forward in time. This technique is used in creating music videos (to increase dynamischheid), and it was also used famously in Guy Ritchie’s *Snatch*. ([Video example](#))

• **Cross-cut**: in this editing technique, two action scenes quickly succeed each other to create a sense of two scenes happening at the same moment in time, but in a different place. The complete sequence of these kinds of scenes is called parallel action. Christopher Nolan is famous for using this technique a lot, it’s used extensively in *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises*, as well as *Inception*. ([video example](#))

• **Follow-cut**: in a follow-cut, the action is followed to its consequence. An example is when you see a character look out over a certain view, and the next shot shows the actual view.
Here you’re shown the perspective of Mr Bennet: his wife and daughters (Pride & Prejudice, 2005)

- **Fades and dissolves**: this type of editing promotes the sense of scenes (and time) moving forward. It’s usually a gradual transition from one image to another. Fades fade to or from a blank image and can fade-in, fade-out, or fade to black. Dissolves are a transition between two shots.
- **Sound-bridge**: this entails the carrying of sound between two shots

Understanding the different kinds of shots also leads to a deepened understanding of the purpose of the director and the meaning he or she is trying to present.

**Next time you watch a movie, make some notes on what you see in the mise-en-scène and consider why it was put there, and also look at the way the movie was edited. What does it do with the meaning of the film?**

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How to Analyze Movies #4: Considering The Camera

In the earlier installments of How To Analyze Movies, we discussed film language, how meaning is created in film through the use of signs, codes and conventions and most recently, we covered mise-en-scène and editing.

Today, we’re going to discuss the camera and how it too can create meaning and how important it is to know about the way the camera is used to analyse a movie. First, we’ll discuss the different kinds of shot types, then the camera angles and finally, camera movement.

Shot Types

A shot is one single take. It can be used to set the scene or the mood, or place the spectator in the scene.

First, there is the establishing shot. This is a long shot that helps to set the scene. It establishes the location of the scene and gives the audience an idea of where they are in the narrative.

The establishing shot is frequently followed by a mid shot, to zoom in on the focus of the scene. A mid shot is usually considered to be a view of a full-length human, although in some styles, like in European film, a shot of a person from the waist up is considered a mid-shot, whereas this type of shot is, in other styles, often already considered to be a close-up. So in that case, a close-up can range from a shot of a person from the knees up, from the waist up, or merely the face.
Finally, there is the subjective point-of-view (POV) shot, an eye-line shot where the spectator sees what the characters sees, which helps give the audience the feeling they are part of the scene themselves.

**Camera Angles**

Camera angles can greatly help set the tone of the movie, and signify meaning nearly always. A great example is when the angle is a subjective POV shot with a high angle, suggesting that the person that’s the subject is superior to the one viewed from up high, and a low angle shot can signify weakness.

You’ll often see this in movies where ranks are important, for instance, when an emperor or king sits high up his throne and the POV high angle shows him looking down over his subjects.

**Camera Movement**

Finally, camera movement. Camera movement too is very important in the creation of meaning. For instance, a zoom into a close-up of someone’s face can suggest a certain emotion or emphasize on it.

Panning across a field of war can suggest endless chaos, just like a POV handheld camera shot creates tension and increases involvement by adding to the feeling of the spectator being part of the action. Using a steadycam can help prevent a handheld camera from
giving too shaky shots. However, some filmmakers prefer the shaky shots instead.

source: Artisan Entertainment

Lastly, the following shot tracks or pans the subject to keep him or her in shot – often, in this case, the camera is attached on rails or on a wheeled platform, a “dolly”.

Practice

Requiem of a Dream (2000) is a great example of a movie in which shot types, camera angles and camera movement are used significantly to create meaning, involve the audience, to display and evoke emotion.

Watch the four minute trailer below and consider all we discussed above.
An example of a significant shot is around 1:10, where we see the television set, shot from below, giving us the sense that it’s a powerful thing – and it is, to the mother whose whole life is about that television.

**Tell me, what else do you see in this trailer, regarding the camera? How does its placement and use create meaning?**

On a random note, I saw Requiem of a Dream when I was very young, and it probably destroyed any appeal drugs could ever have to me. Great movie to show your kids to scare ‘em. And isn’t it still an amazing soundtrack? It still gives me a dry throat.

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How to Analyze Movies #5: Lighting, Sound & Score

Last week we covered the Camera, in which I reminded all of you of one of the most depressing but best shot movies ever. This week in How to Analyze Movies: Lighting, Sound and Score! Seriously, don’t forget about these three if you’re analyzing a movie. They’re important. Let’s get started.

Lighting

Lighting is important in a movie to create a certain mood, or an atmosphere. You may not expect it but even lighting can add to and create meaning in a film. Horror movies, for instance, are known use lighting to create the mood a lot. Most importantly, they use a lot of shade to create the setting and the atmosphere. They are codes of meaning. Certainly, you will never see horror-type lighting in a romantic movie, as it doesn’t fit the setting. In lighting, available light suggests natural light. Spotlight, although mostly used in theater, picks out one member of a group, but is sometimes used more subtly in film, and could be used for foreshadowing. Full-face lighting highlights a face and can suggest openness and truth. Shadow and low contrast are often associated with fear, anger, suspicion, et cetera.

source: New Line Cinema // Lord of the Rings: Two Towers

High-key lighting is harsh and bright, and can uplift the movie’s mood. It can also intensify a scene where emotions are laid bare, as the high-key lighting makes it look as if the person cannot hide anything – especially when they also make use of full-face lighting. Soft-key lighting is, as the name already suggests, a much softer light, shadows are visible and contrast is lower. It’s often used to create a romantic atmosphere, or to set
a more grim mood in darker movies. Watch this fascinating lighting in video tutorial if you’re interested in learning more about lighting – tutorials are very handy to get a deeper understanding of what it is the filmmakers do and how they achieve it (and why!).

**Sound and “Diegesis”**

There is a difference between sound that is in the scene when shot, and the sound that is added after the movie is shot. The former is called the sound of “the world of the film”, or **diegesis**. Examples are singing birds or cars driving by in the background, a baby’s rattle toy, or screeching tires in a car chase. Those sounds are **diegetic**. Not-diegetic are sounds that are added to a film after the film is shot to create mood and atmosphere, like the sounds of blowing wind, rumbling thunder or blows in a fist fight. Moreover, sound can also be **dubbed**. That means the sound is already in the diegesis but is replaced by a clearer recording of the sound, to emphasize on and exaggerate the effect of the sound.

**The Score**

Never forget to consider the score. The movie’s music goes a great length to set the mood. A horror will rarely feature a romantic ballad, though they may sometimes have a very cheerful song to create contrast with what’s happening on screen. This too is done to create that mood and atmosphere. **Blade Runner** is a dark and mysterious movie, set in a very dark, dystopian world. The **score created by Vangelis** really emphasized on that mood, even giving it a dream and trance-like feel, adding to the mystery and surreality of the movie. In fact, another movie that did this well was the movie we discussed last week, **Requiem of a Dream**. The **score for this movie** truly added to the dark mood and desperation of the characters.
A great example of a perfect accompanying score for a tense action scene is the combination of Juno Reactor’s Mona Lisa Overdrive and the orchestra in *The Matrix Reloaded* during the freeway chase:

*The Matrix Reloaded: Trinity on Ducati 996*

Do you ever pay special attention to sound and lighting when you’re watching a movie? What is your favorite movie score – and which did you think didn’t fit the movie you were watching?
If you have any questions or comments, please post them below!

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How to Analyze Movies #6: Story & Genre

To learn how to analyze a movie, aside from understanding the camera, lighting and sound, editing and the signs and codes of film language, you need to know how story and genre can tell you about the message the creators intend to share with their audience.

Story (or Narrative)

Stories are infinitely important to us human beings. We use “schemas” to make sense of our world – we organize events and our surroundings into certain categories to structure the world we live in. Story plays a large role in our making sense of the world. We learn about action and reaction, cause and consequence and many types of people. Stories are often told following a certain form and structure, no matter whether the story is fiction or non-fiction. We’re so used to stories as a tool to recount events, we don’t even know when it’s used! The power of narrative, however, is that it can create an illusion of authenticity.

The basic template of story

Most stories are told through a few always-returning elements: the three acts – beginning, middle and end.


First, the world is presented as a calm, stable place. All is well, until the second act starts: the calm and stable world is rudely disrupted, often by a villain. Now, the hero has to
resolve the issue and make sure the world returns back to normal. The end will show the hero did just that. We’re used to this kind of structure and in fact, expect the disruption to be resolvable and the world to be able to return back to normal.

**Story versus Reality**

In story, the characters are often presented as wholly good and wholly evil. The hero vs the villain. In the real world, however, most people aren’t as black or white, but are many shades of grey. In the real world, conflicts and issues aren’t as easily resolved as stories often present them to be. Story teaches us about the world; after all, it is (presented to be) a **window on the world**, showing us situations and people we may not ever experience or meet in real life.

We unconsciously take story to be true, and with that, our view on the world can be skewed. We have to realize, constantly, that “story” is something applied liberally and generally – it’s not just in books and movies, even non-fiction is presented like a story, as well as the news. News can give one as unrealistic view on the world as a movie can.

**Story in Movie**

What we need to be aware of in movie analysis is how the story has been constructed. While the most basic story structure exists out of a beginning-middle-end, has a hero and a villain, certainly not all movies follow this structure. If they don’t, know what it is the makers are trying to tell you.

For instance, film noir has often drifted away from the original story structure to point us on the fact that in reality, the world is grey and that the end is not always a happy one – not all issues can be resolved.

Genre

Genre is the *kind* of narrative, or story, being told. Genre is just as important as story on its own – it manages our expectations and schemas. When we watch a horror, we link it automatically to all we know of the horror genre, and with that we have certain expectations of the movie as well. This isn’t only limited to the events within the story, but includes its characters and settings. Moreover, it helps us predict where the story will lead to.

For example, when I pick a random horror movie, I’d expect it to be set in a forest or in an old, dingy house – of course in the middle of the night, so that the setting is rich in shadows. I’d expect there to be a screaming blonde cheerleader, some sort of trashy tough guy and a nerdy smart dude, and I’d expect there to be a lot of blood, gore and death. That’s how specific expectations regarding movies can get.

*Texas Chain Saw Massacre – source: New Line Cinema*

Through genre, directors can create a seeming reality. It makes us fail to see what is reality and what is a media convention – for instance, to stick to the horror genre as an example, in reality, it may be the cheerleader that will save people from a tough situation. In film, she’s always presented to be the victim, but in reality, she doesn’t have to be.

*Use of Genre by Film Companies*
Genre can be very useful to film companies – they keep track of what popular genres are, and make movies in that genre. A movie in a popular genre decreases cost (sets can be reused, stories are more easily available) and increases revenue as more people will go to see it, meaning genre can greatly help toward making a movie a commercial success. The downside is that it can also limit creativity and reduce the audience’s choice of movie types.

You can always see genre popularity clearly throughout time. For instance, in the past five years, the super hero movies have been amazingly popular. The 80s showed a rise in popularity of science fiction, and in the 60s, romance, comedy and psychological horror were popular. It’s good to be aware of such trends, as they influence the audience’s (and your) mindset on the genre these movies present.

**That’s it for this week! Please share your thoughts in the comments, I'd love to hear what you think. If you have any questions, those are also very welcome.**

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How to Analyze Movies #7: Iconography & Realism

At long last, we’ve arrived at the final part of the How To Analyze Movies series!

In previous installments, we’ve discussed film language, signs, codes and conventions, mise-en-scène and editing, the camera, lighting, sound and score, and finally, story and genre.

In this last part, we’ll discuss iconography and realism. We’re just rounding up the final bits and this article won’t be as long as some of the others.

Iconography

Iconography, in essence, is an aspect of genre and mise-en-scène. When we watch a movie in a certain genre, we expect to see certain elements: the icons. For instance, when we watch a Western, we expect tumbleweeds, desert, horses, saloon bars, et cetera. When we watch a superhero movie, we expect super powers, muscular and slick superheroes, a female romantic interest, lots of CGI, et cetera. These are the genre indicators, the iconography.

Think of other genres and list some of their iconography, too!

The Stars As Part of Iconography

There are some stars that are typecast in certain roles. For instance, you would never expect Arnold Schwarzenegger to appear in a romance – he’s the quintessential action movie star. Stars can be signifiers of meaning as much as other symbols and icons, as they manage the audience’s expectations regarding the genre and the character they’re playing. They can be quite powerful representations of masculinity and femininity. The former is definitely the case for Schwarzenegger, I’d say. For the latter, Angelina Jolie is a great example – although she’s not typecast as much as Arnie, she definitely is a great symbol of femininity.
In movie history, stars were actually contracted to bind them to one studio and genre, though that’s no longer the case today. This is why you saw actors playing role after similar role in the past, whereas today, they appear in multiple genres (if they’re talented enough to do it well, that is).

Now, on to realism.

**Realism**

Movies can seem very realistic – note, however, that it’s always a *seeming* realism. What movies show is never real. However, the level of realism is convincing and compelling enough for us to subliminally believe what we see is real.

Such high levels of realism are achieved through placing us in front of a bright screen in a dark room, so that we’re sucked in; the Dolby surround sound to increase the feeling we’re *in* the surroundings we see, the increasingly real-looking CGI with which anything can be made to seem real, et cetera. Together, they give an *appearance of reality*, also called *verisimilitude*: a *convention* (our assumption that what we see is real) as there is nothing ever truly real about movie images.
Wanted – source: Spyglass Entertainment

There are two kinds of verisimilitude:

- **Generic verisimilitude**: convincing in its seeming realism due to the genre of the movie. For instance, in a zombie horror, it’s realistic for a zombie to chew on someone’s guts (which is also a convention – we expect zombies to do that), or, in an action film like Wanted pictured above, it’s seemingly realistic that Angelina Jolie is on the hood of a driving car and actually hits their chaser;

- **Cultural verisimilitude**: convincing in its seeming realism because it actually tries to mimic life – often the case for movies in the drama genre. Or for any other movie, and I’ll take Wanted for an example again, where James McAvoy mimics an American accent to make it seem like he’s American, instead of the Scot he really is.

If you want to analyze a movie, it’s important you realize nothing of what you see is real. You need to be aware of this fact so you can see all elements of the movie for what they are. You’ll have to punch through your own conventions and expectations – it’s hard, but you have to consider every little representation on its own (or combined with other representations if that’s called for) as well as from a distance – consider their cultural relevance and try to see what gives the representation the seeming realism to the audience.

**Can you think of any movies that seemed very realistic to you, even though you knew there was nothing remotely real to it? Please share in the comments below!**

That’s it for this blog series! In the next few weeks, we will publish a beat sheet for you to
use while watching a movie to help you sit through the analysis, and an index article of all parts of this series.

As always, if you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to ask, and if you enjoyed this article and think it’s helpful for others, too – please share it with your social networks!

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