 Film Codes

Audience Position

Technical codes

Subject distance:

* How much detail is seen of the subject?
* How significant are close up, medium shots, wide shots, and long shots?

Lens choice:

* Has perspective been altered by the use of wide angle, telephoto or zoom lenses?
* What is the effect of the chosen lens perception of the subject/information?

Camera angle:

* How does the selection of low angles, high angles and eye level shots shape perception?

Camera movement:

* What was the effect of camera movement, such as panning, tracking, and dollying?
* Has a handheld camera been used? What meanings have been created?

Shot duration:

* What is the effect of a succession of quick shots, such as a montage?
* What is the effect of the camera being held on the subject for a long time?
* What effect did keeping the camera running and moving with action achieve?

Symbolic codes

Setting:

* Where is each character interviewed? What is the setting for each interview? What does the setting say about each character?

Lighting:

* How is each character lit? How does this contribute to the argument being presented?

Costume/appearance:

* How is each character dressed? How does this represent the director’s attitudes towards them?

Performance:

* How does the character act in front of the character? What actions are presented? How do they contribute to the argument presented?
* What is the characters’ acting style? Moving? Body language? Facial expressions? Reactions to questions?

Audio codes

Music:

* What type of music is played?
* When is it played?
* Is it used for emphasis or to set a tone?
* How does it contribute to the film's atmosphere?
* How does it contribute to the values and attitudes presented?

Sound effects:

* Are there any sound effects made?
* When do they occur?
* What purpose do they achieve?

Speech

* What is said? Who says it? How is it said?

Introduction:

* Who introduces the story?
* What form does the introduction take?
* To what extent does the introduction provide a framework or a set of expectations for the viewer?

Narration:

* Are presenters used throughout the story?
* How is verbal language used to develop a viewpoint?
* Is voice over narration used?
* Is direct address used?
* How is narration used in conjunction and juxtaposition with visuals?

Interviewing characters:

* Who is interviewed?
* How much time/space is each interviewee given?
* What do we learn about the issue/story from each interviewee and character?
* How does the camera position the audience to view each person?
* How significant is this position in framing our response to the speaker and the issue?

Conclusion:

* How is the story/issue summed up?

Decoding the codes

Voice over narration:

* The audience may attribute certain values to subject.

Tone creates a mood.

* Selection of language in the script shapes values and attitudes.

Music and sound effects:

* Aural stimuli can set a mood or develop an attitude.

Interviews:

* Invites audience to think in a particular way?
* Has a balance been suggested?
* What criterion classifies experts?
* Do questions show a bias? Do they seem framed to illicit a particular response?
* Does the gender of the interviewer or interviewee shape responses?
* Who or what is the audience permitted to hear/see?
* Setting?
* What has been omitted? Effect?

Still photo shots from film clips:

* Selection of shots – position angle, depth of field
* Reality of history
* Length of time given to shots
* Juxtapositioning (two opposite ideas put together to create an effect) of shots

Dramatic recreation:

* Powerful persuader because of emotive quality of drama – heightens sense of reality?