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Basic questions you should ask when analyzing the spatial organization of a film:

- How is the space constructed? Expressionistically? Realistically? Surrealistically? Fantastically? Theatrically? Performatively? How do stylistic elements cue your construction of space?
- How does the spatial organization of the film contribute to its narrational strategies? In other words, what are some of the narrational functions of space in the film?
- How is the syuzhet's presentation of fabula information facilitated or blocked by the style's representation of space? How do the syuzhet and style work together to cue or constrain the viewer's understanding of space as coherent, continuous, and contiguous?
- In terms of character(s), who occupies what spaces in the diegesis—and why? How are we cued to associate certain characters with certain spaces? How are settings and locations used to convey information about characters and the relationships between them? Keep in mind the difference between cinematic space and location. Space is an abstract, general term. Location is more specific; it refers to places, locations, settings, etc. In the film, are the settings and locations generically motivated, ideologically motivated, aesthetically motivated, etc.?
- What cues does the film use to help you make sense of objects and spaces in the film? What are the spatial relationships between objects in the frame? Which elements are foregrounded, ignored, etc.
- Consider matters of space and perception. In what ways is our understanding of space dependent upon perception? What knowledge, anticipations, and decisions do we form in “the visual search” for spatial cues? What are some of the ways our eyes perceive space (via sharp contours, points of juncture, angles, bright spots/dark spots, movement)? What schema do we use to perceive the spatial organization of a film? How does the film mobilize the viewer's sense of spatial perception and depth cues (via schema-driven perception)? How does the film mobilize the viewer's perception of space for the purposes of storytelling?
- How does the film construct spectatorial space? In other words, where is the viewer positioned in the space of the film? Does the viewer move through the space with or without the character(s)?
- Is the space mobile or static?
- How does the film generate certain expectations about space? How does the film cheat our expectations about space?
- What are some of the scenographic aspects of space? How do shot space, editing space, and sonic space all work together to cue or constrain viewers' construction of off-screen space (diegetic and non-diegetic)? How is it that the film suggests a world that is seamless, always-already there, continuous beyond the film's frame and film's time, while at the same time it tells a story, builds up a narrative with beginning, complications, climaxes, and resolutions? How does the film create that world “out there,” beyond the frame?
- How do the elements of scenographic space work to control the degree of knowledge, communicativeness, and self-consciousness? What spatial gaps arise in the film, and how does the syuzhet work to cue or constrain us to fill those gaps?

A Brief Outline of Terms and Concepts:

SCENOGRAPHIC SPACE: “The imaginary space of fiction, the ‘world’ in which the narration suggests that fabula events occur. On the basis of visual and auditory cues, we act to construct a space of figures, objects, and fields—a space of greater depth, scope, coherence, and solidity” (Bordwell 113). The scenographic space is comprised of a *screen space* and an *action space*:

- **Screen space** (two-dimensional space that contains the compositional elements)
- **Action space** (diegetic space)

Three cues that help build scenographic space:

1. **Shot space** (overlapping contours; texture differences; atmospheric perspective; familiar size; light and shade; color; perspective—linear, synthetic, non-scientific; figure movement; monocular movement parallax—ie. camera movements like panning, tilting, tracking, craning; depth—shallow space vs. deep space, ambiguous space)
2. **Editing space** Questions: For any series of shots, we can always ask: how complete and consistent is the layout of space and what areas tend to be favored? How does the editing cue us to make sense of the film's space? How does the editing lead us to create a ‘cognitive map’ of the total space of a scene or scenes?
3. **Sonic space** (volume, acoustic texture, sound perspective, acoustic cues, stereophonic sound, sound bridge, amplitude, pitch, timbre, tone, ambient noise)

Off-screen space: diegetic vs. non-diegetic



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