

Unit 1: Form, Structure & Meaning

“Form equals Content”

Form is the general system of relationships among the parts of a film.

How does the structure create the meaning? Why?

A Film structured around plot focuses the audience's attention on what happens

Conflict in Film is **EXTERNAL** and **INTERNAL**

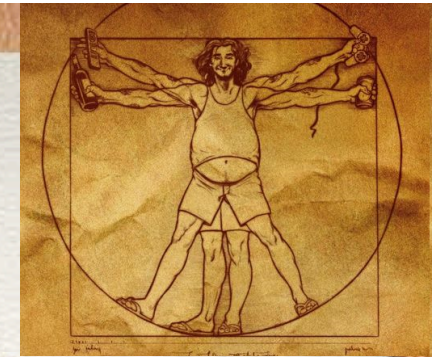
Types of Conflict

- Man vs _____
- Man vs _____
 - Man vs _____
 - Man vs _____

Theme

1. Is the film's basic appeal to the intellect, to the funny bone, to the moral sense, or to the aesthetic sense? Is it aimed primarily at the groin (the erotic sense), the viscera (blood and guts), the heart, the yellow streak down the back, or simply the eyes? Support your choice with specific examples from the film.
2. How well does your statement of the film's theme and focus stand up after you have thoroughly analyzed all elements of the film?
3. To what degree is the film's theme universal? Is the theme relevant to your own experience? How?
4. If you think the film makes a significant statement, why is it significant?

Theme-Humanity



1. **Morality** – “Love of Money” – **Film:** Wall Street
2. **Truth about Human Nature** “What are we like deep down inside?” **Example:** Lord of the Flies.
3. **Social Problems.** **Film:** “Crash”
“How can we improve as a society?”
4. **Struggle for Human Dignity** (Rocky & On the Waterfront)
How can we find respect and worth in a difficult situation?
7. **Complexity of Human Relationships.** **Film:** “The Notebook”
8. **Coming of Age/Innocence to Awareness**
How we grow, learn, and change? Finding Nemo & The Wizard of Oz are both Loss of Innocence stories.
9. A film centered on **Moral or Philosophical Riddle** communicates primarily through **symbols & images**
Films: Run Lola Run/Memento/Groundhog Day

Types of Meaning

1. Emotional
2. Referential
3. **Explicit** is an openly asserted meaning
4. **Implicit Meanings** can lead an audience to come up with broad concepts for a film called **theme**
5. Symptomatic (ideology)

Symbolism



1. Universal/Natural

2. **Motifs** are repeated **images, patterns** and **ideas**

3. **Symbolic value** of an object in a film

comes from value placed on it by a character,
musical emphasis and **Context**

4. Special visual, aural, Musical emphasis

5. Patterns and Progressions

6. Values in Conflict

7. Metaphors-visual, intrinsic, extrinsic

ABACA is another way to describe Form pattern & variation. The viewer or listener enters into an active participation with a film, creating and readjusting expectations about film form as the experience develops.

The Wizard of Oz begins with Dorothy clutching her dog, Toto, and running down a road. Immediately we form expectations. Perhaps she will meet another character or arrive at her destination. Even such a simple action asks that the audience participate actively in the ongoing process by making certain hypotheses about "what will happen next" and readjusting expectations accordingly. Eventually we come to expect that Dorothy will get her wish to return to Kansas. Indeed, the settings of the film give The Wizard of Oz a large-scale **ABA** form, or in this case Kansas-Oz-Kansas.

Elements of a Good Story -

How does the film stack up against the five characteristics of a good story?

1. Unified Plot
2. Credible/Externally Observable Truth
- 3. Internal Truths** in a film refer to what viewers want or need to believe is true
4. Interesting-Suspenseful/Action
5. Simple and Complex
6. Handles Emotional Material with Restraint/sincere and honest?



Characterization



1. Motivation (Compositional, Realistic, Intertextual or Generic, and Artistic)
2. Protagonist
3. Antagonist
4. Stock or Stereotypes
5. Static (don't change) vs Dynamic or Developing characters

Characterization

- Round vs Flat Characters
- Flat are 2-dimensional, predictable, but not realistic
- **Through Contrast-Foils**
- Through Appearance
- Through Dialogue
- Through Action (Internal/ Ext))
- Through Reactions of others
- Through Caricature/**Leitmotif** (costume, lighting, camera angles)
- Through Name-name typing



How can we understand character?

- Pick out bits of dialogue, images, or scenes that you consider especially effective in revealing character, and tell why they are effective.
- Find screenplays online for quotes.
- Visual clues on screen?

It all comes down to story/ screenplay

- The most important element in the film is the story.
- The film must hook the viewer from the opening credits.
- We must care for the character and his/her journey
- 3 Acts-The tree/Climbing the tree with the conflicts/Coming down the hero

Uniqueness of Watching Film

- Images and Sound
- Theatre vs Home
- The theatre is the new church
- How to watch and read a film?
- How to write about film?

4 Vs

- Voyeuristic-Can we eavesdrop on a believable world? Does it make sense?
=HEAD
- Visceral-Does it grab you and make you feel happy, sad, sick, scared, worried, etc?=GUT
- Vicarious-Do we become emotionally involved with the characters? Do we care?
=HEART
- **Verisimilitude**-the quality of appearing to be true or real.

Film Analysis/Segmentation

- Shot/Scene/Segment/Film
- **segmentation** \w\ The process of dividing a film into parts for analysis.**sequence** \w\ Term commonly used for a moderately large segment of film, involving one complete stretch of action. In a narrative film, often equivalent to a *scene*.

How is the story heard and understood?

~~What is the film's primary focus: plot,~~
emotional effect or mood, character, style or
texture or structure, or ideas?

- The film itself
- The author/filmmakers
- The viewers and their experience
- The world that shapes the story's presentation

Range vs Depth

- Range is
- **Depth of Narration** is related to objective/subjective and points of view
- Restricted vs non-restricted
- Objective vs subjective
- **Change of knowledge** is the most common pattern of plot development

Story vs Plot

- In a narrative film, all the events that are directly presented to us, including their causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial locations.

Plot refers to arrangement of the material in the film and the **story** refers to sum of the total events in the narrative

- Opposed to *story*, which is the viewer's imaginary construction of all the events in the narrative.

linearity

in a narrative, the clear motivation of a series of causes and effects that progress without significant digressions, delays, or irrelevant actions.

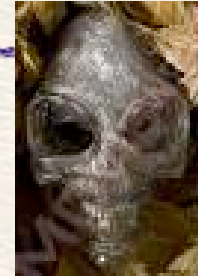
order

in a narrative film, temporal manipulation of the sequence in which the chronological events of the *story* are arranged in the *plot*.

Frequency & Duration

in a narrative film, are the aspect of temporal manipulation that involves the number of times any *story* event is shown in the plot. Both are part of the convention of time or temporal order.

McGuffin



The MacGuffin in "Family Plot" is a diamond.

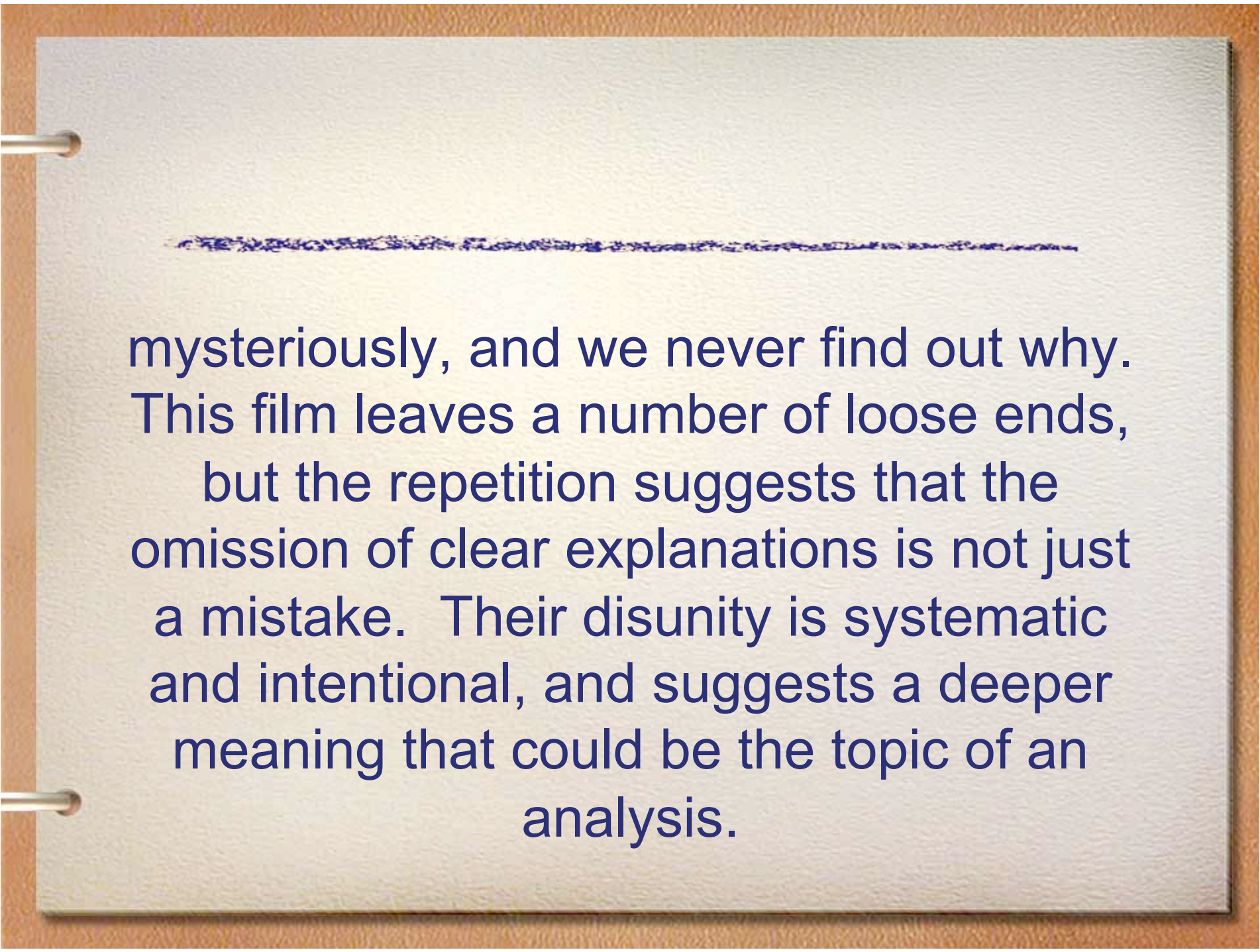
The Maltese Falcon , Blue Diamond, Crystal Skull
Alfred Hitchcock's term for the device
or plot element that catches the viewer's
attention or drives the logic of the plot,
but often turns out to be insignificant or
is to be ignored after it has served its purpose.

closure

the degree to which the ending of a narrative film reveals the effects of all the causal events and resolves all lines of action.

Unity/Disunity

When all of the relationships we perceive within a film are clear and economically interwoven, we say that the film has **unity**. Yet almost no film is so tight as to leave no ends dangling. Suppose we saw a film in which several characters die

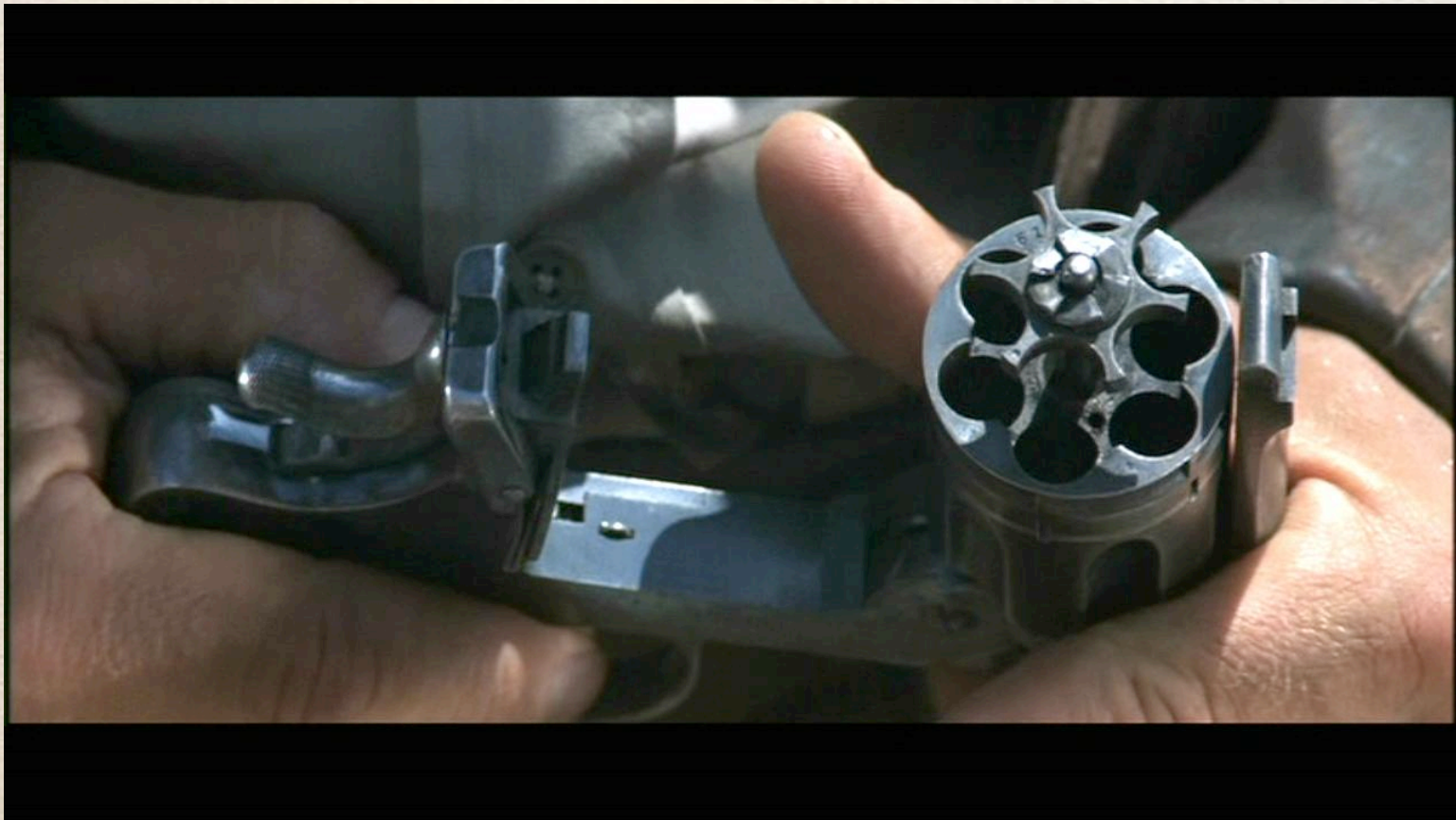
A piece of white paper with a blue scribble at the top, pinned to a brown background. The paper has two metal fasteners on the left side. The text is written in a dark blue, sans-serif font.

mysteriously, and we never find out why. This film leaves a number of loose ends, but the repetition suggests that the omission of clear explanations is not just a mistake. Their disunity is systematic and intentional, and suggests a deeper meaning that could be the topic of an analysis.

Diegetic vs nondiegetic

- In a narrative film, the world of the film's story. The diegesis includes events that are presumed to have occurred and actions and spaces not shown onscreen. See also *diegetic sound*, *nondiegetic insert*, *nondiegetic sound*.

Point of View



Meaning

Referential Meaning: allusion to particular pieces of shared prior knowledge outside the film which the viewer is expected to recognize.

Example: " In the Depression, a tornado takes a girl from her family's Kansas farm to the mythical land of OZ. After a series of adventures, she returns home."

Explicit Meaning: meaning expressed overtly, usually in language and often near the film's beginning or end.

Example: "A girl dreams of leaving home to escape her troubles. Only after she leaves does she realize how much she loves her family and friends."

Implicit Meaning: meaning left tacit, for the viewer to discover upon analysis or reflection.

Example: "An adolescent who must soon face the adult world yearns for a return to the simple world of childhood, but she eventually accepts the demands of growing up."

Symptomatic Meaning: meaning which the film divulges, often "against its will", by virtue of its historical or social context.

Example: "In a society where human worth is measured by money, the home and the family may seem to be the last refuge of human values-especially during the Depression."

Title

1. Why is the title appropriate? What does it mean in terms of the whole film?
2. How many different levels of meaning are expressed in the title? How does each level apply to the film as a whole?
3. If the title is ironic, what opposite meanings or contrasts does it suggest?
4. If you recognize the title as being an allusion, why is the work or passage alluded to an appropriate one?
5. If the title calls your attention to a key scene, why is that scene important?
6. How is the title related to the theme?

Types of Structure

1. Linear/Chronological-Plot Chart
2. Nonlinear-In **medias res** (to begin in the middle), Flash backs & forwards
3. Temporal order
4. Space
5. Variation
6. Development
7. Unity
8. Disunity



Medias Res – Star Wars EP IV

Irony

1. Dramatic Irony requires the audience to have knowledge that is denied to the characters in a film
2. Situational
3. Character
4. Setting **Example:** An old man dying in a maternity ward or a baby being born in a cemetery
5. Tone
6. Verbal
7. Cosmic

motivation

the justification given in film for the presence of an element



narration

the process through which the *plot* conveys or withholds *story* information. It can be more or less restricted to character knowledge and more or less deep in presenting characters' mental perceptions and thoughts.

narrative form

a type of filmic organization in which the parts relate to each other through a series of causally related events taking place in a specific time and space.

Other Terms: Using Evidence for Homework.

- *On Dramatic Structure*
- 1. does the film use linear (chronological) or nonlinear structure? If it begins with expository material, does it capture your interest quickly enough, or would a beginning “in the middle of things” be better? At what point in the story could an *in medias res* beginning start?
- 2. If flashbacks are used, what is their purpose and how effective are they?

A film structured around plot

A) is centered on characterization.

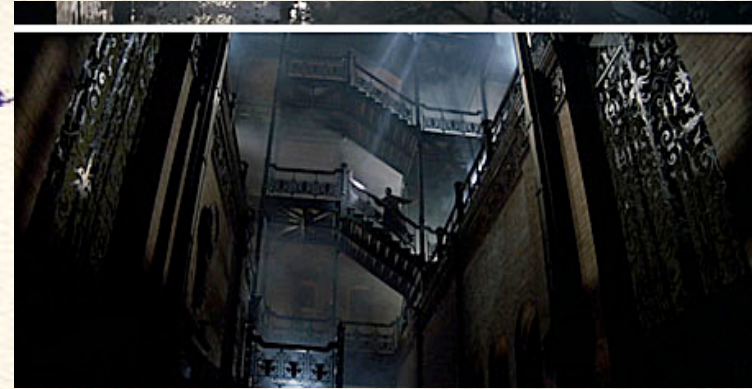
B) is primarily concerned with mood.

C) focuses the audience's attention on what happens.

D) usually fails at the box office.

E) calls our attention to the director's style.

Motifs are



- A)actors, extras, who fill in a background.
- B)images repeated throughout the film.
- C)patterns repeated throughout the film.
- D)ideas repeated throughout the film.
- E)b, c, and d

An easy way to analyze the range of narration is to ask what?

A)Who knows when?

B)Who knows why?

C)Who knows what when?

D)Who knows how?

Which of the following is a **diegetic** element of film?



A) Opening credits

B) Soundtrack music

C) Plot related images

D) Dialogue between characters

Group Project #1

See directions on handout

- Choose your group (2-6 members).
- Choose your film from the list on board.
- View film on your own (consult “How to read a film” and your notes/terms).
- View your film in class-(you may work outside with your group on those days).
- Written work, clips, visuals, terms, and oral presentation due after screening in class (55 minutes max.)

Films

Usual Suspects

Jaws

Memento

Groundhog Day

Run Lola Run

The Prestige

Crash

Frailty

Eternal Sunshine...

More Films

- *Wicker Park*
- *Jerry McGuire*
- *Do the Right Thing*
- *Amistad*
- *Peggy Sue got Married*
- *Spirited Away*
- *Pulp Fiction*
- *Snatch*
- *20 bucks*
- *The Fisher King*

<http://www.filmsite.org/bestscreenscreenplays4.html>

- *12 Monkeys*
- *Jacob's Ladder*
- *Good Will Hunting*
- *October Sky*
- *Life is Beautiful*
- *Magnolia*
- *Dark City*
- *Amadeus*
- *Lucky Number Slevin*

More for HW???

- *Being John Malkovich*
- *11:14*
- *The Notebook*
- *Equilibrium*
- *Kung Fu Hustle*
- *Life as a House*
- *Truman Show*
- *Life is Beautiful*
- *Remember the Titans*
- *Timecode*