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Critical Approaches
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PROJECT 1

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Journal Entries: Narrative Approach

Some people assume that acknowledging the narrative structure can ruin the experience of watching a movie. On one hand, the 3-act structure does make films more predictable. However, you learn to appreciate the small details of the structure, such as the building of character traits, the setting, and the development indicated by the plot points. Moreover, since a young age we are used to see not only movies that follow the 3-act chronology, but also books. Which explain why most movies are somehow predictable. But many directors like to play and twist the chronology, normally making the audience be on the edge of their seats. The “Arrival” (2016) by Denis Villeneuve is a perfect example of a non-linear film. Villeneuve plays with an almost circular approach, leaving the climax towards the end but connecting it to the beginning of the film. The film completely takes the audience by surprise when they identify a dimensional chronology. Furthermore, while watching “The Platform” (2019) by Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia, it can be noticed the construction of the introduction, and shows how the director makes us aware of the setting and soon introduce the main characters as well as some of their personality traits, which intensifies while the film progresses. Also, noticing the obstacles during the rising action on act two, contributes to the excitement on the act three. In a nutshell, knowing the 3-act plot structure does not affect your enjoyment while watching a film. A skilled critic enjoys understanding the movie and its context. Becoming aware of the plot structure, and other ways of critiquing a film induces you to appreciate films through different perspectives. When an audience watches a film using the narrative approach on a critique, they still need to be attentive for the film’s details. They have to establish a main thought, which consequently drives the viewer to section the basic analysis of the

film and then introduce an idea. The main idea will present the context of the film, and will correlate with the film's producer proposal.

Journal Entries: Socio-Cultural Approach

The social-cultural approach emerged from the Karl Marx's theories of analysis and social criticism, which reveal the values reinforced and reflected by the bourgeoisie, the privilege class. The Communist Manifesto appealing ideas are still relevant in today's society. The absurd amount of contemporary films which approach the context through class struggle, such as Bong Joon-ho's "Snowpiercer" (2013) is a prove on how Marx's ideas keep influencing people. Another clear example of class struggle is represented in Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia's "The Platform". The hierarchy is represented through a vertical penitentiary, separated on hundreds of levels, the place revolves around the banquet which goes from the first, to the last level. The lowest the prisoners are, the last food they get. This hierarchy could be easily compared to the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Further, symbolism is another term frequently used in the ideological approach. Throughout film "The Platform", symbolism is demonstrated as the three hundred and thirty-three floors, and the randomized choice of floor. The spiritual symbolism represented by the level of the last floor is known as the angel number, and the randomized process that leads to the prisoner changes of jail floor level represents the inconsistency of a capitalist system. Moreover, alienation was frequently discussed throughout the Manifesto. Charlie Chaplin's "Modern Times" (1936), is a classical representation of the term, where Charlie characterized as factory worker cannot restrain his mechanic behavior cause by the exhausting routine, and the lack of empathy of the employer which only values the money and efficiency.

Just as the globalization influenced consumerism, mainstream productions can influence people. The masses are directly connected to the way the government and

corporations relay in all segments of consumerism and entertainment. Individuals end up being constrained to advertising and marketing mechanisms, which almost force them to consume. Just like advertisement and propaganda, a movie can influence people. Disney movies always seem inoffensive, but many of their films have a deeper meaning. The “Cinderella” for example, reinforce the ideas of hierarchy and patriarchy. It fortifies the idea that a woman can only be successful because of a man, and the success depend on the man. To conclude, the ideological approach is about the general values that the film promotes, and how capitalism is a trap that we are exhorted to get out of.

Critique: “The Pavement” by Taylor Engel.

“The Pavement” (2015) by Taylor Engel is a story about the uncovering affair between a brother and his brother’s wife, which leads to tragic consequences. The use of Kuleshov effect consistently play with the viewers assumptions. Specifically, the film manages to deliver a suspenseful and entertaining story, which captivates the audience mainly due to its shots, music, and narration.

The importance of the shots to create meaning is consistently highlighted throughout the short film. An example of this is shown in the first part of the movie when the viewer has almost no clue of what was really going on. In the first 26 seconds, the sequence of shots is followed by a smooth voice-over announcing “*a touch*”. This gives the impression of genuine passion and romance. The continuous use of close-ups and extreme close-ups allows the viewers to immerse themselves into the footage and also keep them from seeing the entire setting and the true context of the events in the film. The expectation that the film fits firmly in the romance genre fails at 0:44 minute mark, after the narrator states “*those lips*” and then ads “*that voice*”, which is followed by a woman screaming. After this the viewer begins to approach the film in a totally different way. Having this rough felling that something is not right, which contrasts entirely with the first genre thoughts.

Throughout the whole composition, the shots are complemented by the audio track. In which a voice-over names the subjects appearing in each shot. Such as, “*the glass*” referring to the broken glass, “*the red*” blood, and “*the pavement*”. Also, as the movie progresses, the faster the shots and audio are delivered. Even the score of the film

moves from slow to a faster rhythm music with 'agony' noises in the background of the audio. The repetition of images and lines invoke a dizzying feel to the viewer, as if they are trying to remember a traumatic experience. *The Pavement* demonstrates exactly how audio complements the shot composition. The interaction between two shots, give the viewer a better understanding than a shot in isolation. This phenomenon is called Kuleshov effect. In this case, the intelligence comes from the communication between the shots and the narration with a background music.

In conclusion, Taylor Engel invoke the viewer to investigate the arising incident, making them be on the edge of their seats. Both use of powerful shot technique and over-voice music enforce the mysterious mood and theme.

Critique: “Balance” by Wolfgang Lauenstein & Christoph Lauenstein

What if the sense of community was the only thing left? In a strange world, five men live in a suspended platform where the equilibrium is limited. They all look and dress the same, apart from the numbers stamped on their backs. They depend on each other, so if one of them move, all the others also have to adapt, keeping the fragile balance of the system. Produced by the twin brothers Wolfgang and Christoph Lauenstein, when viewed using the ideological approach the short-animated film “Balance” (1989) strongly criticize the general values of individuality and community, suggesting that humans are consistently fighting over small things. The 90’s Oscar’s winning for best short film incorporates these themes through its use of social class, alienation, and setting.

First of all, the simplicity of the aesthetics does not compare to the grandeur of its social meaning. Soon after the first minute of the film, the five men living on this strange looking world start synchronized fishing. All of them belong to one of the two predominant capitalist classes; the proletariat. Further, one of them fishes a red box, and at first sight their curiosity made them work together in order to acknowledge what was that object. However, soon enough a game of interest and alliances started, as if the box represented a sort of power or opportunity. The platform and the trunk are the representation of capitalism, and the five men represent the working class. The producers wanted the viewers to question how capitalism interfere the human sense of community, often making it selfish and unequal. Moreover, the Lauenstein brothers show how the capitalist system deteriorates the identity of the lower class, by making all of them identical apart of the number in their backs. Meaning that their world is extremely unstable and makes the

people that live in lose their individuality. However, this peculiar world is only balanced because of their sense of community.

To conclude, the film successfully manages to invoke a deeper meaning through a simple construction. Their use of social class, alienation and the setting enforce the viewer to question and admire their use of relevant themes. Nowadays, we are passing through a difficult time where we acknowledge how our sense of community is important and how the economy in a capitalist world depends on the population. Consequently, it does not impress that this film won several awards; the subtle way they refer to a thoughtful message is clear and timeless.