

42.232: Sequence Analysis Assignment

due November 13

It's helpful to be able to see the details of a text and to express their significance in the work as a whole. Writing this careful, shot-by-shot analysis will help you write an effective, analytical argument about film. In this assignment, you will have the opportunity to work with the technical vocabulary you have acquired in class. You will focus your attention on the technical structure of a sequence of shots, and think carefully about how technical elements contribute to the sequence's and the film's meaning, and how the sequence conveys the ideas of the original literary text.

The Preparation

- Choose one of these sequences from *In the Bedroom* to work with. I will show you where to start and finish.
:39:20 - :40:26 (Matt gets & delivers the bad news) **OR**
1:21:09 - 1:22:44 (Matt goes to see the lawyer)
- If there is an alternate sequence you would like to work on, please get my permission before you begin.
- See the sequence a few times. We will work on this in class on Tuesday, 10/23, but you will definitely need to review the sequence a few more times on your own, so be sure to plan for that. NB: I encourage you to watch the sequence in pairs. While I will insist that you write both parts of the assignment independently—and note that I will be looking for observations that are suspiciously similar—collaborative viewing might help you to see more clearly (four eyes are better than two) and to think more sharply.
- Observe and take notes on the main technical aspects of the construction of the sequence (refer to list below) in preparation for writing.

The Written Assignment

Part One: Create a list, table, or outline isolating each shot of the sequence. This part should not be narrative, but it must be accurate and precise, and your comments must be detailed and careful. You can think of it as an outline of the visual structure of the sequence. Your analysis should include the following for each shot:

- camera angle/position (low angle, high angle, eye level, etc.)
- camera movement (pan, tilt, crane, tracking, none)
- scale/framing (the relative size and the relative position of elements in the frame)
- mise en scene (including significant factors of lighting, costumes, set design, location, décor, acting, etc.)
- sound (describe any dialogue (need not be verbatim), music, voice over, or sound effects)
- editing (type of transition that connects to the next shot)

Part Two: In a concise essay of two pages, explain the importance of the technical elements or treatments and their effects on your understanding of the sequence. Think about the importance and impact of the technical structure you have just outlined. Write about the theoretical impact of your technical and structural analysis, and make a claim or proposal about how this visual treatment affects the rest of the sequence, how it relates to the themes of the film as a whole. Your essay should proceed from a thesis that is explicit, analytical, interpretive, clear, and ambitious.

In addition to your technical observations, consider the following questions in relation to your chosen scene. (**Please don't** use these to organize your paragraphs; they are simply meant to get you thinking. **Supply your own thesis, organization, and structure!**)

Plot: How does this scene contribute to the ongoing story?

Narrative structure: Does the scene move chronologically? What are the logical relationships between the shots?

POV: Does this scene present an objective view of events, or does it represent someone's subjective account? Does it shift between POVs? Explain. How is the camera used to emphasize this point of view?

Character: What does this scene tell you about the featured character or characters? Refer as specifically as you can to the actors' movements, words, and dress as revealed by the camera.

Tone: Describe the overall mood of this scene. Is it mysterious, funny, sad? What elements create this mood?

Interpretation of the original text: Does the scene, as presented, relate directly to the novel? Does the scene illustrate an idea or theme from the novel? Does it succeed in expressing the style of the novel?

TWO EXAMPLES OF PART ONE

In this example, I'm analyzing a 5-shot sequence from *In the Bedroom* in which Matt is pruning the tree and, in his mind's eye, sees young Frank (in actuality, this is a memory of his dead son) climbing above. You should use a 12-point font, though you may single-space your list/table/outline, as long as I can read it. Please double-space your analytical paragraphs. **Please note: You should do the shot-by-shot outline in only ONE form (list, table, outline, etc.) I'm showing you two separate methods just to illustrate the options!**

Part One, example #1: Table-style

This is the same information from the "list-style" shot description, only now it's laid out in table form. Again, either way is fine.

Begins: [Cut from the card game where Carl has recited the second poem.]

shot#	camera position	camera movement	scale of main element/framing	mise en scene	sound	editing
1	extreme low angle	camera is still, but branches fall out of frame	medium long shot of Matt	very green and leafy, natural lighting. Matt looks down after the branches and reaches up to the next	faint birds and normal sounds of Matt's movements	clean cuts into and away from the shot.
2	eye-level	camera is still, branch falls so that leaves fall out of focus and nearly cover camera	close-up to extreme close-up of leaves	green!	sounds of Matt's movements	no match into the scene, leaves fall to nearly black out cuts away into next shot
3	eye-level	camera is still, movement of leaves brings run into foreground	medium close up on Matt and close up of rung (with no movement or change of focal length)	We see the worn and aged rung catching Matt off guard. Presses lips together, breathing through mouth, looks long at it, removes a glove, caresses the rung tentatively then more firmly. Matt tips his head back and looks up into treetop.	sounds of Matt's movements	re-oriented camera/cheat cut into shot, shot prepares cut away on the "imaginary" eyeline match in Matt's POV.
4	extreme low angle, from Matt's POV	camera pans upward and pulls back from CU to MLS	Medium close-up of legs, then a cramped Medium long-shot of Frank's whole body.	newer-looking rung painted red, with child's dirty feet and legs visible, climbing. In MLS, cute young Frank is bent forward and looks cramped in the frame. Frank smiles down directly at camera/Matt.	No sound at all.	"eyeline" match into shot from Matt's POV. Cut away from shot anticipates an eyeline match from young Frank's POV, but doesn't follow through; actually a clean cut
5	eye-level, same position as shot 3	camera is still, catching the movement of Matt descending the ladder out of the bottom of the frame	close up of Matt	Matt is still touching the tree, looking up. just as in the end of shot 3. He looks down at the rung again, blinks a bit, lips pressed tight, then turns and goes down the ladder.	Sounds of Matt's movements, and, as he goes down ladder, one faint, dissonant note of extradiegetic music, carried into next scene.	Cut in notes the failure of Frank's eyeline match, camera returns to the position of shot 3, emphasizing that Matt's memory was an illusion

[Cut to Ruth walking downtown.]

Part One, example #2: List-style

[Cut from the card game where Carl has recited the second poem.]

1. Extreme low-angle, medium long shot of Matt alongside tree trunk, near treetop, struggling with branches and loppers. Camera is still; cut branches fall out at the bottom of the frame. Matt looks down after the branches and reaches back up to cut the next. Natural lighting, shady in the treetop, very green. No score, only some faint bird chirping until the final shot of the sequence.
2. Cut to close up on leaves, the branch moving tells us it's the one Matt's cutting (loppers, barely visible, show that this shot is above Matt's head. Some blue sky behind the moving branch, a beautiful day. Camera is still; leaves fall out of focus onto camera, almost blacking out the screen.
3. Almost imperceptible cheat cut: when the leaves fall, it is clear that the camera has been repositioned to eye-level with Matt in medium close up. Again, camera is still through shot. Also, when the leaves fall, the lower part of the worn, wooden rung is foregrounded in close up. We see it before Matt turns his head. He regards it for a long moment, pressing his lips together and breathing through his mouth, pulls off a glove, tentatively then firmly caresses it, then tips his head back to look up the tree trunk.
4. Cut (on an eyeline match) to extreme low-angle, point of view shot of a newer-looking rung, painted red, with a child's dirty feet climbing, legs in shorts all that is visible. Camera tilts (moving for the first time in the sequence) to follow climbing motion and captures

young Frank (full body, but bent over, cramped in the frame) in a medium long shot, looking down directly at camera/Matt and smiling. No sound in this shot.

5. Cut suggests an eyeline match, but the match is imperfect, as the camera is in the same position as shot 3 (eye-level in medium close up), rather than from young Frank's POV, emphasizing that shot 4 is an illusion, that the action has picked up exactly where shot 3 left off. Matt is still touching the tree, still looking up, but looks down at the rung again, blinks a bit, lips still pressed tight, then turns away to go down the ladder. As he descends, the first note of extradiegetic music begins: a single, faint note, vaguely dissonant, which carries over into the following scene. Again, the camera is still in this shot, so Matt descends out of the bottom of the frame. [Cut to Ruth walking downtown.]

EXAMPLE OF PART TWO

The analysis must be done separately from the shot-by-shot, following ALL of the conventions of good academic writing noted in the style sheet for this course. Your analysis section must be analytical, have a thesis, use precise details, use terminology correctly and judiciously, and follow the assignment directions. Notice how only some details from the above section are repeated/referred to below. These are the points I want to claim have special significance in relation to my thesis. *Please note that if this text were normally formatted, it would run to just slightly more than two pages.*

This sequence, one of several in the long, middle section of the film, establishes Matt's sense of grief at the loss of his son. It is particularly important in showing how Matt's grief surrounds and isolates him, and in connecting to the theme of the fear for his children that is present in Dubus's story. Like the story, this particular sequence is firmly rooted in Matt's point of view. The seamless cinematography, which portrays a memory/illusion through a series of convincing eyeline matches, lends a dream-like quality to the scene which imitates the story's depiction of Matt's unbidden memories as interruptions of his thoughts. The lush green of the leaves, the hints of blue sky, the texture of the tree trunk, and the dappled, golden sunlight are visually quite beautiful, and this reflects an idealized memory of Frank as a child, at a time when Matt could still protect him (as in "Killings") from the injuries of childhood.

Most notable in the scene's technique is the editing. The linking of the shots brings the memory into the present action in a surprising way. The series of convincing (if, ultimately, illusory) eyeline matches between Matt and the fantasy figure of young Frank depict Matt's sorrow and present for the viewer the embodiment of the loss, the waste of youthful innocence, that haunts the film. The scene underscores how Matt's grief is with him in the moment, and shows the strength and force of this memory, which seems to blot out a sense of reality. This sense of unreality is especially strong because of the juxtaposition of Matt in his 50s and Frank as a very young child. It seems clear that this memory is as fresh to Matt as if it had happened only yesterday.

The details of the cinematography and mise-en-scene contribute to the emotional impact and resonance of the sequence. The extreme low-angle shots convey the sense of Matt's powerlessness, and, in the shot of young Frank, the sense of danger and paternal worry. The camera's stillness in the shots of Matt allow us to focus on the details of Tom Wilkinson's performance, and captures the feeling of being suspended in time. That Matt takes off his glove (a symbol of insulation, protection, and, perhaps, dampened feeling) to touch the rung that Frank once stood upon seems to allow Matt's memory/vision to occur. This lingering touch is a mimetic link to Frank, and to the lost possibility of Matt's happiness in fatherhood. The camera remains still even as Matt descends the ladder (back to the present) and falls out of the frame, leaving the rung in focus, allowing the persistence of Matt's loss to be dominant.

In the larger context of the film, this sequence follows a pattern that separates Matt's grieving process from Ruth's. This sequence, like the lawn-mowing and swingset-disassembling sequences, shows Matt working out his grief on his own by attempting to keep himself busy. All of these scenes emphasize his isolation from his wife and from others who try to sympathize, and, in this sequence especially, the strong point of view (augmented by the stillness of the camera and the silence) gives us a sense of having witnessed an extremely private moment. This scene also shows the failure of Matt's coping strategy - which seems to Ruth to be simply forgetting about Frank and getting on with the routines of life - letting the audience see that Matt's sorrow over losing Frank is constantly present, despite being kept private. This is underscored by the fact that Matt never speaks directly of this memory, but we are reminded of it after his fight with Ruth, when she says, "I've seen him, Matt; I keep seeing him." (She, of course, refers to Strout.) Matt, referring to Frank, says, "I know..., I... I... I... know... in his room, you know, sometimes... I could swear he's there...." Again, Matt's isolation in his grief is a central association.

From this sequence, we understand that Matt's memories of Frank are bittersweet and extremely powerful. They are presented idyllically; the shots are beautiful, young Frank is a sweet-looking child, and we sense Matt's pride in his long gaze. At the same time, the memories are, clearly, extremely painful to Matt; his grief surrounds him and overwhelms him without notice, he is vulnerable in the face of his own memories, and he is alone in his suffering, which, Todd Field shows us, leaves Matt emotionally separated from Ruth. Along with reinforcing several thematic points, this scene helps set the stage for Matt's actions in the remainder of the film.