

Textual Analysis
IB Film Standard Level
M2019
***Amelie*: 01:48:16-1:53:16**

Textual Analysis: *Amelie*

Sequence Running Time: 01:48:16-1:53:16

The extract that I have selected is taken from *Amelie*, a whimsical film directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet that revolves around a young woman that must defeat a lonely childhood by seeking joy in life. The film follows Amelie as she holds onto her childhood and stirs up delight in others' lives. In an extract taken from Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amelie*, the geographical and social context will be analyzed in connection to how film elements such as cinematography, sound and lighting convey meaning to portray filmmaker's intention.

In 2001, *Amelie* is released. The film is set in Paris, the capital of France, often called the city of love or the city of light. Paris has been regarded as one of the most highly attractive cities in the world, and it is often cited as a hub for art, literature, entertainment and most significantly culture. French culture is typically associated with Paris, and the city is most known for its romanticism that attracts many tourists; it is a tourist destination. Paris has a highly diverse population, as it is one of the largest cities in Europe with a population of 2.27 million and a 20% rate of foreign-born people as according to a case study done by Utrecht University. In *Amelie*, Jeunet portrays the city in its purest and simplest form. Paris is shown in a highly idealistic manner with almost no minorities included, and Jeunet states in an interview with IndieWire, "I wanted to make a fake Paris, a very nice Paris, like in my head when I was twenty and I arrived in Paris for the first time." Jeunet reveals his motivation for choosing Paris as *Amelie*'s setting in the same interview; he wanted to make a personal movie, a positive movie. Drawing inspiration from the imagined Paris of his youth, Jeunet constructs a perfect Paris that enlightens all audiences.

Socially, the French are considered to be “global champions of pessimism,” as reported by The Independent newspaper. The French are stereotypically highly pessimistic and discontent with life. Research conducted by the Royal Economic Society considers that culture may be to blame for this. The gloomy French can be explained by “mental attitudes that are acquired in school or other socialization instances, especially during youth.”, as according to The Guardian’s Jamie Doward. Although France has the same material well-being as Belgium and Denmark, it is revealed by The French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies that of the three countries, they ranked the lowest in the happiness scale. It is deeply established in French culture to call oneself unhappy, and this discontent is addressed by Jeunet. Jeunet’s previous works were dark and gloomy, much like French culture, however with *Amelie*, he wished to communicate a positive story. Jeunet states in an IndieWire interview that he wanted, “For this story, I needed an explosion of colors, something ... happy”. Jeunet’s intentions are clear once the French mindset is revealed, and it is further evident in his interview with The Big Issue; “People need positive stories, they need something with joy, something light.” *Amelie* is intended to bring joy to audiences, similar to how *Amelie*’s title character brings joy to her community.



Figure 1



Figure 2

The sequence begins with Amelie walking into her apartment building. Amelie is first framed in a long shot and moves into an extreme closeup, as shown in figures 1 and 2. The depth of field becomes shallow as the subject is framed in an extreme closeup in figure 2. In the sequence, Amelie has misunderstood Nino and Gina's meetings and is dealing with feelings of jealousy and loss, causing Amelie to retreat back into the safety of her mind. This is conveyed through the use of the dolly and extreme closeup; as the camera moves towards Amelie, she retreats into her own imagination to deal with the pain of losing her chance with Nino. The shallow depth of field in figure 2 symbolizes that Amelie is not paying attention to her surroundings anymore; she is back inside the safety of her imagination. Additionally, the shallow depth of field shows Amelie tuning out Madeleine Wallace, even as Wallace excitedly declares that her husband loved her all along. Unknown to Wallace, the letter is actually forged by Amelie and is another one of her good deeds. Amelie's indifference to the effect of her good deed communicates the idea that she has indeed regressed into her mind. Furthermore, in figure 1, Amelie is small and she becomes larger as the camera dollies in; in connection to Amelie walking down a long hallway, this conveys that Amelie still has a long way to go before she can successfully break free from her own mind and lonely childhood. The tracking shot and its continuity from the hallway to the stairs communicates that Amelie must continue to move forward.

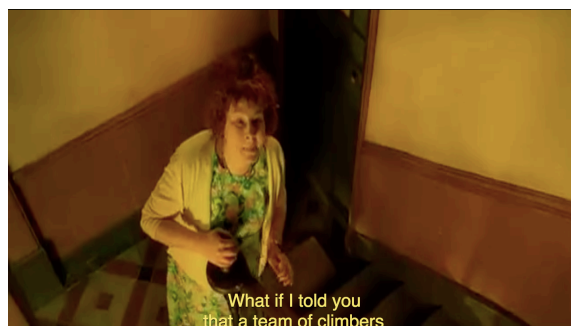


Figure 3

In figure 3, Wallace is left standing at the bottom of the staircase alone. Wallace is framed in a high angle shot as Amelie walks up the stairs. This shows how much power Amelie actually wields, as Amelie's good deeds allow people to progress in their life. Furthermore, this is the only time Wallace is shown outside of her apartment. This is significant; Amelie's good deed allows Wallace to break free from her own loneliness and gives Wallace the strength to break away from the confines of her apartment room.



Figure 4

In the medium shot, figure 4, Amelie is peering into the mirror. The composition of the shot conveys Amelie at war with herself; Amelie's reflection and Amelie herself are balanced. Bruno Delbonnel, the cinematographer, utilizes symmetry in many shots such as figure 4. As the camera dollies in, Amelie's reflection is able to be seen more and more. The two main focal points of the frame, Amelie and her reflection, serve to juxtapose each other. It is mind versus body. As the camera dollies in and Amelie's reflection is revealed, the audience is being invited into Amelie's thoughts and feelings as she regresses into her mind.



Figure 5

Delbonnel mainly used wide angle lenses when shooting *Amelie*, which created a cartoony and animated effect on characters. This is seen in figure 5. Coupled with framing the subject in the center, this takes up all of the audience's attention. This is meant to make viewers focus on the subject and focus on the character. Jeunet wanted to create a positive film, stating in an interview with AV Club, "It's about the pleasurable side of life." *Amelie* is meant to bring joy to audiences and allow viewers to escape from reality, and by framing the subject in a close up and being centered in the frame, audiences will be captivated and focus on the subject even more.

Amelie's soundtrack is composed by Yann Tiersen; the romantic and soft score created by Tiersen completes the film and sways audience emotion. When Amelie is in the kitchen daydreaming about Nino, the melancholy piano that accompanies the scene causes viewers to sympathize with Amelie. During Amelie's daydream, sounds such as a door closing and a bell ringing can be heard in addition to rain. This serves to immerse the audience into a dream-like version of Paris; in the scene, there are no sounds of cars honking or tourists chattering. This further highlights the perfect Paris that Jeunet has envisioned since he was young, as stated in an interview with

IndieWire. Paris is one of France's biggest cities with a large population of 2.27 million, and so it is very unrealistic for the city to be so quiet. Paris is a loud bustling city and a tourist destination, so it would be crowded with people and noises of cars honking and people talking. Again, this ties into Jeunet's intentions with the film: to bring joy to viewers through escapism. The Paris that Jeunet constructed is not realistic, but it is not meant to be. Viewers listening to the rain and piano score that is present while Nino is walking are immersed into Amelie's melancholy feelings, and the audience gets a sense of the perfect world they live in through the small sounds that are present, such as the door closing and the bell ringing.

Through Amelie's vision, Paris is quiet and sorrowful with the sound of rain. She is brought back to reality when the doorbell rings, and abruptly the piano soundtracks ends. And when Amelie opens the door to reveal Nino, a dramatic sound effect plays. However, no music plays when Nino steps inside Amelie's apartment, in order to show the awkwardness of Amelie breaking free from her shell. The tiny sounds are amplified in order to immerse the audience into Amelie's Paris.

Lighting is also powerful in the film. Audiences are able to be immersed in the world through the use of soft light. The feel-good film is meant to provide an escape for the pessimistic French, and the lighting helps viewers to feel present in the film. Delbonnel uses soft light in many of his works. According to Jon Fusco, Delbonnel uses large light sources and keeps it far away from the subject in order to keep the lighting very soft. Paris is the city of love, and *Amelie* keeps with this theme by using soft lighting which gives the film a romantic effect. The characters are also the most brightly lit in the frames, which makes viewers focus on them. This allows the

characters to stand out. Jeunet wanted frames to be "...very bright and happy," as stated in IndieWire, and so it is evident that the lighting is meant to brighten the lives of the audience. In figure 5 Amelie is the most brightly lit subject in the frame as a result of Delbonnel's lighting. Three quarter lighting is also used in the frame, which serves to create a realistic environment, further allowing audiences to escape reality. French cinema was typically dark, and in contrast, *Amelie*'s bright positivity was not typical a hit. The happy and bright story that Jeunet creates lead to the success of *Amelie* worldwide.

Word count: 1,682

Works Cited

Arnold, William. "Inspired 'Amélie' Blends Solid Comedy with Cutting-Edge Special Effects." *Seattlepi*, www.seattlepi.com/ae/movies/article/Inspired-Amelie-blends-solid-comedy-with-1071154.php.

Bell, George. "Introduction to Film and Media Studies." Introduction to Film and Media Studies Cinematography of *Amelie* Comments, sites.lafayette.edu/fams101-sp15/2015/02/09/cinematography-of-amelie/.

Chappell, Bill. "Third Of French Are On Psychoactive Drugs, Agency Says." *NPR*, NPR, 20 May 2014, www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/05/20/314242590/third-of-french-are-on-psychoactive-drugs-agency-says.

CONTEXT'S, sccweb.scea.wa.edu.au/SCCMedia/StudentResources/web/amelie12MPA_2009/Contexts.html.

Daul, Kimberly, et al. "Paris." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 27 Mar. 2018, www.britannica.com/place/Paris.

Ebert, Roger. "Amelie Movie Review & Film Summary (2001) | Roger Ebert." *RogerEbert.com*, 9 Nov. 2001, www.rogerebert.com/reviews/amelie-2001.

Fusco, Jon. "Watch: The Technique and Dreamlike Practices of DP Bruno Delbonnel." *No Film School*, 2 Mar. 2018, nofilmschool.com/2016/08/dp-bruno-delbonnel.

“Glad to Be Unhappy: The French Case.” *The New Yorker*, The New Yorker, 19 June 2017, www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/glad-to-be-unhappy-the-french-case.

Gritten, David. “If You Make Something Beautiful, They Want to Kill You'.” The Telegraph, Telegraph Media Group, 14 Jan. 2005, www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3634908/If-you-make-something-beautiful-they-want-to-kill-you.html.

“ISA - Paris Culture.” *Sydney, Australia Cultural Highlights - ISA*, studiesabroad.com/programs/country/france/city/paris/cultureCorner.

Jeunet, Jean-Pierre, director. *Amélie*. UGC-Fox Distribution, 2001.

Lewis, Katy. “Amélie vs Midnight in Paris: How Is Paris Portrayed?” The Artifice, theartifice.com/amelie-midnight-in-paris-portrayed/.

Myers, Scott. “Classic International Movie: ‘Amélie’ – Go Into The Story.” Go Into The Story, Go Into The Story, 14 Oct. 2016, gointothestory.blcklst.com/classic-international-movie-am%C3%A9lie-65cbddd40ef0.

Nottingham, Betsy Jane. “Betsy Jane Nottingham.” Café Des 2 Moulins in *Amélie*, 10 Apr. 2015, sites.psu.edu/ameliecafedes2moulins/2015/04/10/introduction-to-amelie-film-study-of-paris/.

Ramirez, Elizabeth. “Behind Films.” *Amélie Shots & Text Analysis*, 1 Jan. 1970, erbehindfilms.blogspot.com/2010/10/amelie-shots-text-analysis.html.

Rich, Katey. “Interview: Micmacs Director Jean-Pierre Jeunet Creates His Own Paris.” CINEMABLEND, CINEMABLEND, 26 May 2010, www.cinemablend.com/new/Interview-Micmacs-Director-Jean-Pierre-Jeunet-Creates-His-Own-Paris-18747.html.

Sabrinaks. “Child's Eyes.” *Cinematography in 'Amélie' (2001)*, 1 Jan. 1970, childeyesfilm.blogspot.com/2016/01/www_13.html.

Sciolino, Elaine. "Cinematography Meets Geography In Montmartre." The New York Times, The New York Times, 10 Aug. 2003, www.nytimes.com/2003/08/10/travel/cinematography-meets-geography-in-montmartre.html.

Shmoop Editorial Team. "Amélie Table of Contents." Shmoop, Shmoop University, 11 Nov. 2008, www.shmoop.com/amelie/table-of-contents.html.

Steinberg, Stefan. "The Thoroughly Conformist World of Amélie." Torture and Death in America's Prisons, World Socialist Web Site Wsws.org Published by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), 28 Aug. 2001, www.wsws.org/en/articles/2001/08/amel-a28.html.

Steinberg, Stefan. "World Socialist Web Site." The Thoroughly Conformist World of Amélie, World Socialist Web Site Wsws.org Published by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), 28 Aug. 2001, www.wsws.org/en/articles/2001/08/amel-a28.html.

Tobias, Scott. "Jean-Pierre Jeunet." The A.V. Club, Wwww.avclub.com, 31 Oct. 2001, www.avclub.com/jean-pierre-jeunet-1798208190.

Tong, Shimeng. "Amélie (2001) by Jean-Pierre Jeunet." blogs.commonsgorgetown.edu/st798/files/2016/10/Critical-Viewing-Shimeng-Tong.pdf.

Winter, Max. "Watch: Jean-Pierre Jeunet's 'Amélie' Depends on Symmetry for Its Curious Power." IndieWire, Indiewire, 28 May 2016, www.indiewire.com/2016/03/watch-jean-pierre-jeunets-amelie-depends-on-symmetry-for-its-curious-power-131833/.

"13 Whimsical Facts About Amélie." 13 Whimsical Facts About 'Amélie' | Mental Floss, 30 July 2015, mentalfloss.com/article/66614/13-whimsical-facts-about-amelie.

"Amélie." Filmeducation, Cineschool, www.filmeducation.org/pdf/film/Amelie.pdf.

“Amélie Director Jean-Pierre Jeunet: ‘People Need Positive Stories.’” *The Big Issue*, 2 May 2018, www.bigissue.com/interviews/amelie-director-jean-pierre-jeunet-people-need-positive-stories/.

“Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie* - Filmmaker Magazine - Fall 2001.” *Filmmaker Magazine*, filmmakermagazine.com/archives/issues/fall2001/features/magnificent_obsession.php#.VmXa1MqTbOo.

“Le Fabuleux Destin D'Amélie Poulain (Site Officiel).” Jean-Pierre Jeunet, www.jpjeunet.com/filmographie/le-fabuleux-destin-dAmelie-poulain/.

“Paris, the City of Love, Light and History.” *Partnership International*, 23 Nov. 2016, www.partnershipinternational.ie/paris-city-love-light-history/.

“Postmodernism in *Amélie* (2001).” *UKEssays*, www.ukessays.com/essays/film-studies/postmodernism-amlie-2001-3913.php.

“The *Amélie* Effect.” *Film Comment*, www.filmcomment.com/article/the-amelie-effect/.

“Understanding the Cinematography of Bruno Delbonnel.” 7 Aug. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uoSz-0zbTg.

“Why French Are World Champs in Pessimism.” *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 18 Sept. 2011, www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/why-french-are-world-champs-in-pessimism-2179059.html.