

I, ROBOT - THE MOVIE

HOW TO ANALYSE A MOVIE

It generally seems quite easy to understand a film. We are used to sitting back in the dark and watching it uncritically. Indeed each film has a carefully constructed structure based on visual, auditive, and linguistic components that are manipulated in rather complex ways.

Any film interpretation is based on the deconstruction of that invisible structure. Here are some useful suggestions on how to analyse a film.

First of all, a film consists of single units called **shots**. More shots dealing with the same theme/event make up a **sequence**. A shot can generally be classified as a **close-up**, a **mid-shot**, or a **long shot**. Close-ups focus on facial expressions, and are often used to portray emotions. Mid-shots emphasize body gestures and movements, while long shots emphasize the scene, and are generally used to establish the setting of the story. Shots can be used to evoke particular emotions: a close-up may reveal a character's pain or joy, while a long shot may emphasize his/her sense of isolation.

Among the basic elements of a film are the **title**, the **story**, the **plot**, the **characters**, the **point of view**, and the **setting**.

The **title** is chosen carefully and is always relevant to the general content of the film and to its message. It may be ambiguous or foreshadow future events.



The *story* consists of all the information conveyed by the film and assembled in chronological and logical order, while the *plot* is the story as it appears on the screen, with flashbacks or flashforwards,¹ digressions, and so on. Remember that in a film information is conveyed not only through dialogue, but also through visual clues and sound.

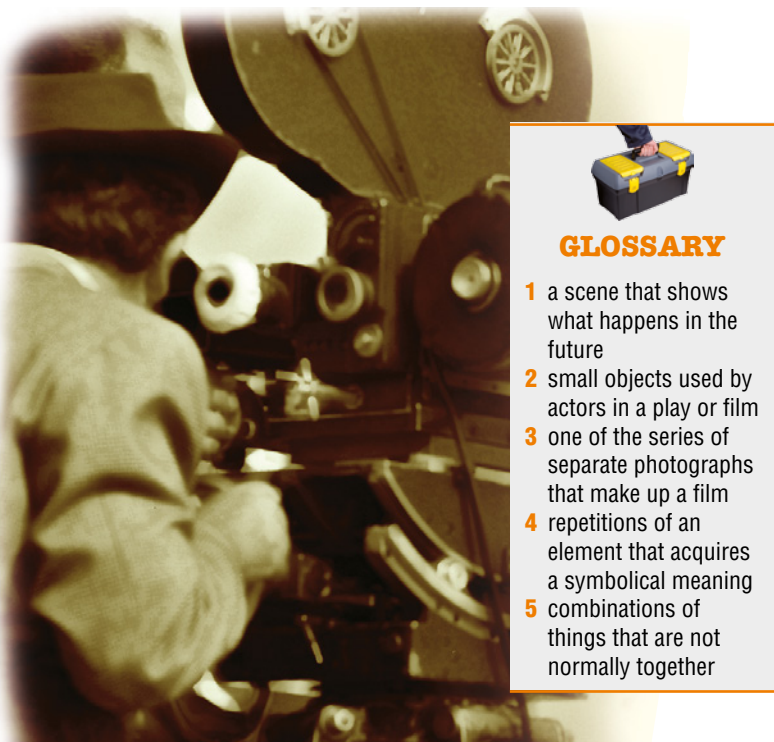
Each film is inhabited by *characters*. There are central characters and minor characters. A character may be thinly or fully drawn and may embody positive or negative values.

The *point of view* is the perspective from which a film is told. It may be realistic, emotional, psychological, or visionary. The camera angle, that is the angle at which the camera is pointed at the subject, creates the point of view for the audience. For example, low angle shots tend to make the subjects larger, high angle shots tend to make characters look weak, while tilted angle shots create a sense of imbalance.

Another important aspect to consider when analysing a film is the *mise-en-scène*, that is the arrangement of props² and characters within the frame.³

The *setting* may be more or less integrated into the action and may function as a sign in order to convey information. Lighting is another important element in the *mise-en-scène*. Sound is probably the hardest element to analyse, yet it is often extremely important as it may be used to emphasize emotions, to create suspense, or as an ironic counterpoint. The background music used throughout the film is called a score or soundtrack. It often manipulates a similar theme and it is used in relation to the narrative structure. Particular motifs⁴ may be used in relation to particular characters.

Finally, remember that films often have a subtext, that is a series of messages conveyed beneath the surface through irony, contradiction, and strange juxtapositions⁵ or through the use of figurative elements like metaphors and symbols.



GLOSSARY

- 1 a scene that shows what happens in the future
- 2 small objects used by actors in a play or film
- 3 one of the series of separate photographs that make up a film
- 4 repetitions of an element that acquires a symbolical meaning
- 5 combinations of things that are not normally together

I, ROBOT: THE SINOPSY

(directed by Alex Proyas, starring Will Smith.)

The film is loosely based on a book by the legendary science fiction writer Isaac Asimov, and the setting is the future, Chicago 2035, to be precise.

I, Robot is an action movie, a special effects film, but it is also a drama and a mystery. US Robotics is a super international mega powerhouse that essentially controls and has monopolized the robotics industry. Your personal robot does everything. But, as with all the best sci-fi movies, technology goes wrong. Will Smith plays a cop, Del Spooner, who is called to investigate the death of a US Robotics scientist, Dr. Alfred Lanning, played by Robert Cromwell. Lanning is thought to have committed suicide, but Spooner is convinced that he has been murdered by a robot. The paranoid cop is right and Spooner, along with psychologist Susan Calvin, finds himself trying to save the world.



READING COMPREHENSION

● Decide if the following statements are true or false and correct the false ones.

- 1 I, Robot is directed by Will Smith.
- 2 The film is based on one of Asimov's books.
- 3 The film is set in Chicago.
- 4 The film does not make use of special effects.
- 5 Del Spooner investigates the death of a robot.
- 6 Lanning has killed himself.
- 7 The murderer is a robot.
- 8 Technology plays a positive role.

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ACTIVITIES



VOCABULARY

● In the text, find the English equivalents of the following words and expressions.

- 1 Avere per protagonista
- 2 Scrittore di fantascienza
- 3 Film d'azione
- 4 Industria dei robot
- 5 Interpretare
- 6 Poliziotto

WRITING

● Write a synopsis of a science fiction film you have recently seen.

RESEARCH WORK

● Rent the *I, Robot* video or DVD and watch it carefully. Then write a review of the film. Remember to include the main aspects to consider in any good film analysis (story, setting, characters, lighting, sound etc.). Finally, give your personal opinion about the film.