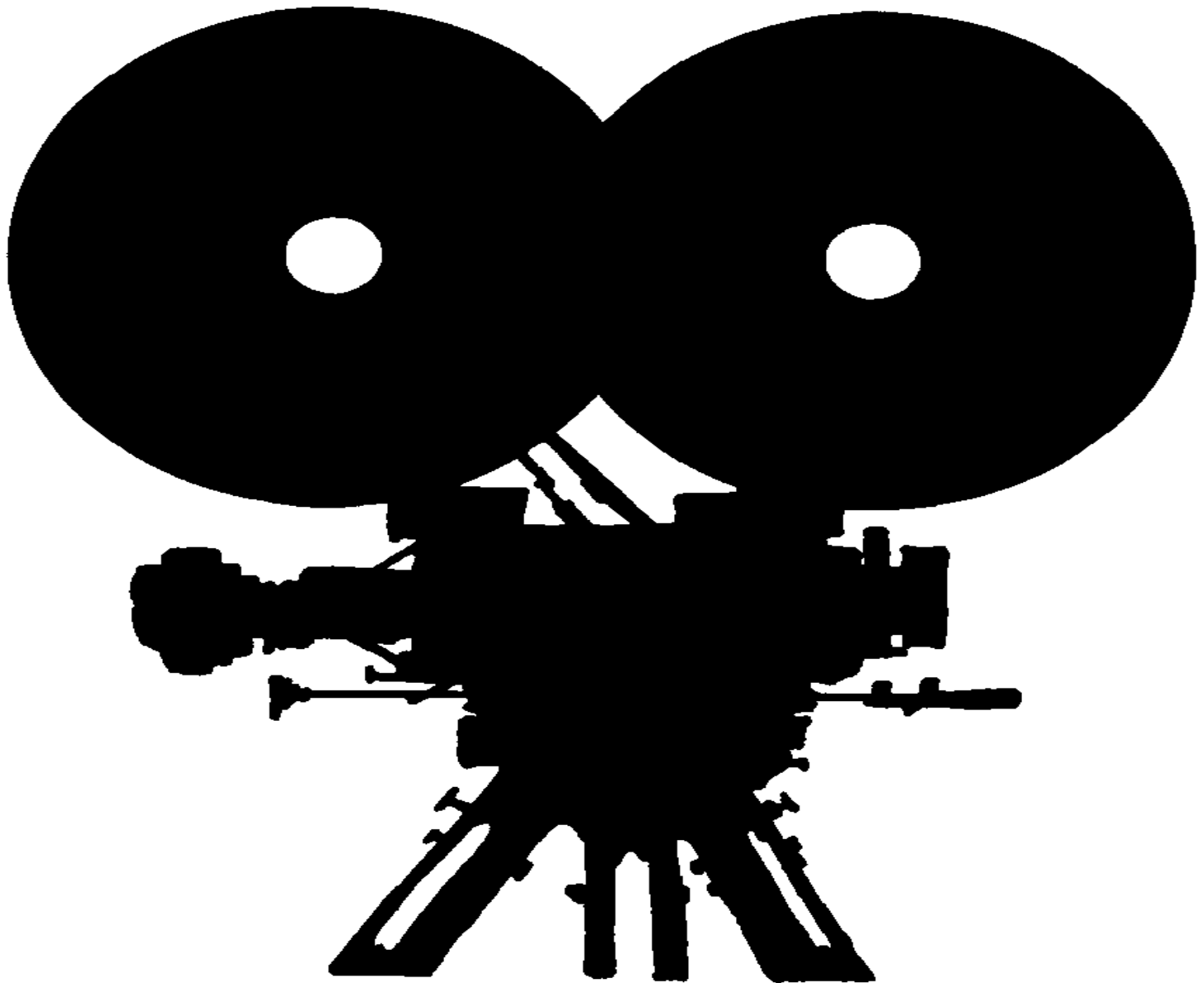




# How to Watch Movies Critically

# Contents

- Understanding Dialog
- A Second Viewing
- Title and Credits
- Film Stock
- Production Values
- Maintain Objectivity
- Overall Quality
- Film's Rating
- Initial Reception\
- Visual Clues
- Audio Clues
- Film Context
- Understand Film's Influence
- Film's Genre
- Soundtracks
- Editing
- Fact or Fiction
- Theme
- Acting Qualities
- Plot, Structure or Story
- Conventions and Cliches'
- Special Effects:



Viewing a film critically and attentively means possessing an informed knowledge of film's complex and dense 'language,' its conventions, codes, symbols, cinematic attributes, and other factors.

# Understand Dialog

Note how the dialogue is delivered (fast, mumbled, overlapping, loud/soft, etc.)

Are there any recurring lines of dialogue and how do they function?

# Examine Title and Credits:

Consider a film's main title and its opening credits:

Why was the specific title chosen (were there any other alternatives considered?), and how do the credits establish a tone or mood?

What are the first sounds and images in the film?

Can you find any motifs in the credits?

Do the end credits have any unusual features (e.g., out-takes, gags, additional footage, etc.)

Until the 1950s, films had a set format for the credits: (1) credits at the start, (2) a "The End" title card following the film, and (3) a cast list with character names.

Recently, films often begin with a plot sequence, with 'opening' credits ("main title") super-imposed over them after a few minutes, and extensive rolling 'full credits' ("end title"), usually white text on a black background, after the film concludes.

# Determine Choice of Film Stock

Consider why the film was made as either color or black/white.

Watch how color (or black and white) is used?

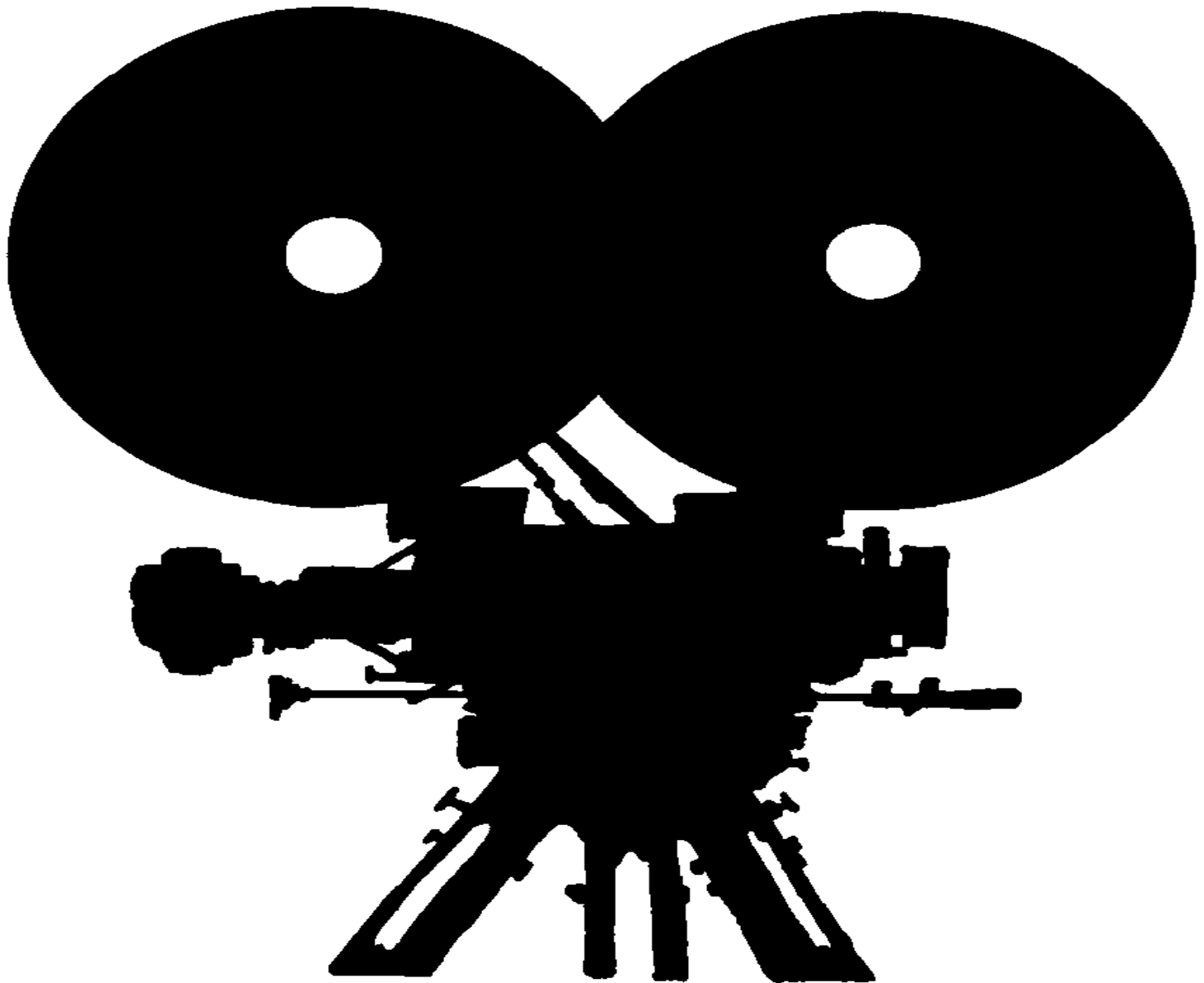


# Use of color in film is expressive.

Consider the Black and White ***Schindler's List*** why was it filmed in Black and White in 1993. What is the meaning of the red coat on the little girl?

Consider the color tones in the Film ***Born on the Fourth of July***. The film is saturated with various shades of Red White and Blue

Consider the use of actual colors in the film that give meaning, for example ***Jaws*** and ***The Sixth Sense*** use red effectively while ***Shopgirl*** uses green effectively.



# Evaluate Production Values

High-production values  
(with a glossy and expensive look)

or

Low-production values  
(Production shortcuts save money)

# Discover Film's Context:

What was the social, political, and/or historical context for the film?

Was there any controversy surrounding the film's release?

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001.  
FOUR PLANES WERE HIJACKED.  
THREE OF THEM REACHED THEIR TARGET.

THIS IS THE STORY OF THE FOURTH.



## UNITED93

From the Acclaimed Director of  
*Bloody Sunday* and *The Bourne Supremacy*

ONLY IN THEATERS  
APRIL 28

THE FILM IS BASED ON THE  
PICTURE AND LOG OF UNITED93

www.united93movie.com

**CONTROVERSY...WHAT CONTROVERSY?**



CONFIDENTIAL

**MICHAEL MOORE**

# FAHRENHEIT 9/11

A DOG EAT DOG FILMS PRODUCTION A FILM BY MICHAEL MOORE FAHRENHEIT 9/11 EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS CARL DEAL AND FRANCISCO A. CUBAN PRODUCED BY MIKE DESJARDINS AND JEFF CROSS  
WRITTEN BY MONICA HAMPTON AND KURT ENGELER CHRISTOPHER SEWARD T. WOODY RICHMAN AND PRODUCED BY JEFF CROSS AND KURT ENGELER EDITOR PRODUCED BY IAN LESSON  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JACQUES MENTRE HARVEY WEINSTEIN BOB WEINSTEIN PRODUCED BY JIM CZARNECKI KATHLEEN BLYNN WITH MUSIC BY MICHAEL MOORE

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JOSH BROLIN

W.

A life underestimated.



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Today, only a handful  
of people know what it means...  
Soon you will know.

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China  
Syndrome*

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Associate Producer JAMES NELSON · Executive Producer BRUCE GILBERT  
Produced by MICHAEL DOUGLAS · Directed by JAMES BRIDGES

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MPAA PARENTAL STRONG CAUTION  
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79538

THE CHINA SYNDROME

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF INDEPENDENCE DAY

# THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW

MAY 28 WHERE WILL YOU BE?

The damndest thing you ever saw.

# NASHVILLE

**"A pageant of  
celebration!"**

—Vincent Canby, N.Y. Times



**"Highest Rating!"**

—New York Daily News

Original soundtrack available on ABC Records and GRT tapes.

**"A completely  
satisfying  
entertainment!"**

—Judith Crist, New York Magazine

**"The funniest epic  
vision of America ever  
to reach the screen."**

—New Yorker Magazine

**R RESTRICTED**  
Under 17 requires  
accompanying parent or  
adult guardian





**What if there were a list?**

**A list that said:  
*Our finest actors  
weren't allowed to act.  
Our best writers  
weren't allowed to write.  
Our funniest comedians  
weren't allowed to make  
us laugh.***

**What would it be like if  
there were such a list?  
It would be like America in 1953.**

COLUMBIA PICTURES PRESENTS A MARTIN RITT • JACK ROLLINS • CHARLES H. JOFFE PRODUCTION

## **WOODY ALLEN .. "THE FRONT"**

**WITH ZERO MOSTEL**

CO-STARRING HERSCHEL BERNARDI, MICHAEL MURPHY, ANDREA MAROVICCI • WRITTEN BY WALTER BERLINGTON • CREATIVE PRODUCER  
CHARLES H. JOFFE • PRODUCED & DIRECTED BY MARTIN RITT • A FERGUSY-BRIGHT/DEVON FEATURE





# Maintain Objectivity

Watch the films presentation without pre-judging the film based on what you've heard about it (from critics or friends), your pre-conceptions about the actors in it, the reputation of the director, etc.

# Overall Quality

View the film as a whole, realizing that it is composed of the sum of all of its parts. Some individual parts may be 'great' but the film must hold together, and be cohesive and meaningful in its entirety.

# Note the Film's Rating

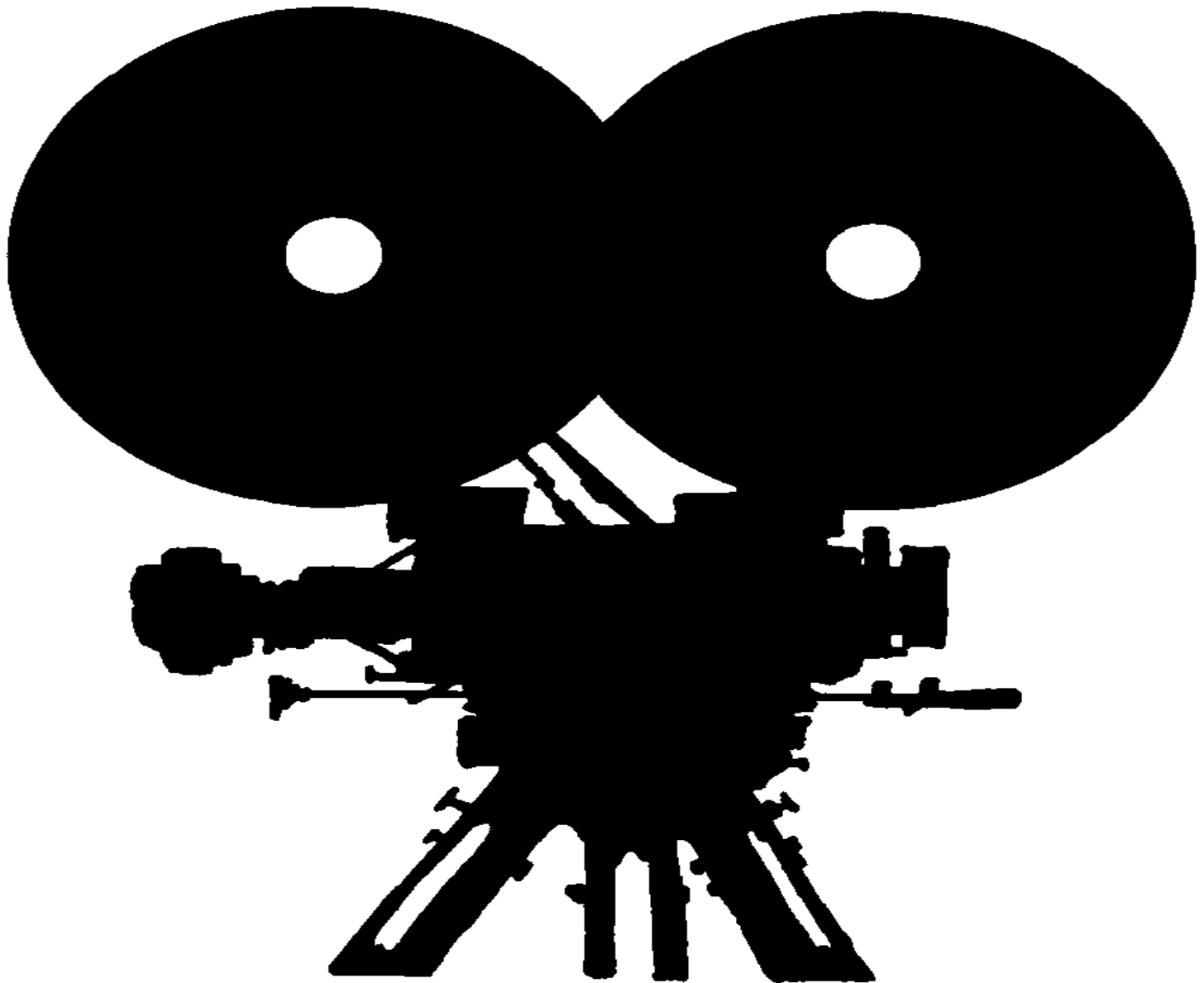
Consider the film's official MPAA rating (G, PG, PG-13, R, NC-17, or unrated).

Was there any controversy surrounding the film's rating?

# Learn About Initial Reception

What was the film's  
original reception?

How is the film perceived  
today?



# Understand Film's Influence

Does the film had an influential impact on future films or on society in general.

Did it pay homage to (or reference) a previous film in some way?

# Film influences on Society

- When Clark Gable appeared without an undershirt in the 1934 movie *It Happened One Night*, the underwear industry went into an immediate recession as men across the country wanted to be like Clark.





**"It's still  
the same  
old story,  
a fight for  
love and  
glory."**



Paramount Pictures presents  
An Arthur P. Jacobs Production in association  
with Rollins-Joffe Productions

**"PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM"**

A Herbert Ross Film

starring **WOODY ALLEN** **DIANE KEATON** **TONY ROBERTS**  
**JERRY LACY** and **SUSAN ANSDACH** **JENNIFER SALT** and **VIVA**

Screenplay by **WOODY ALLEN** Produced by **ARTHUR P. JACOBS** Directed by **HERBERT ROSS** Executive Producer **CHARLES F. ROYE**  
Based on the play by **WALLY ALLEN** Produced on the New York stage by David Mamet. Music Scored by Billy Goldenberg. An APJAC Production. Technicolor® A Paramount Picture

© 1992 Paramount Pictures. All Rights Reserved. PG-13



*Humphrey* *Ingrid* *Paul*  
**BOGART · BERGMAN · HENREID**



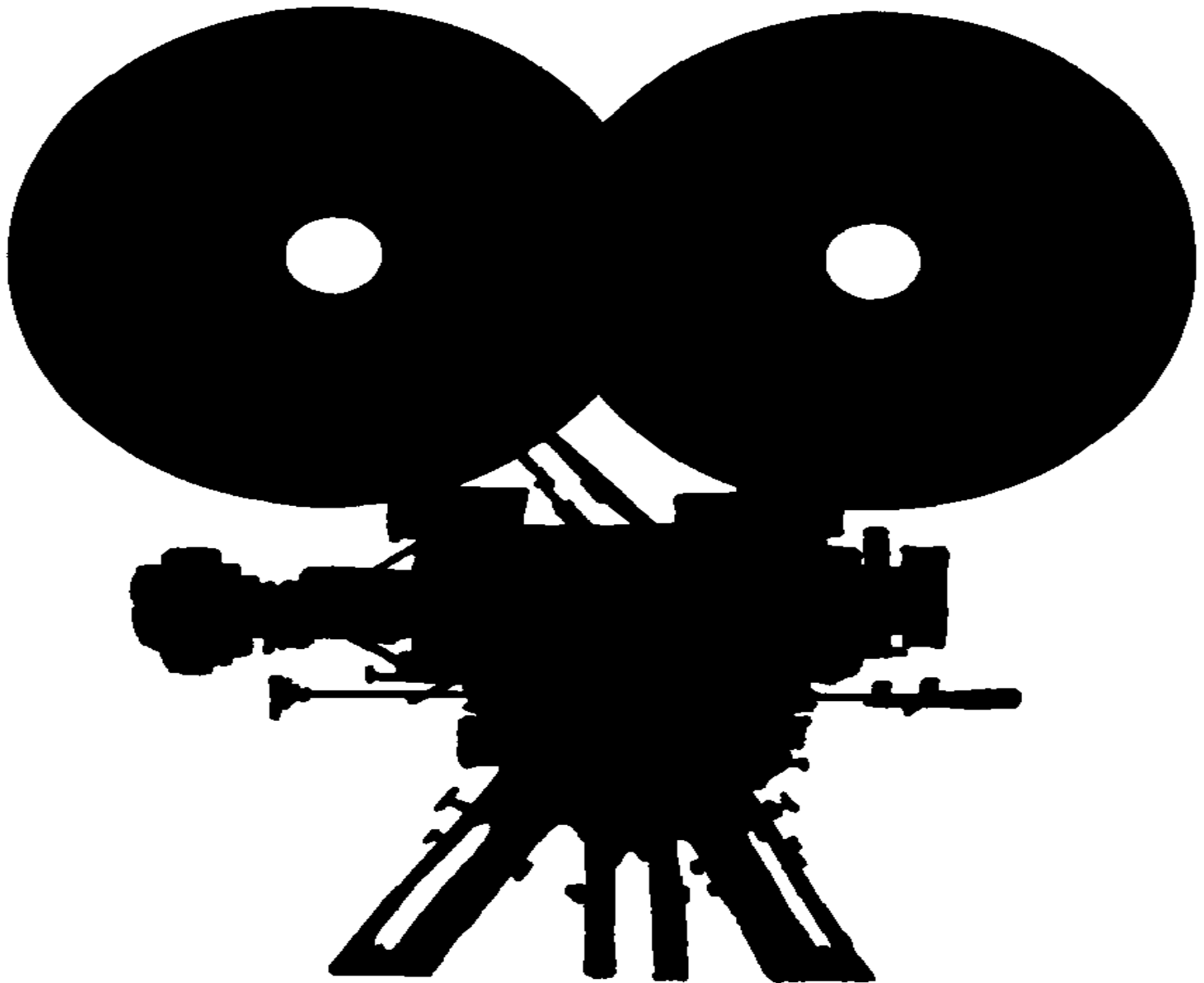
A  
**HAL B. WALLIS**  
**PRODUCTION**

**"Casablanca"**

**CAROLE** **CONRAD** **SYDNEY** **PETER**  
**RAINS · VEIDT · GREENSTREET · LORRE**

Directed by **MICHAEL CURTIZ**





# Classify Film's Genre

Decide on the film's principal type, its **genre** and **sub-genre** (such as action, adventure, musical, comedy, etc.) Is it's a **hybrid?** (a combination of two or more genres), What are they?

How does the film fit (or not fit) into its conventional, recognizable classifications?

# Is the Film Fact or Fiction?

Is the film is based upon an historical event or person?

How true to life is the film?

Does it mythologize an historical event or period?

# Examine Plot, Structure or Story

How is the film structured?

How is the story's plot told?

Is the film told through normal exposition, rising action climax and falling action?

Or is the film told through by flashback with a narrator?

Is the film chronologically or linearly character-driven?

Tone wise, is the film objectively or subjectively presented.

# Additional Questions to Decipher

From what vantage point is the film presented?

Does parallelism (the film cuts back and forth between two scenes that are happening simultaneously or at different times) exist between two or more scenes?

Are the transitions between scenes effective?

Does the film's narrative provide continuity from scene to scene?

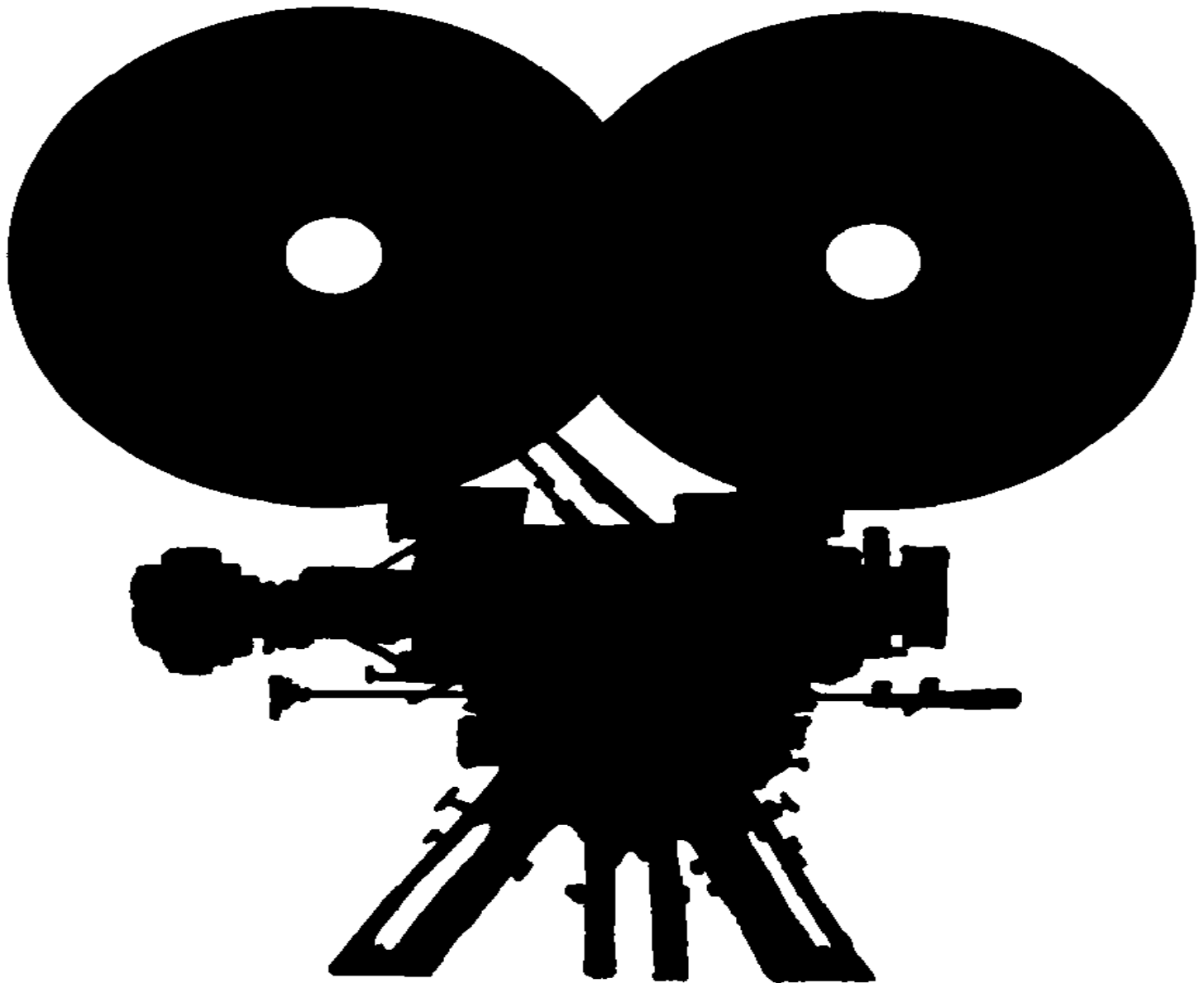
Is there a climax and resolution?

Is there closure by film's end?

# Special Effects: Help or Hindrance?

Does unrestrained use of visual effects overwhelms the dramatic, story-telling elements and sacrifice plot and/or characters?

With increased computer use in film editing there has been a movement away from invisible editing, in order to create excitement, but at a great cost. Too often there is a loss of coherence and logic in the action sequences. -- See ***The Borne movies*** – consider how the James Bond series was wonderfully reborn with ***Casino Royale*** in 2006 then massacred in 2008 with ***Quantum of Solace*** – the problem was computer editing that ripped the life out of the characters and the series.



Are the film's characters names symbolic or significant?

Consider why characters do things?  
Are characters round or flat, static or dynamic?

Are the characters believable and three-dimensional?

Is there a hero or anti-hero?



Is the acting memorable, exceptional, or inferior?

Ask yourself about 'star quality' - why were specific performers (or stars) chosen (or cast) to play each role - were they appropriately cast (i.e., the right age or size, or with the proper accent)?

Were any of the performers cast against type?

Were their performances appropriate for the roles?

Does one performer steal the spotlight from others?

# Film Conventions

There are expected elements in a type of film, without question, thought, or judgment. Examples:

*Film noir* is expected to be a dark, pessimistic, shadowy-filmed story about human betrayal or corruption, such as *The Maltese Falcon*.

While *Documentaries* are expected to usually include factual information and interviews.

# Film Conventions or Cliches'

The expected elements in a type of film, without question, thought, or judgment

Note typical film conventions, for instance:

(1) Cars that crash will almost always burst into flames, or (2) all telephone numbers in America begin with the digits 555.

# Editing

Editing has a superlative effect on the emotional and intellectual connection between the film, filmmakers and the audience members. Consider here just a couple of ideas of editing.

What is the effect of using **montage** or rapid cutting between shots **juxtapositions** (**cross-cutting**, **cutaways**, **match cuts**)?

Consider the audio or Aural editing (how music, noise, or transitional dialogue create the illusion of continuity between cuts).

Change the Pace and rhythm of editing and you completely change the movie.

# Cinematography and Visual Cues

Identify the film's cinematographer, stylistic and visual characteristics, use of lighting and color (or black and white) to create a mood, use of a static or moving camera, amount of close-ups, and favorite techniques.

Compare screen time to 'story time.'

Be attentive to various visual clues, such as the following: establishing shots (the initial shot in a scene)

Camera lighting (diffuse, high-key, low-key, muted, highlighting, spot-lighting, use of light and dark areas)

Focusing (zooms, rack-focus, blurry, deep-focus)

Camera Framing (full shots, medium shots, closeups)

Compositions (positioning of elements, symmetrical vs. asymmetrical, use of shadows, doors, low ceilings, windows, mirrors, etc.)

Camera angles (tilted, wide angle, telephoto, POV shots, low/high angled, etc.)

Be attentive to camera movements and shots (***dolly shots, crane shots, pans, tracking, handhelds, freeze-frames, reaction shots***, the number and order of shots, the use of shot/reverse shots in conversations or interviews, etc.)

colors used (or color filtering)

film speed (reversed, or fast/slow-motion)

Overall, is the cinematography effective?

Identify the film's cinematographers visual style and use of lighting and color (or black and white) to create a mood, use of a static or moving camera, What is the ratio of close-ups to mediums shots and long shots. Know that television is a close-up mediums, film is a wide shot medium.



# **Listen Carefully to the Soundtrack:**

Prepare to listen carefully to the film's soundtrack and how the music, songs, and score enhance the actions of the characters and the film's mood. You will be surprised how often the lyrics of a song comment on the screen's action.

# Listen to Audio Clues

Listen for the film's audio clues, including:

Sound effects

Music

Dialogue or voice

Silence

Understand the use of:

## ***sound bridges***

Sound bridges occur at the beginning of one scene when the sound from the previous scene carries over briefly before the sound from the new scene begins.

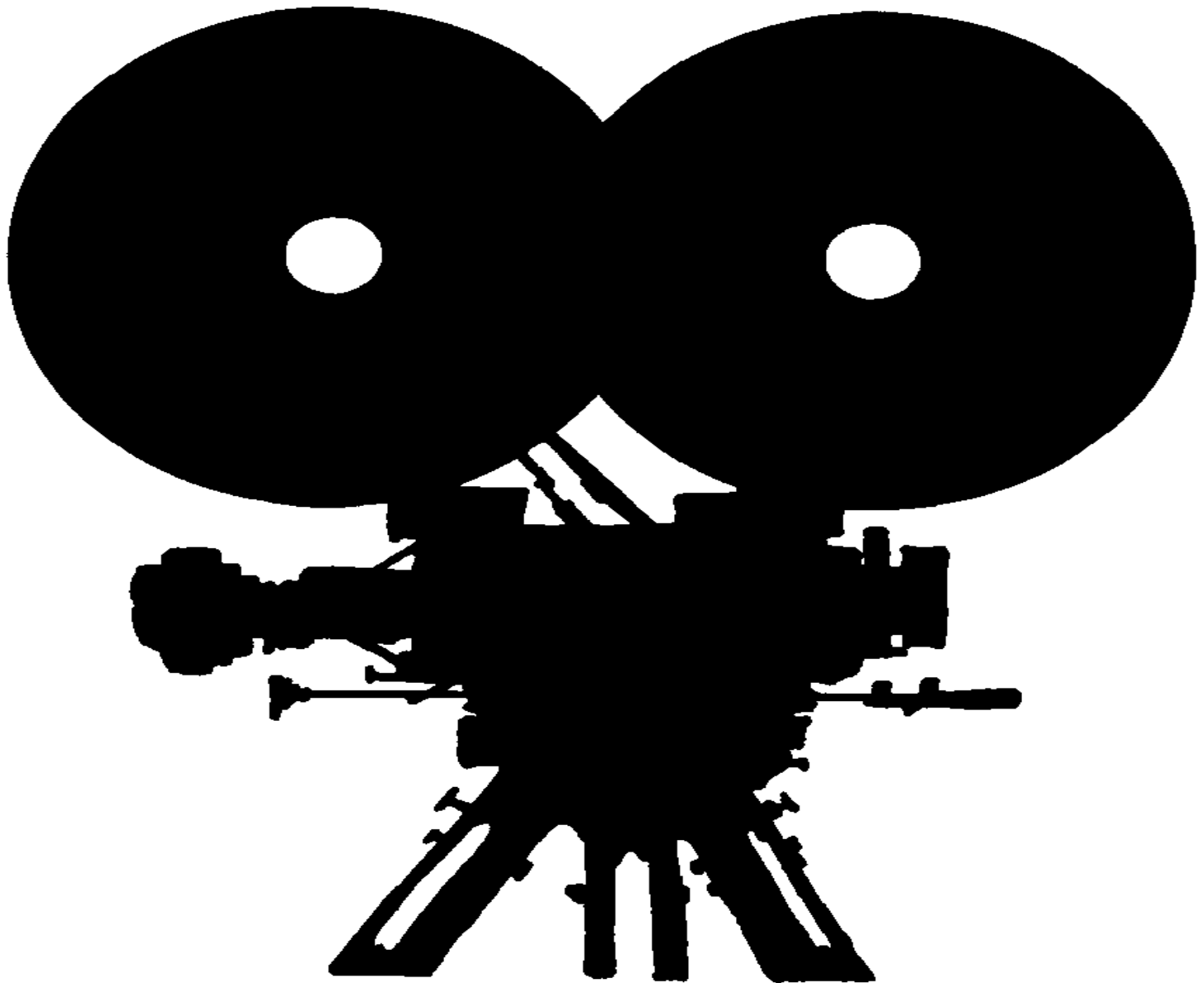
## ***diegetic sound***

(dialogue and sound effects)

## ***non-diegetic sound***

(the musical score, narrative voice-overs)

Note whenever sound transitions do not match shot transitions.



# Recognize Theme(s):

Look for the film's central theme, motif, idea or dominant message, as well as the film's sub-text (the message 'beneath the surface'), and then answer these questions:

Identify prominent symbols and metaphors within the film and determine their purpose and overall effect.

What popular ideologies are reproduced and reinforced in the film?

Does the film have an original theme or a traditional one?

Is the film's theme adequately or successfully supported by the story, acting, and other film elements?

**You have not  
seen a film until  
you have seen it  
a second time.**

**Alfred Hitchcock**



The ***second*** time around: pay more detailed attention to what is being projected take notes and make observations. Think in a about the film's structure, acting, directing, the camera shots and angles, etc.

[Note: Not all films deserve such scrutiny.]



Watch a deserving film more than once, and preferably with others so that the experience may be discussed afterwards.

During the ***first*** viewing: become familiar with the basic plot, main characters, important action, etc. in other words, acquire a brief synopsis of its story including time and place, the characters and their interactions, and the film's main themes.



**THE  
END**