

FEATURED PROJECT: THE DECONSTRUCTOR: AN ONLINE FILM ANALYSIS

CCNMTL and Lawrence Engel, Adjunct Professor of Film at the School of the Arts, have developed an interactive online tool that helps students learn to analyze a film's structure. The Deconstructor provides film students with the analytical tools to transform from passive viewers to active observers with a greater understanding of how films are constructed – skills that they can carry into their own work as filmmakers.

The Deconstructor contains more than 70 film scenes in its digital library. Students select one of these scenes to dissect into a series of discrete shots in the storyboard (Fig. 1), which they carefully analyze and annotate in the databoard (Fig. 2). Numerical values are assigned to criteria such as shot type, camera angle, and camera movement. The Deconstructor then generates a graph of these values, from which students can identify patterns that inform the film's narrative structure (Fig. 3). For example, by reviewing the graphs, students can analyze patterns used by the film's director to build suspense.

Professor Engel modeled the Deconstructor on the teaching method of former Columbia Professor Stefan Sharff. According to Professor Engel, Sharff's "approach to film grammar and syntax opened a way of seeing film that I hadn't thought of before. This new tool is a way of continuing his work and helping students more easily collect the data necessary to discuss and learn about film's inherent grammatical underpinnings."

Integrating the Deconstructor into student work enables them to engage more deeply with film analysis. Students have responded enthusiastically, noting that the technology helps them to "understand the complexities and planning a director must look at when designing a shot."

The Deconstructor was first introduced to Professor Engel's Analysis of Film Language class in the spring 2002 semester and continues to be used in other courses including the Documentary Tradition. It can be customized for use in any course that requires students to analyze motion graphics or photographic sequences.



Fig. 1: Storyboard

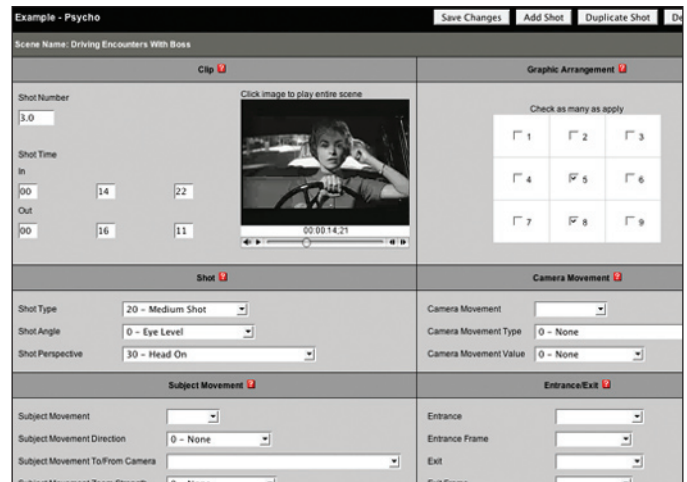


Fig. 2: Databoard

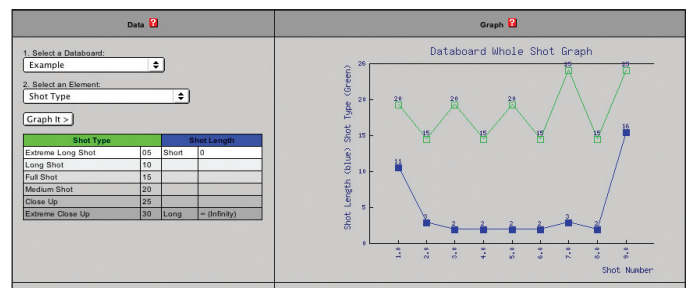


Fig. 3: Graph