

**M1/M2 Course:**

**Understanding people's views and visions.**

A semiotic and cultural approach of amateur audiovisual productions.

## **Different perspectives on Amsterdam**

On the video excerpts:

*Amsterdam on foot*  
*Amsterdam – The Netherlands*  
*Amsterdam*

**Authors:**

**Elodie Caucigh**  
**Rianne Vink**

Università della Svizzera Italiana (U.S.I.)  
National Institute of Languages and Oriental Civilizations

Lugano, 18.11.2009

## 1/ Introduction

---

This paper aims to analyse three videos, published on *Youtube*, depicting the city of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. The semiotic analysis is realized on the first one and a half minute of each video. Although their construction follows the same logic, one could underline three different perspectives.

The three first chapters will focus on the construction of the three videos: shots and iconic themes, figurative and abstract themes, type of montage, and mise en image. The fifth chapter will focus on the staging of people which is only applicable to the third video *Amsterdam*.

## 2/ *Amsterdam on foot*: perspective of an insider

---

### 2.1/ Presentation of the video

---

- The author and publisher: 'antonwithagen'
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVJM1NwBpHl&feature=related>
- Amateur video:
  - > images not stabilized
  - > one source of light (natural daylight)
  - > no voiceover commentary
- BUT:
  - > background music
  - > credits at the beginning

### 2.2/ Shots and iconic themes

---

- 18 shots in 1:30 mins
  - > 1st shot (credits) : viewer needs some knowledge to understand the meaning
- Iconic themes:
  - > houses: 4 shots
  - > city landscape: 4 shots
  - > canal: 7 shots
  - > beer factory: 1shot
  - > person: 1 shot

---

### 2.3/ Figurative and abstract themes

---

- Many shots of different places
  - > The viewer needs knowledge about the city to link the different shots
- Why filming?
  - > The author wants to share his experience of the city (showing bikes, graffiti, houses as much as buildings)

---

### 2.4/ Type of montage

---

- Movement across the city
- Difficult to understand the 'logic' of the edit, because there is no possibility for the viewer to draw the walk of the cameraman.
- The montage can be based on chronology of events, but it could also be possible that different shots were mixed during the editing process.
- No transitions

---

### 2.5/ Mise en image

---

- Shot n°4 & 17: zoom in (respectively on the door and on the boat)
- Shot n°6 & 7: same object but different frames
- Shot n°14: low angle camera position & obvious camera movement (pan)
- Shot n°15: no clear camera movement during the 1<sup>st</sup> five seconds followed by a zoom out on the boat.
- Shot n°18: no clear camera movement during the 1<sup>st</sup> five seconds followed by a zoom in on the bridge.
- 8 static shots
- 4 shots where camera movement is not clearly definable.

## 3/ Amsterdam - The Netherlands: perspective of four insiders

---

### 3.1/ Presentation of the video

---

- The authors: Yara de Jong, Cynthia de Lentsch, Malou Lamptey, Judy Biginski
- The publisher: 'biginski' (one of the authors)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZVz3C0J8qo&feature=related>
- Amateur video:
  - > images not stabilized
  - > one source of light (natural daylight)
  - > no voiceover commentary
- BUT:
  - > background music
  - > credits at the beginning
  - > transitions between shots

### 3.2/ Shots and iconic themes

---

- 15 shots in 1:30 mins
- Credits
  - > Split in three shots (the three first ones)
  - > Shot n°1: Title of the video 'Amsterdam'
  - > Shot n°2: Man singing and dancing in the street (parallel with the lyrics of the soundtrack 'there's a sailer who sings')
  - > Shot n°3: names of the authors of the video (the last one is also the publisher)
- Iconic themes:
  - > man singing: 1 shot
  - > city landscape: 4 shots
  - > canal: 2 shots
  - > birds: 1 shot
  - > canal + city landscape: 1 shot
  - > canal + city landscape + birds: 1 shot
  - > statues: 3 shots

---

### 3.3/ Figurative and abstract themes

---

- Many shots of different places (e.g. from one iconic theme to another)
  - The viewer needs knowledge about the city to link the different shots (from the man singing, to the canal, to the city landscape and to the place with the statues)
- Some iconic themes are depicted more in detail when 2 or 3 shots are related to one another. Hence there are three scenes in the video: 'the canal', 'walk on the bridge' and 'the statues'.
- Why filming?
  - The authors want to give an overview of the city by showing the canal, the city and what might be a famous place with statues (though these last shots require some knowledge from the viewer to be understood).
  - Such overview focuses on some particular elements though: The video is not a juxtaposition of unrelated objects but allows for establishing a relation between different shots.

---

### 3.4/ Type of montage

---

- Movement across the city
- Logic of the editing (might be explained by the fact that four people contributed to the realisation of the video, as the result of a complete group work)
  - Shots n°4 & 5: might have been taken from the same boat on its journey on the canal.
  - Shots n°6, 7 & 8: the birds are the common element in shots 6 and 7. They allow the viewer to retrace the journey of the cameraman (stepped to the left side of the bridge in order to shot a pan of the canal and the city ending on the birds). The shot n°8 shows a closer frame on the street that was shown at the beginning of the pan realized in the shot n°7. Hence, the cameraman might have stepped again a bit further on the left side of the bridge.
  - In these three shots, one could retrace the walk of the cameraman starting on the right side of the bridge (shot n°6), then in the middle (shot n°7) before ending on the left side of the bridge (shot n°8).
  - Shots n° 12, 13 & 14: the statue present in shot n°12 can be seen in shot n°13 (but also in shot n° 14 when watching the video after 1:30 mins). Likewise the 'army' of statues is present in both shots n°13 and 14.

- Here again, the walk of the cameraman could be retraced. He/she starts at the bottom in front of the highest statue in shot n°12, then steps back in order to present a overall view of the place, before coming closer to the army of statues (on the left side of the army).
- The montage can be based on chronology of events, but it could also be possible that different shots were mixed during the editing process.
- Transitions
  - Fade in: 5 times
  - Square window: 7 times
  - No transitions: twice

---

### 3.5/ Mise en image

- Shot n°4 & 5: camera static on a boat on movement along the canal. The movement of the shot is produced by the boat, not by the camera (even though the camera is slightly panning).
- Shot n°10: zoom in on a street sign
- Shot n°12: tilt from up to down (from low-angle to neutral position) on the statue
- 4 static shots
- 4 pans

## 4/ Amsterdam: perspective of a tourist

---

### 4.1/ Presentation of the video

---

- The author and publisher: 'mediamen5'
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VM6ZREchDHU&feature=related>
- Amateur video:
  - > images not stabilized
  - > one source of light (natural daylight)
  - > no voiceover commentary
- BUT:
  - > background music in some shots
  - > transitions between shots

### 4.2/ Shots and iconic themes

---

- 8 shots in 1:30 mins
- Iconic themes:
  - > people: 2 shots
  - > canal + bridge: 2 shots
  - > square: 1 shot
  - > barrel organ: 1 shot
  - > book market: 1 shot
  - > tram: 1 shot

### 4.3/ Figurative and abstract themes

---

- The shots are taken from different places in Amsterdam
  - > The viewer needs knowledge about the city to link the different shots.

- Why filming?
  - The man/woman who films spends time with his/her family (supposedly) in Amsterdam. The video is an overview of the places they visited, as a souvenir from their stay.
  - The video can be seen as a sort of walk or movement through the city, because the shots are not all static.

---

#### 4.4/ Type of montage

- Movement across the city
- Difficult to understand the 'logic' of the edit, because there is no possibility for the viewer to draw the walk of the cameraman.
- The montage can be based on chronology of events, but it could also be possible that different shots were mixed during the editing process.
- Transitions
  - All 7 transitions are fade in transitions

---

#### 4.5/ Mise en image

- The cameraman used no zoom.
- The shot length varied from 6 seconds till 22 seconds. The average shot length was 11,5 seconds.
- Almost all the shots were taken from a neutral angle. Shot n°2, 3 & 8 moved from a neutral to a slight high angle because the cameraman was filming a shorter person (n°2), the pigeons on the square (n°3) and the canal from the street (n°8)
- In shots n°1, 5 & 6, the cameraman is walking.
- Shots n°2, 4, 5, 7 & 8 are panning shots. N°5 is even a 360° pan.
- Shots n°1, 3 and 6 are slightly panning to the left.

## 5/ Staging of people in *Amsterdam*: perspective of a tourist

---

### 5.1/ Shots and iconic themes

---

- In 4 shots out of 8, people play a role
- Iconic themes:
  - > People waving (shot n°1)
  - > People walking (shot n°1, 2, 5)
  - > People posing (shot n°6)
  - > People singing (shot n°2)
  - > People smiling (shot n°2, 6)

### 5.2/ Interaction with camera

---

- Pro-filmic situation is unprepared in shots n°2 and 5 and prepared in shots n°1 and 6.
- Situation is modified, because the people were aware of being filmed.
- Interaction with camera in three shots out of four (shots n°1, 2, 6)
  - > Shot n°1: Man is waving to the camera, walks and shows the viewer the canal
  - > Shot n°2: The younger girl is singing and walking in a frolic way while looking at the camera.
  - > Shot n°6: 'Family' is posing by a city map. The 'mother' and the younger girl are smiling.
- No interaction in shot n°5
  - > Cameraman is walking and the people enter and leave the visual field when the cameraman is panning. The older girl looks at the camera but there is no interaction.

### 5.3/ Attitudes towards the camera

---

- The younger girl
  - > Interacting the most often and spontaneously with the camera.
  - > Not concerned about her social face, probably because of her age.
- The older girl
  - > Seems to avoid the camera
  - > Concerned about her social face, probably because of her age. Being filmed is face-threatening for her.
- The younger girl
  - > Neither avoiding nor interacting much with the camera.
  - > Not really concerned about her social face as she is behaving in a 'normal' way.
- Man
  - > Present in shot n°1. Might be the camera man of the other shots.
  - > Not concerned about his social face as he is interacting with the camera. He might be the initiator of the video.

## 6/ Conclusion

---

The three videos studied in this analysis are similar to each other insofar as they juxtapose various shots of the city of Amsterdam which do not follow any precise chronological order or narrative.

However, in accordance to the identity of the authors, each video represents Amsterdam from a different perspective. In that view, the insider shows a mosaic of representations of the city which are not linked to each other. Hence, the aim might be to give a multifaceted image of Amsterdam. On the contrary, the group of four insiders presents fewer aspects of the city but at the same time focuses much more on these. As a result, the viewer gets a more accurate representation of some elements chosen by the group. Finally, the aim of the tourists clearly seems to put the emphasis on the experience they had in Amsterdam by showing 'family' almost as much as the city itself.

As mentioned in the analysis, the distinct perspectives may have an impact on the montage and mise en image processes as well as on the objects/subjects that are filmed. Indeed, one could notice that the construction of the insider's video denotes the eclectic experience of his/her own city. Yet, the video realized by the group of insiders shows a more accurate structure and focus that could be explained by the collaboration of several people on this video. Indeed, such common project might require a better organization and the necessity for authors to compromise on what they intend to show about the city and how they would show it. In comparison, the tourists' video might gently reconstruct the grasp of little moments of their stay in Amsterdam while walking around and discovering the city.

## 7/ Bibliography

---

Stockinger, Peter (2009) *Course I, II, III - Understanding people's views and visions. A semiotic and cultural approach of amateur audiovisual productions* [Online]

Available at:

[http://www.semionet.fr/FR/enseignement/annees/09\\_10/09\\_10\\_Lugano/dcours10.htm](http://www.semionet.fr/FR/enseignement/annees/09_10/09_10_Lugano/dcours10.htm)

[Accessed 18 November 2009]