

Annotated Film Critique Sheet

COMM 3390

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Courtesy Dr. Doug Carr

Introduction: When looking at a film to critique it or evaluate it, there are many things to consider beyond *personal preference*, though that has a place. Here are listed some considerations, some questions you might find answers to, some of the possibilities for investigation with respect to a particular film. Several questions below can only be answered by research. The purpose of this list is to provide some possibilities beyond personal preference.

1. Direction

- a. How well does the director stage scenes?
- b. What "vision" does the director seem to impart to the film?
- c. How does this film compare with other work of the same director?
- d. How well do the images on the screen match or diverge from the figures of speech in the script?
- e. Does the director make the best advantage of the material and the opportunities the story presents?
- f. Does the movie drag or seem longer than the showing time?
- g. Are there homages or references to other films identifiable in the film?
- h. Does the director belong to a "school" or is he or she unique in the vision presented on screen?
- i. Is the director part of the Hollywood establishment or independent of it?
Is this obvious in the film?

2. Cinematography

- a. How is light used and how well?
- b. What is the tone of the film as suggested by the colors, hues, shadows etc.?

3. Acting

- a. How well do the actors perform their roles?
- b. Is there one actor or actress who is particularly strong compared to the rest?
- c. What qualities does an actor have that makes him or her unique?
- d. Are the actors convincing?
- e. How well does the acting compare with an actor's (or actors') previous roles?
- f. Are the actors type cast or cast against type?
- g. Does an actor's previous acting history affect the way you perceive him or her in this film?
- h. Is there anything in an actor's life that resonates with the onscreen persona?
Should it matter?

4. **Script/writing**

- a. Which does the writer do best: dialogue, character or plot?
- b. Is the writing meaningful or does it merely move the plot along?
- c. Is the dialogue realistic?
- d. To what extent is the "text" figurative?
- e. Is the dialogue crisp? Clever? Tight? Or is it loose and sloppy?
- f. Was the script worked on by one writer or by a "script doctor"?
- g. Are the lines fresh or clichéd?
- h. How effectively is irony used? (Are there scenes, for example, where the actors appear to be talking about one thing on first viewing, but on reviewing the film you realize their lines have a double meaning?)

5. **Editing**

- a. Are there any outstanding transitions between scenes?
- b. How well does the continuity work?
- c. Is there confusion in the viewing experience? Can you tell if it's intentional or because of poor choices as the film was edited?
- d. Are there "accidents" (such as props reversed or moved, mike shadows) that show careless editing?

6. **Theme**

- a. Is the meaning subtle? Ambiguous? Heavy handed?
- b. Does the film seem to moralize or does it let you come to your own interpretation?
- c. Does the film deal with meanings we can describe as universal?
- d. Does the film seem to teach you something fresh or is the moral a cliché?
- e. Does the structure of the film contribute to the meaning?

7. **Social issues**

- a. What social issues does the film deal with explicitly?
- b. What social issues can be identified in the film that may not have been intended (such as racist or sexist behaviors deriving from the culture of the time)?
- c. Is the film reflective of issues or trends of an era?
- d. Would this film be useful in illustrating or provoking discussion about some element of the society depicted?

8. **Conformity with/divergence from the original material on which it was based**

- a. Is the original material widely known?
- b. Have you seen or examined the original material?
- c. Are different versions of (for example) the screenplays available?

9. Genre

- a. Can this film be classified? Is there an obvious genre or class into which this film can be placed? If not, why not?
- b. How does this film compare to other films in the same class?
- c. What makes this film different, other than the obvious?

10. Special effects

- a. Are they remarkable for any reason?
- b. How do they compare with special effects in other movies?
- c. Can you detect how the effect was created? (Projection scenes are often easily identifiable.)

11. Reality or consistency with premise of story

- a. Are there implications of the premise of the story that are poorly explored?
- b. Is the story "realistic" or convincing, given the premise of the story?
- c. Is the premise of the story unusual or remarkable?

12. Comparison / contrast of ANY quality the film has with that in another film

- a. How do seemingly similar films (scenes, structures, tone) differ?
- b. How are seemingly different (scenes, films, stories, actions, music) actually similar?

13. Effectiveness of ANY of the items listed above

- a. How well do the various elements of the film work?
- b. Are there obvious weaknesses or failures of any particular element?
- c. Is there something that is particularly outstanding about a particular element?

14. The larger context of ANY of the items listed above

- a. Every element of the film has multiple contexts: Do you know much about any of them?
- b. Does looking at this film in the context of, say, other films like it or other work by the same cinematographer (actor, director, writer) or other writing or other acting *or whatever*...does looking at any element in a special context tell you anything useful about the film?

15. Overall aesthetic impression

- a. Is there anything remarkable about the images (or any individual image) on screen?
- b. Is there a particular principle or pattern that seems to inform the images on the screen?
- c. Does the feeling have an identifiable "tone" to it visually?

16. Overall *general* impression

- a. What is the film – ostensibly, seemingly, ultimately – about?
- b. Was the film fun or entertaining or frightening or boring or _____ ?
- c. Is this a film you would want to talk about to someone else?
- d. Is this a formula movie? Or is it unique? Is it part of an identifiable tradition?
- e. Is there anything genuinely new in the film?
- f. Where does the film best succeed? Where does it not succeed?
- g. Did this film "stay with" you after you left the theater?

17. Miscellaneous

Is there anything you have learned about the making of this film that would lead you to change your impression from the one it made on you initially?

18. Personal preference (at last! — Film is, at least at one level, a medium of entertainment! But keep in mind, there are MANY other uses of film, as well: propaganda, commercial, ideological etc.)

- a. Did you "like" the film? Why or why not?
- b. Would you recommend this film to anyone else?
- c. Would you see this film again?
- d. Does this film resonate with you – talk to you – in a particular way you could share with others (or not share)?

NOTES & COMMENTS: Are there questions or directions you would add to this critique sheet?

