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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
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**How *The New Yorker* portrays immigrant  
families in its documentary films**

*Master Thesis*

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## **Bibliographic note**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to generate a debate about the portrayal of immigrant families in *The New Yorker* documentaries. The general objective is to understand how visual framing and the use of mise-en-scène elements such as set design, lighting and space, play a crucial role in communicating the representations of immigrant families and influencing the viewer's perception towards this group. In this study, the method used is close textual analysis on shots where family dynamics unraveled in seven documentaries featured in *The New Yorker*: *Ale Libre*; *Guanajuato Norte*; *Seasons*; *Sing Me a Lullaby*; *Team Meryland*; *The Prince of Luna Park*; and *Yves & Variation*. Findings indicate that immigrant families are, mainly, shown: 1) indoors, during the day; 2) with high-key lighting; and 3) with positive, closed, and deep space settings. The camera distance that appeared the most is "medium close-up". The findings advance how immigrant families are framed through mise-en-scène. This study contributes to the understanding that the portrayal of immigrant families in documentaries is a result of not only economic, social, political, and cultural tendencies and shifts, but also of elaborated constructions through mise-en-scène elements in a frame. This study has implications for research on film studies, analysis of mise-en-scène, and immigrant families in the media.

## **Keywords**

**The New Yorker, documentary film, immigrant family, framing, mise-en-scène, content analysis**

## **Abstrakt**

Účelem této studie je vyvolat debatu o zobrazení rodin imigrantů v dokumentech *The New Yorker*. Obecným cílem je porozumět tomu, jak vizuální rámování a použití prvků mizanscén, jako je scénografie, osvětlení a prostor, hrají klíčovou roli při komunikaci reprezentací rodin přistěhovalců a ovlivňují vnímání diváka vůči této skupině. V této studii je použitou metodou podrobná textová analýza záběrů, kde se rodinná dynamika rozpadá v sedmi dokumentech uváděných v *The New Yorker*: *Ale Libre*; *Guanajuato Norte*; *Seasons*; *Sing Me a Lullaby*; *Team Maryland*; *The Prince of Luna Park*; and *Yves & Variation*. Zjištění naznačují, že rodiny přistěhovalců se zobrazují hlavně: 1) uvnitř, během dne; 2) s vysokým osvětlením; a 3) s pozitivním, uzavřeným a hlubokým vesmírným nastavením. Vzdálenost fotoaparátu, která se objevila nejvíce, je „střední blízkost“. Zjištění posouvají, jak jsou rodiny imigrantů sestavovány prostřednictvím mizanscén. Tato studie přispívá k pochopení, že zobrazování rodin imigrantů v dokumentech je výsledkem nejen ekonomických, sociálních, politických a kulturních tendencí a posunů, ale také propracovaných konstrukcí prostřednictvím mizanscénických prvků v rámci. Tato studie má důsledky pro výzkum filmových studií, analýzu mizanscén a rodin přistěhovalců v médiích.

## **Klíčová slova**

**The New Yorker, dokumentární film, rodina imigrantů, rámování, mise-en-scène, analýza obsahu**

**Range of thesis: 101 pages and 151.974 characters**

## **Declaration of Authorship**

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

**Prague, July 29, 2022.**

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the author's signature.

**Fernanda Novaes Buffa**

## **Acknowledgments**

Reserving originality for the actual thesis, I'd like to express my sincere gratitude and admiration to my family, my partner, and my friends. Thank you for the encouragement, the endless laughs and the boundless love.

I'm also grateful to all of my instructors at Danmarks Medie og Journalisthøjskole & Aarhus University in Denmark and at Charles University in Prague. Especially to my supervisor Prof. Jan Miessler.

I would also like to thank my colleagues at the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting & The Rainforest Journalism Fund for supporting, every day, journalism that has impact and is done in an ethical and conscious way.

Finally, I'd like to thank the European Union for funding the Erasmus Mundus Scholarships and allowing this dream to come true.

With care & curiosity for what's next,

Fernanda.

# Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

## Approved research proposal

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism FSV UK Research proposal for Erasmus Mundus Journalism Diploma Thesis									
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<b>Student's surname and given name:</b> <i>Fernanda Novaes Buffa</i>	<b>Registry stamp: / Razítko podatelny:</b>  <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;"><b>Univerzita Karlova Fakulta sociálních věd</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Došlo dne:</td> <td style="text-align: center;">- 9 -12- 2021 -1-</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Čj: <i>409</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;">Příloh:</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">Přiděleno:</td> </tr> </table>	<b>Univerzita Karlova Fakulta sociálních věd</b>		Došlo dne:	- 9 -12- 2021 -1-	Čj: <i>409</i>	Příloh:	Přiděleno:	
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<b>Your faculty e-mail:</b> <i>72102498@fsv.cuni.cz</i>									
<b>Study program/form of study:</b> <i>Erasmus Mundus Journalism</i>									
<b>Thesis title in English:</b> <i>Making more space at the table: how The New Yorker portrays family dynamics in its audiovisual content</i>									
<b>Expected date of submission:</b> <i>Summer semester 2022 (hand-in in July, presentation in September)</i>									
<b>Main research question:</b> <i>How do documentaries featured in the New Yorker use space to portray family dynamics?</i>									
<b>Current state of research on the topic:</b>  <i>There is a rich literature that evaluates news work as a more or less "artistic" endeavor. When it comes to audiovisual content such as documentary, Nichols (1991) is a reference within the discussion. He argues that there are six modes of documentary: expository, poetic, observational, participatory, performative and reflexive, and, with this range, approaches his theory to Cramerotti's (2009) aesthetic journalism. This field argues that the worlds of journalism and art are converging in the context of changing values, practices and working arrangements. Aesthetic journalism talks about the idea of truth shifting from the sphere of news media to the territory of art. Nash (2016) asked if journalism could be seen as art, but like Cramerotti he articulates a "journalistic turn" in the art world, rather than operationalizing artistic journalism. Scholarly fields such as "art journalism" and "cultural journalism" study how journalists cover arts and culture (Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen 2007; Jaakkola 2015), and are not concerned with how news work in itself is an artistic endeavor. The lens of aesthetics in Klevan's (2018) work and in Bazin's (2004) film analysis can mend that gap. Bazin describes the mise en scène aesthetic as emphasizing choreographed movement within the scene rather than through editing. According to him, the representation of space affects the reading of a film. Therefore, through depth, proximity, proportions, lighting, props and other elements, it is possible to identify a film's creation of space, or mise en scène, as discussed by Aumont (2006). In a conventional sense, mise en scène is a practice derived from theater, referring to the staging or choreography of bodies within a set. However, in films, its definition is enlarged and, with it, arises an optimal way to analyze and expand notions of family dynamics as foreseen by Mccarthy and Edwards (2011).</i>									
<b>Expected theoretical framework:</b>  <i>Drawing on the theories of aesthetic journalism, documentary, and mise en scène, this study will analyze space in New Yorker documentaries and its ability to reflect family dynamics. It will contribute to the discussion of creating and communicating spaces and investigate how much time is dedicated to family dynamics and in what spaces they develop. Mccarthy and Edwards' (2011) work will be crucial to outline the meanings and key concepts of family. To understand documentaries as a form and medium, I will use the work of Nichols (1991). To grasp aesthetic journalism and its possibilities, I will read Cramerotti (2009). Bazin's (2004) work on theater and cinema will guide my methodology and allow me to capture the ways of how space can be used to portray family dynamics. Finally, with Aumont's (2006) concept of mise en scène, I will be able to keep a time track and record of when family dynamics unravel in a certain space.</i>									



### Expected methodology, and methods for data gathering and analysis:

To understand how family dynamics are portrayed in the New Yorker, I selected seven documentaries. They all portray immigrant families or families with immigrant backgrounds.

I will analyze the documentaries through the lens of **Bazin's film analysis** and **Aumont's mise en scène** with the following approach: 1) first, I will identify the family composition in the film; 2) second, I will consider spaces where family members interact; 3) third, I will code the spaces, dividing them into a) private spaces (domestic spaces), b) public spaces, c) spaces of hybrid character (spaces in-between); 4) the spaces will be analyzed through *mise en scène*, therefore, they will be described in terms of camera placement and lenses, set design, lighting, depth, proximity, proportions, and other visual aspects that outline moods and relationships between elements in the story; 5) finally, I will use a stop-clock to quantitatively measure how long the family dynamics play out in a given space.

One hypothesis is that The New Yorker does not prioritize showing immigrant families in domestic spaces.

H2: When portraying immigrant families, The New Yorker dedicates more time to spaces of hybrid character, such as roads, planes, etc.

With this study, further researchers interested in the matter will be able to arrive at the same results and, if they intend to, expand the work.

### Expected research design:

For the purpose of this study I have selected seven documentary films featured in the New Yorker. The movies are:

1. *Ale Libre* (16'33, in this study "Movie I"), directed by Maya Cueva, and released on 09/29/2021.
2. *Guanajuato Norte* (19'04, in this study "Movie II"), directed by Ingrid Holmquist and Sana A. Malik, released on 08/19/2020.
3. *Since You Arrived, My Heart Stopped Belonging to Me* (20'34, in this study "Movie III"), directed by Erin Semine K kdil and Chris Filippone, and released on 05/26/2021.
4. *Sing Me a Lullaby* (28'59, in this study "Movie IV"), directed by Tiffany Hsiung, and released on 01/11/2021.
5. *Team Maryland* (27'35, in this study "Movie V"), directed by Gabriel Gaurano, and released on 09/15/2021.
6. *The Prince of Luna Park* (15'11, in this study "Movie VI"), directed by Daniel Lombroso, and released on 09/01/2021.
7. *Yes & Variation* (15'22, in this study "Movie VII"), directed by Kervin Marseille and Katie Sheridan, and released on 08/12/2020.

Together, the seven films amount to over 100 minutes of audiovisual content, making it infeasible to expand the scope of the research.

### Expected thesis structure:

- 1) Abstract;
- 2) Introduction; here I will present the goal of the study: how to see space, or *mise en sc ne*, as a way of portraying family dynamics
- 3) Theoretical Framework; here I will present the theoretical framework and make sense of how all theories connect
- 4) Definition of Family; here I will discuss how family is defined and how it is portrayed in documentaries
- 5) Aesthetic Journalism; here I will introduce the concept of aesthetic journalism and show how it is relevant for analyzing family dynamics within documentaries
- 6) Definition of Documentary; here I will discuss the language of documentaries and its possibilities
- 7) Methods and Research design;
  - *Mise en sc ne*
  - Codes, themes and subthemes
- 8) Findings

- Spaces that show family dynamics
  - Private spaces
  - Public spaces
  - Spaces in-between

9) Discussion; here I will discuss how documentaries featured in the New Yorker use space to portray family dynamics

10) Conclusion

**Basic literature list:**

**Aumont, J. (2006). *The Cinema and Mise en Scène*. Paris: Armand Colin.**

- + Aumont, J. (2000). *The Mise en Scène*. Brussels: De Boeck.

To explain the method of mise en scène and how it relates to film analysis, I will use the work of Aumont.

**Bazin, A. (2004). *THEATER AND CINEMA*. In *What Is Cinema? Volume I*. Berkeley: University of California Press.**

Employing Bazin's understanding of theater and cinema, I will structure the methodology so it encompasses the movie's form, craft and meanings.

**Cramerotti, A. (2009). *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform Without Informing (Vol. 2)*. Bristol: Intellect Books.**

- + Nash, C. (2016). *What is Journalism: The Art and Politics of a Rupture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

To explain why there is space to talk about family dynamics within journalism, I will use the work of Cramerotti and Nash.

**Klevan, A. (2018). *Aesthetic Evaluation and Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.**

- + Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design (Second ed.)*. Abingdon: Routledge.

With the work of Klevan, Kress and Van Leeuwen, I aim to show the various ways aesthetics can relate to film studies and how to read the iconic, indexical and symbolic signs.

**Mccarthy, J. & Edwards, R. (2011). *Key Concepts in Family Studies*. 10.4135/9781446250990.**

Mccarthy and Edwards will provide definitions of family.

**Nichols, B. (1991). *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Vol. 681. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.**

- + Spence, L. & Navarro, V. (2010). *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning*. Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press.

A documentary's sounds and images are always the product of selection and choice, and often underscore points the filmmaker wishes to make. The work of Nichols, Spence and Navarro will explain the ways films tell their stories; how they use the camera, editing, sound, and performance; what rhetorical devices they employ; and what the theoretical, practical, and ethical implications of these choices are.

**Related theses and dissertations:**



Gotardo, A. T., & Freitas, R. F. (2021). *Dissonant Bodies and the Struggles Over Urban Space: Narratives About Rio de Janeiro in International Documentaries*. *Revista Lusófona de Estudos Culturais/Lusophone Journal of Cultural Studies*, 8(1), 43-60.

Rehman, F., Iqbal, L., & Mukhtar, Y. (2020). *Representation of Gender in Documentary Saving Face: A Semiotic Analysis*. *Global Sociological Review*, V(III), 72-85. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2020\(V-III\).09](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2020(V-III).09)

Rehman, M. (2016). "Discourse on gender, religion, and culture in Pakistani films: A narrative analysis of contemporary independent films from Pakistan." [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cj\\_etds/94](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cj_etds/94)

Piazza, R. (2010). *Voice-over and self-narrative in film: A multimodal analysis of Antonioni's When Love Fails (Tentato Suicidio)*. *Language and Literature*, 19(2), 173-195. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963947010362911>

Porta, A. (2018). *The Music that Children Listen to in Movies, Series and TV Documentaries. An Empirical Study on its Meaning*. *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 49(2), 311-332. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26844649>

Date / Signature of the student:

21/07/2022

**THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY THE ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR:**

I confirm that I have consulted this research proposal with the author and that the proposal is related to my field of expertise at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

I agree to be the Thesis supervisor.

MIESSLER, JAN

Surname and name of the supervisor

Date / Signature of the supervisor

Further recommendations related to the topic, structure and methods for analysis:

Further recommendations of literature related to the topic:

The research proposal has to be printed, signed and submitted to the FSV UK registry office (podatelna) in two copies, by **November 15, 2021**, addressed to the Program Coordinator.

Accepted research proposals have to be picked up at the Program Coordinator's Office, Mgr. Sandra Štefaniková. The accepted research proposal needs to be included in the hard copy version of the submitted thesis.

**RESEARCH PROPOSALS NEED TO BE APPROVED BY THE HEAD OF ERASMUS MUNDUS JOURNALISM PROGRAM.**

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## Introduction

Cinema directly influences the social imaginary and impacts the sociocultural and political structure of society (Bordwell, 1991). Therefore, it should be assimilated not only as a form of mass media, but also as a partial producer and disseminator of representations, ideas and perceptions.

Cultural media studies are the home to film history, film analysis, and other facets of the scholarship. Films tell stories by organizing elements within a frame that convey certain meanings. This organization is called *mise-en-scène*, and, together with music, camera settings and other strategies and techniques, it makes a film immersing and compelling (Lacey, 2018).

This study is divided in five chapters and guided by the research question *RQ: How do documentaries featured in The New Yorker portray immigrant families through mise-en-scène?*

In chapter I, Kunkel (2009) and Sims (1990) give the context of *The New Yorker* as a media outlet and Wolfe (1973) details *The New Yorker's* style which is consensually seen as narrative journalism. To deal with the digitalization of narrative journalism, the studies of Berning (2011) and Pavlik (2000) are discussed.

Continuing the theoretical framework, concepts such as spectacle; simulacra and simulation; and realism are explained while addressing representation within the media. Because this study focuses on films, the works of Bordwell (2008, 2013) and Münsterberg (1970), the founders of cognitive film theory in the humanities, guide the discussion.

To encompass the sociology of family, immigrant families and representations of immigrant families in the media, the studies of Greenberg and Brand (1994) and McCarthy and Edwards (2010) are considered. They detail the concept of family, how family dynamics navigate different spheres of society, and how representations of immigrant families are created and distributed. The role of empathy in narration and perspective-taking is discussed along with the analysis of how it can articulate perceptions and meanings for audiences.

According to Marcus and Stoddard (2009), documentaries challenge popular narratives of immigration experiences and provide more nuanced views of immigration than traditional news media. In this light, cinema studies, as understood by Metz (2010), and documentary studies, as detailed by Nichols (2005), offer clear definitions to understand how films are structured and how they operate.

In the discussion of framing studies, Coleman (2010), Goffman (1974) and Reese (2001) guide the conversation. Coleman (2010) leads the discussion on visual framing and reinforces how camera angles, paraproxemic variables, nonverbal expression, and other visual cues are crucial in determining how a film is perceived.

Finally, mise-en-scène is discussed with the works of Bordwell and Thompson (2008), Cassidy (2013), Gibbs (2002), Monaco (2009) and Pierson (2010). Elements of mise-en-scène such as set design, lighting and space are discussed comprehensively accompanied by the meanings they articulate in each frame.

With this in mind, this study has implications for research on film studies, mise-en-scène analysis, and perception of immigrant families in the media.

This study uses qualitative content analysis based on textual analysis or close reading of a film's form (Lewis, 2014) developed with intentional sampling methods. After meeting the established criteria, the selected seven documentaries in *The New Yorker* are: *Ale Libre*; *Guanajuato Norte*; *Seasons*; *Sing Me a Lullaby*; *Team Maryland*; *The Prince of Luna Park*; and *Yves & Variation*.

While studying a film's form, Lewis (2014) suggests that close reading of mise-en-scène, narrative, editing, camera work, sound, and other compositional techniques, outlines the meanings of films.

It is important to note that there are several changes in the thesis against the original proposal. Originally, the researcher planned on working with the concept of aesthetic journalism, as studied by Cramerotti (2009), with the definitions of mise-en-scène as described by Bazin (2004), and only with the concept of "space" within the mise-en-scène elements. However, after familiarization with the theoretical outlines and implications, the researcher concluded that Cramerotti's work is more aligned with art than with journalism, and Bazin's work did not, comprehensively, indicate how mise-

en-scène elements articulated meaning, therefore the author was replaced by Gibbs (2002) and Lewis (2014). Furthermore, the researcher found it necessary to expand the scope of analysis of mise-en-scène and incorporate set design, lighting and camera distance as they are fundamental elements in understanding visual framing. Lastly, the researcher thought that an analysis of framing Goffman (1974) and visual framing Coleman (2010) are crucial to articulate meaning within mise-en-scène constructions.

The last two chapters give an overview of what has been presented in the study, discuss the research findings and their significance and suggest ways of expanding the research in the fields that are relevant for this study.

## **1. Theoretical Framework**

This study details what has already been produced in research related to *The New Yorker* as a media outlet, representation in the media, family studies, film studies, framing studies, and mise-en-scène elements, techniques and implications.

### ***1.1 The New Yorker***

*The New Yorker* was founded in New York City, in 1925, by Harold Ross, as a magazine dedicated to humor, short fiction, criticism, and reportage. In the founder's words, it is a publication of "gaiety, wit, and satire" (Kunkel, 2009).

Much has been written about *The New Yorker* and its impact on journalism and the many different scopes of society. The majority of research focuses on the history of *The New Yorker* and its influence on literary journalism and narrative journalism (Kunkel, 2009; Sims, 1990; Wolfe, 1973). Additionally, research on the media outlet also highlights *The New Yorker's* characteristic humor style and humor patterns (Lee, 2000; Matzo and Miller, 2009).

It is not a priority of this research to delve deep into the history of *The New Yorker* since it has been covered by many scholars (Kunkel, 2009; Sims, 1990). This study is interested in understanding the concept of "narrative journalism" (Wolfe, 1973)—because there is an academic consensus that it is the style of *The New Yorker*—and point out how the publication dealt with the digitization of narrative journalism.

According to Bal and Van Boheemen (2009), narration is a set of theories of narrative texts, displays, images, and cultural products that tell a story. Wolfe (1973) states that there are four pillars that sustain a narrative journalism text: scene-by-scene construction, detail, first and/or third person narrator, and dialogue. Sims (1990) adds to the conversation saying that there are additional required features: structure, immersion, voice, and symbolic realities. Scholars like Sharlet (2014) and Palau (2017) study narrative journalism and its implications on themes such as migration and religion, and stress the empathy it can create.

Ricoeur (1980) argues that, with their specific configuration, narratives define historical reality and the notion of society. In other words, the author argues that narratives not only are shaped by their time and context, but also help shape the social world.

*The New Yorker*, and its editorial guidelines, evolved over time. In 1985 it was acquired by Advance Publications (the media conglomerate ahead of Condé Nast) and



since the late 1990s, it has taken advantage of the internet and other technologies to showcase its current and archival material (Lee, 2000).

Despite many media companies having migrated to a strictly online business model, *The New Yorker* still prints magazines. In 2021, it published 47 issues, with five covering two-week spans. Data from 2019 shows that *The New Yorker* reaches a circulation of 1,231,710<sup>1</sup> people both nationally and internationally.

Even with the notable success of the printed magazine, *The New Yorker* website<sup>2</sup> features the full contents of each week's magazine and additional multimedia content.

With studies of narrative journalism in the digital era, it is safe to say that the means of production and distribution of news and multimedia content underwent a reformulation when the internet was introduced in the newsroom in the late 1990s and reshaped the publication's way of operating.

### ***1.1.2 Digital journalism and The New Yorker documentaries***

To deal with the digitization of narrative journalism, this study relies on the works of Abrahamson (2006) and Berning (2011). In the field of digital journalism, the focus is on Deuze (2001) and Pavlik (2000), and, to analyze the audience factor, Broersma (2019).

According to Abrahamson (2006), narrative journalists use techniques from fiction, but never cross the limits to the epistemological side of fiction. With this in mind, the researcher suggests that digital online environments widen the set of tools available for journalists to build authenticity, which is one of the keys to online narrative journalism.

Berning (2011) highlights that interactivity, multimediality and hypertextuality—characteristics of online journalism highlighted by Deuze (2001)—offer enhanced means of immersion. The researcher, supported by an interdisciplinary framework that focuses on a transgeneric narratological research, creates a set of categories that describe, analyze and label journalistic reportages. With her criteria in place, Berning (2011) challenges the argument that journalism and literature cannot overlap and have different communicative goals.

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<sup>1</sup> "Circulation averages for the six months ended: 12/31/2019". Alliance for Audited Media. Media. December 31, 2019. Retrieved April 2, 2022

<sup>2</sup> The website can be accessed at: <<https://www.newyorker.com>>

Both Abrahamson (2006) and Berning (2011) argue that narrative journalism can be seen as a hybrid text capable of informing, educating and entertaining, regardless of the platform and, when analyzing shifting media environments, the authors suggest that narrative journalism adapts to where it circulates.

Deuze (2001) states that there are four main categories that encompass “online journalisms”: 1) Mainstream News sites, which offer a selection of editorial content and minimal participatory communication; 2) Index & Category sites, which are less tied to mainstream media organizations and more aligned with search engines, and marketing agencies; 3) Meta & Comment sites, characterized by content that can be seen as ‘journalism about journalism’ and sometimes built to be media watchdogs (Pavlik, 2000); and 4) Share & Discussion sites, characterized by providing a platform where users can connect via a ‘group weblog’ and share accounts of how individuals experience the Internet.

*The New Yorker* website falls under category 1) Mainstream News sites. Although the category gives context to how the website operates, it does not address audience experience. Broersma (2019) addresses new trends in digital journalism and how social networks operate, especially in terms of authority and dynamic information. Networks influence the journalistic practice, but this study is more interested in understanding the concept of engaged audiences (Broersma, 2019).

“Audience engagement (also, user engagement) refers to the cognitive, emotional, or affective experiences that users have with media content or brands. Contrary to passive exposure to news content, engagement denotes an active and intentional orientation toward what users read, view, or hear” (Broersma, 2019: 1).

Broersma (2019) argues that when an audience feels engaged, it can lead to greater interaction with the content, increased consumption of content and news, and greater purchasing of products related to the brand. The researcher also points out that “engagement should be conceptualized as a process rather than as a measurable stable state of being” (Broersma, 2019: 3). This definition opens space to consider the social, political and economical inclinations and shifts of audiences.

According to Pew Research (2014), 52 percent of *The New Yorker's* audience hold "consistently liberal" political values, while 77 percent of those readers hold left-of-center political values. In this light, readers of *The New Yorker's* narrative journalism hold certain expectations toward the tone of the content it provides.

Pavlik (2000) highlights that journalism has always been shaped by technological innovations. In his research, he suggests that technological changes affect journalism in four different areas:

“(1) the way journalists do their job; (2) the nature of news content; (3) the structure and organization of the newsroom and the news industry; and (4) the nature of the relationships between and among news organizations, journalists and their many publics, including audiences, competitors, news sources, sponsors and those who seek to regulate or control the press” (Pavlik, 2000: 229).

New technologies not only affected the journalism aspect of *The New Yorker*, but also the way it produces and presents multimedia content.

On *The New Yorker* website, the navigation bar is currently divided into 11 categories: 1) News; 2) Books & Culture; 3) Fiction & Poetry; 4) Humor & Cartoons; 5) Magazine; 6) Puzzles & Games; 7) Video; 8) Podcasts; 9) Archive; 10) Goings On; and 11) Shop. Furthermore, there are many extra features given to the audience of the magazine. One example is *The New Yorker* app which was created in 2016 and is available to be downloaded for free. Another example is how the magazine adapts its content to a variety of social media channels such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

*The New Yorker* website allows visitors to have access to three free articles per month. Subscription options—that include print, digital, or both—vary if you are based in the United States or abroad. In the United States, one year of digital and print access costs \$74,99 and the exclusive digital access is \$49,99—same price for international audiences<sup>3</sup>. Students and educators have special offers to subscribe.

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<sup>3</sup> Subscriptions at *The New Yorker*: <<https://www.newyorker.com/subscribe>>. Accessed on May 28, 2022.

While articles on the main website operate under a paywall, *The New Yorker* has a specific website domain for videos<sup>4</sup> which does not have access limitations. *The New Yorker* videos can be reached freely and internationally and are divided into nine categories: 1) Books; 2) Business; 3) Culture; 4) Humor; 5) Politics; 6) Science & Tech; 7) Sports; 8) Paid Post; 9) News. The vast majority of the hundreds of videos displayed are considered mini or short documentaries and have a length that ranges from 2 to 25 minutes.

Even though the videos are an important aspect of *The New Yorker*'s editorial production, there has not been significant academic research dedicated to studying *The New Yorker*'s audiovisual content. This study aims to bridge that gap and contribute to the discussion of how media products portray immigrant families.

To raise this debate based on the analysis of films enlightens how audiovisual products act “not as mirrors that reflect us, but, rather, as our dreams do, movies most truly reveal the times” (Deming 1969: 1). Understanding the framing techniques used to portray immigrant families explains how identities are “constructed” and “reconstructed” in front of the camera and how audiences' perceptions are formed.

## ***1.2 Representation in the media***

In multicultural, globalized, dynamic, and complex societies, stories circulate through cultural products. In this context, there is no distinction between the real (subjects and objects) and the imaginary (ideas, values, thoughts, etc.); the two coexist (Baudrillard, 1994).

In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann (1966) make a case for how social organization is composed of communication and language. The authors argue that language and the ability to communicate through symbolic objectification are what define humanity: “A special but crucially important case of objectification is signification, that is, the human production of signs. A sign may be distinguished from other objectifications by its explicit intention to serve as an index of subjective

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<sup>4</sup> Videos in *The New Yorker*: <<https://www.newyorker.com/video>>. Accessed on May 28, 2022.

meanings” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 35). In other words, social organizations would not be possible without signs, symbols and representations.

Before expanding on the matter of representation in the media, some terms need to be defined: spectacle, simulacra and simulation, and realism.

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, published in 1967, Debord (2012) explains that "all that once was directly lived has become mere representation" (Debord, 2012:12). The author makes a cultural critique and commentary on consumer culture while tackling mass media, class alienation, and the structures that lead to cultural homogenization. Debord (2012) argues that “when the real world is transformed into simple images, the simple images become real beings and efficient motivations of a hypnotic behavior" (Debord, 2012:18). Under this effect of hypnosis, audiences create a bond with the images, an affective identification between spectator and spectacle.

Building on Debord’s (1967) work, the cultural theorist and philosopher Baudrillard examined, in 1981, in the book *Simulacra and Simulation*, the relationships between symbols, society, and reality.

Baudrillard (1994) argues that as media products develop, they integrate themselves into daily life and “real” experience to such a degree that there is no distinction between the mediated and the unmediated sensation. Baudrillard (1994) states that media can become a simulation that threatens the distinction between ‘true’ and ‘false’, and between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’. The concept of “simulacrum” was originally designed to visually represent the image of a simulation, but has been theoretically extended to define all systems that derive from their initial meaning (Baudrillard, 1994).

Both Debord (2012) and Baudrillard (1994) work with the concept of “realism”, however, there has been several controversies in the literature on how to: 1) define if realism lies with the text itself or within the audience’s perception; and 2) define perceived realism. This study is interested in “perceived realism” and takes into consideration the work of Hall (2003). To articulate realism and film studies, this paper delves deeper into the contributions of Cutting (2005).

Realism is a concept that encompasses how representations created within media products relate to real world experiences (Hall, 2003). Hall (2003) structured her work

on perceived realism on six dimensions: 1) plausibility, 2) typicality, 3) factuality, 4) involvement, 5) narrative consistency, and 6) perceptual persuasiveness.

Plausibility refers to the probability in which the event could take place in the real world. Typicality refers to how typical the event is in the real world. Factuality refers to reality programming and encompasses the editing and/or production of a text. Involvement is the one of the most important dimensions for this study and refers to the relationship that develops between the audience and the character, whether it is a sympathizing or an identifying relationship. Narrative consistency indicates how cohesive the story being told is. Lastly, perceptual persuasiveness refers to how well a story or an event is portrayed visually (Hall, 2003), and it is also an important dimension for this study.

The dimensions listed play a crucial role in determining perceived realism of media products. When it comes to cognitive film studies, scholars explain that audience's experience reality by 1) tracing similarities between perception of the real world and perception of film sounds and images, and 2) stressing the role of film narrative in lending cohesion and unity to perceptual experiences which lead to an experience of realism (Cutting, 2004).

The discussion of spectacle, simulacra and simulation, and realism is extensive and could go further, but this study is more interested in understanding, specifically, how representations are applied to films.

Among many definitions, the Oxford dictionary (1989) describes the verb 'represent' as "to be a symbol of something." In order to analyze what representation means in film analysis, this study relies on the work of Münsterberg (1970) and Bordwell (2008, 2013), the founders of cognitive film theory in the humanities.

Münsterberg (1970) argues that film has the ability to imitate mental processes. Due to *mise-en-scène*, framing and editing techniques, the flow of images on the screen mirror the way human minds work. In movies, "the objective world is molded by the interests of the mind" (Münsterberg, 1970: 46).

The experience of the world often develops, and is even replaced, by representations. "In this way, the intentionality of the representations, as a product of

social practices, gains the sense of taking for itself the status of truth and dissociates itself from the material and objective world" (Barbosa, 2006: 75).

To put it in another way, representations and their by-products are the raw materials of narratives. Agamben and De La Durantaye (2012) analyze this relationship by stating that:

“The history of humanity is always the history of ghosts and images, because it is in the imagination that the fracture between the individual and the impersonal, the multiple and the unique, the sensitive and the intelligible takes place, and, at the same time, the task of their dialectical recomposition. Images are the rest, the vestiges of what the men who preceded us hoped and wished, feared and removed. And since it is in the imagination that something like a history has become possible, it is through the imagination that it must, each time, again decide itself” (Agamben and De La Durantaye, 2012: 63).

From this standpoint, “the narrative space incorporates the work of recording events and surpasses it, since it is constituted by inventions, creations, interpretations, and reconstructions. In short, all of these elements are representations of the social space in movement” (Barbosa, 2006: 83). Tan (2018) adds to this idea:

“Extracting events in understanding film scenes needs more than retrieving schemas of real world events. The fact that they are presented with an idea in mind, is reflected in their understanding. Understanding film scenes and especially characters, their actions, plans and goals has been argued to require a so-called *Theory of Mind* (Levin et al., 2013). TOM is a system of cognitive representations of what beliefs, needs, desires, intentions and feelings people have in their interaction with others and the world” (Tan, 2018:6, original emphasis).

Tan (2018) states that viewers understand relations between complex scenes, events and characters by mentalizing what people feel, think, and do. “For example, character *gaze following* that underlies our perception of what characters feel or want to do with respect to an object that they look at requires TOM” (Tan, 2018: 6, original emphasis).

*Theory of Mind* is also related to character engagement. Character engagement is measured by a viewer response that involves wishful identification and perceived similarity (Hoffner and Buchanan, 2005), identification (Tal-Or and Cohen, 2010) and empathy (Zillmann, 1995).

Among many techniques and procedures, one of the most relevant for engaging with characters is “focalization”. Focalization has been considered by many scholars as an effective tool that promotes character engagement and structures narrative discourse (Bal, 1997; Bálint and Kovács, 2016; Bordwell, 2008; and Deleyto, 1991).

Focalization “refers to different narrative techniques that regulate the perceived proximity to a character’s mind such as feelings, thoughts, and attitudes” (Bálint and Kovács, 2016:4). Focalization, through depth of information, reveals characters’ internal world. Focalization has two modes: internal or external (Bruner, 2009).

“Techniques that communicate the character’s mental states, such as a close-up of the facial expression or an expressive lighting that matches the emotional state of the character, realize internal focalization in the movie, whereas the absence of these techniques makes external focalization more dominant in the narrative” (Bálint and Kovács, 2016:9).

Through internal focalization, characters’ mental states and thoughts are shared, through external focalization, the focus is on characters’ actions by “reporting only their acts and gestures, as seen from the outside with no attempt at explanation” (Genette, 1993: 66). While many *mise-en-scène* elements can present characters through external focalization, it is believed that resorting to internal focalization can promote higher character engagement (Bal, 1997).

In this light, representations and cognitive patterns help audiences grasp not only action between characters, but also spatial relations in scenes. In other words, representations articulate and organize cognitive and perceptual responses to films (Sobchack, 1992).

In the interest of elaborating elements that play a role in film absorption, this study adopts the lens of media psychologists (Green and Brock, 2000; Zillmann, 1995) and elaborates two measures of absorption-like states: 1) transportation and 2) empathy.



Transportation is defined by Green and Brock (2000) as a transition into the film's story-world. The term "entails a personal relevance and participatory sympathetic feeling, amplifying the emotional quality of the experience" (Green and Brock, 2000:32). Empathy helps audiences absorb the inner life of characters. Zillmann (1995) defines viewer empathy as the capacity to perceive, understand and emotionally respond to a character's feelings.

Bordwell (2008) states that representations rely heavily on the experience of continuity. The author suggests that the Hollywood film style delivers the experience of continuity well because it offers a smooth progress of narrative. "Continuity editing ensures fluency across shot transitions. Shot A cues cognitive schema-based or narrative expectations that are subsequently matched in shot B" (Tan, 2018: 6). In this sense, the expectations can be either cognitive or perceptual, but regardless of their manifestation they are always supported by a cohesive representation of psychological mechanisms that operate under aesthetic patterns (Tan, 2018).

Representations determine the various relations that individuals or groups maintain and negotiate their identities with the social world. Despite the subjectivity that permeates consumption of any cultural product, representations are a testimony of the memory of a group, community, society, etc., and give shape to the collective imaginary (Barbosa, 2006).

Understanding how representations are created, edited, and distributed in films is crucial for realizing how society interacts with cultural products to build, and renegotiate, reality.

### ***1.3 Family studies***

Many academics have researched family, family dynamics, and the sociology of family (Greenberg and Brand, 1994; Coontz, 1995; Hochschild and Machung, 2012; and McCarthy and Edwards, 2010). The word 'family' has been interrogated in various studies, always testing the concept against its context and social setting.

For family researchers, defining experiences of family can be a challenging task (Coontz, 1995; McCarthy and Edwards, 2010). This happens because family members,

often in order to maintain intimacy and group cohesion, perceive family dynamics as confidential. There is consensus within the field that by building trust, researchers can access personal information about individuals and family dynamics (Hochschild and Machung, 2012). Furthermore, the field of family studies has undergone major reformulations since conversations about “sexuality” Foucault (1990), and “intimacy” Giddens (2013) have taken place.

This study is interested in family dynamics because it analyzes how seven immigrant families are portrayed in documentaries through *mise-en-scène*. However, it does not give a comprehensive view on family studies as it understands that the visual manifestation of family can clearly be distinguished in the movies analyzed. Furthermore, since the term family is constantly in dispute, this study focuses on “family practices” and “family displays” (Finch, 2007; Morgan, 2011). Family practices are actions directed at people who are characterized as family members and these actions are oriented by sustaining those specific relationships (Finch, 2007; Morgan, 2011). Family displays are structured on establishing “this is my family” to others (Finch, 2007, original emphasis).

To understand how family dynamics are determined and unravel, it is necessary to identify what constitutes a family. In order to define ‘family’ one must take into consideration that, over decades of family studies, the term has become a matter of considerable controversy and dispute (McCarthy and Edwards, 2010).

“There are many questions about social life that seem to require the concept of ‘the family’ as an object that exists and can be studied. Similarly, policy makers may feel the need for a clear model or benchmark of what ‘the family’ is, in order to develop legislation and general procedures. A different solution is to use the term in the plural and refer to ‘families’. This acknowledges the diversity of lifestyles and relationships that might be referred to as ‘family’, offering a way forward which is widely accepted in family studies” (McCarthy and Edwards, 2010: 2).

Prior to engaging more thoroughly with family studies, concepts like “identity” and “ethnicity” need to be defined. Identity is a topic that concerns all spheres of a

person's life: public and private spaces, politics, education, language and culture. Maalouf (2011) states that:

“Each individual's identity is made up of a number of elements, and these are clearly not restricted to the particulars set down in official records. Of course, for the great majority these factors include allegiance to a religious tradition; to a nationality—sometimes two; to a profession, an institution, or a particular social milieu. But the list is much longer than that; it is virtually unlimited” (Maalouf, 2011: 10).

Maalouf (2011) argues that “identity isn't given once and for all: it is built up and changes throughout a person's lifetime” (Maalouf, 2011: 20).

When it comes to ethnicity, this study adopts a social anthropological lens that looks at the term as “relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive” (Eriksen, 2005:136). Ethnicity here is focused on ethnic tendencies and how they play a role in defining identities and family structures.

Eriksen (2005) argues that “nationalism stresses the cultural similarities of its adherents and, by implication, it draws boundaries vis-à-vis others, who thereby become outsiders” (Eriksen, 2005:138). This dichotomy creates boundaries between the “self”, the local, and “the other”, the foreigner, which influences power relationships, privileges and family dynamics.

The term “family” is not only of significance to sociology scholars, but also impacts people's emotions (McCarthy and Edwards, 2010) and political rhetoric (Wong, 2016). Despite its influence, ‘family’ is a concept that is not broadly discussed within journalism studies; even though “the family”, as an institution, relates to major social institutions such as educational, economic and employment systems (Hochschild and Machung, 2012).

In addition to theorizing the term ‘family’, this study is interested in understanding how a ‘family unite’ or a ‘family composition’ can connect to a set of topics such as: inequality, global issues, diversity and, ultimately, be established as

“close relationships and their dynamics, in the context of various dimensions of age, generation, gender and sexuality” (McCarthy and Edwards, 2010: 4).

For the purpose of this study, it is important to see how families are linked to wider social patterns. McCarthy and Edwards (2010) suggest that families can be seen as a key feature in analyzing global economic systems, patterns of migration, and tendencies of employment and care. The authors also point out that “national and international legal systems define citizenship rights by reference to family ties,” (McCarthy and Edwards, 2010: 5).

This study acknowledges that the field of family studies is changing and adopts an intersectional approach to understand how social class relations, nationalism, immigration status, gender inequalities and other variables explain family life and organization.

### ***1.3.1 Immigrant families***

Research on migration, immigration and forced displacement is complex. This study, seeking to impart knowledge about immigrant families in the media, will analyze the works of Suárez-Orozco and Carhill (2008) and Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014).

The study takes into consideration that the reasons behind an individuals’ desire to resettle in a new country are diverse: prosperity, education, financial betterment, to be reunited with family, among others.

Before making the case of how immigrant families are perceived in the media, it is important to make the distinction between a migrant and an immigrant family.

About 3.4 percent of the global population<sup>5</sup>—258 million from the world’s total count of 7.7 billion people—is composed of international migrants. The United States has the largest population of migrants compared to any other country in the world. Migrants are individuals who move, willingly, to another state or country, most often in search of employment or better opportunities (Suárez-Orozco and Carhill, 2008).

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<sup>5</sup> Data from the Migration Policy Institute. <<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/content/explainer-who-immigrant>> Accessed May 24, 2022.

Immigrants are individuals who move to another country, legally and willingly, with the intention of settling there permanently (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). With the aid of legal documents, immigrants qualify to work, become lawful permanent residents—eventually citizens—and build a life without restrictions in their new country. More importantly, these individuals are free to return home whenever they choose.

“Although migration is fundamentally a family affair, the family, as a unit of analysis, has been understudied both by scholars of migration and by developmental psychologists. Researchers have often struggled to conceptualize immigrant children, adolescents, and their families, all too often giving way to pathologizing them, ignoring generational and ethnic distinctions among immigrant groups, stereotyping immigrants as “problem” or (conversely) “model” minorities, and overlooking the complexity of race, gender, documentation, and language in their lives” (Suárez-Orozco and Carhill, 2008:10).

With clear definitions in place, this study can now introduce the discussion of how immigrant families are portrayed in the media.

### ***1.3.2 Immigrant families in the media***

Many scholars have pointed out that the media can play a decisive role in combating or promoting racial prejudice and therefore has a considerable influence on ethnic relations (Greenberg and Brand 1994; Hall, 2000; Wong, 2016). Among these scholars, most studies have found more negative than positive representations of immigrant minorities in mass media. The recent media tendency to shift the “migratory blame” from individuals to structural economic forces represents a responsible reporting of the facts, but such emphasis is also limiting and does not account for the complexity of the representation of immigration in the media (Wong, 2016, original emphasis).

In this study, since *The New Yorker* is a North American media outlet based in the United States, it is important to focus on how immigration is perceived in the United States, its role in popular and elite discourse across the ideological spectrum, and how it influences American identity (Wong, 2016).

Even though the idea of the United States as an immigrant nation is regularly reflected in media and political rhetoric, the American public opinion<sup>6</sup> has been polarized in recent years, and opposition to immigration is one of the defining factors in this division (Wong, 2016). Among perceived threats, the main ones are of cultural identity (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014) and a menace to the economy (Dancygier, 2010).

In this scenario, a growing literature addresses strategies to increase positive attitudes toward immigrants (Adida, Lo, and Platas, 2018; Hopkins, Sides, and Citrin, 2019) and to combat anti-immigrant attitudes (Wong, 2016).

The media is a key player in this dynamic because of its ability to manipulate perspective-taking (Adida, Lo, and Platas, 2018). Research suggests that individuals that score high on empathy hold greater positive attitudes toward immigrants (Hartman and Morse, 2020). Moreover, an individual feels more empathy when they are capable of giving consideration to a person's perspective (Batson and Shaw, 1991). Therefore, media products that encourage perspective-taking with immigrant characters reduce out-group prejudice, or in other words, "perspective-taking increases willingness to engage in contact with negatively-stereotyped targets" (Wang, Kenneth, Ku and Galinsky, 2014:1).

There are many studies that investigate how perspective-taking develops. Most instruct individuals to reflect on peoples' experiences, may that be by imagining themselves in a similar situation or imagining peoples' feelings (Wang, Kenneth, Ku and Galinsky, 2014:3). Personal attachment or shared experience with someone like a family member also have a big influence in establishing bonds and making individuals engage more in perspective-taking (Batson and Shaw, 1991).

Moreover, "temporarily extended interactions" (Batson and Shaw, 1991), or "prolonged states of attention" (Münsterberg 1970), whether in-person or virtually through media products, increase the chances of perspective-taking. With this in mind, this study is interested in measuring the time in which family dynamics unfold in the seven selected documentaries. Further explanation on this matter is presented in the methodology chapter.

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<sup>6</sup> In this study, public opinion will be considered as people's input on political decision making (Abts and Rummens, 2007).

### *1.4 Cinema studies*

Cinema is a mass medium that instigates experiences and conveys emotions and perceptions. For Baudry (1986), cinema is a system consisting of three articulated levels: the first is a technological apparatus of production and exhibition (camera-project-screen), the second is characterized by the psychological effect of illusionist identification projection, and the third involves the cultural industry as a social institution, an active producer of the social imaginary.

Based on these factors, it is possible to affirm that cinema exerts a direct influence on reality, since it is capable of influencing the way spectators perceive it and also impact their behavior derived from this assimilation. Cinema, therefore, can be considered a social and economic institution, a medium, and an art form.

According to Metz (2010:16) “cinema is a storytelling machine that possesses an air of reality, a direct hold on perception that has the power to displace crowds.” And its popularity is conferred by the impression of reality constructed by movement.

“Here we find an idea that is not new and was often developed after Jean-Paul Sartre's studies on the imaginary: the real never tells stories; memory, because it is a narration, is totally imaginary; an event must be somehow closed so that—and before—its narration can be initiated” (Metz, 2010:37).

In this sense, Metz points out that cinema will never be a faithful portrayal of reality and deconstructs the possibility of reproducing the real world. At most, sound and image generate devices that can represent reality. Nichols (2005) agrees with this idea and adopts the concept of “representation” to discuss cinema. The author argues that: “we cannot guarantee that what we see is exactly what we would have seen if we were present next to the camera” (Nichols, 2005:19).

Among the various devices that compose a film, there are: scenes, shots and takes. Lacey (2018) defines a scene as a unit of space-time composed of a set of shots. A shot is the portion of film between two cuts. A take is the portion of film between the firing of the camera and its interruption (Lacey, 2018).

In other words: the scene is composed during the editing, from the takes, which will be defined when the cuts that determine them are established from the available

shots. Therefore, the control of the visual elements—or simply the control of *mise-en-scène* which is discussed further on—is the foundation for the constitution of the scene.

Understanding the formal aspects that compose a film is essential to grasp its creation process and its intended meaning (Lacey, 2018). Some formal aspects include: framing, angle, and distance. Other elements like composition, depth of field, and lighting are also important and are examined in the *mise-en-scène* section.

Simply put, all images have frames. “When analyzing images, the formal aspects are almost wholly related to the image’s frame,” (Lacey, 2018:13). The frame determines what the audience is allowed to see, and what is left out of sight. Roughly, the frame, with its dimensions and shapes, determines the position from which the image is seen. More aspects of visual framing are explained in the next chapter.

Another formal aspect of films that is important to consider is angles. “The angle of vision refers to the camera’s angle in relation to the vertical,” (Lacey, 2018:14). Lacey (2018) says that the camera can adopt many angles, among them: a low angle and a high-angle. The first directs the audience to look up at a character or object, and, therefore, indicates a position of power. The latter directs the audience to look down at a character or object, and, most commonly, indicates a subservient position. However, no assumptions must be made and the meaning of the shot can only be determined by context. Lacey (2018, original emphasis) also points out that some shots can be taken with a “birds’ eye view”, when the shot is directly over the scene.

Analyzing the created distance in a shot also reveals significant aspects about a film’s composition. “Distance refers to the distance of the object from the camera,” (Lacey, 2018:15). Lacey (2018) says that there are six distance categories: “1) extreme long shot (a landscape); 2) long shot (a group of people); 3) medium shot (one or two people); 4) medium close-up (part of the body); 5) close-up (face); 6 extreme close-up (part of face)” (Lacey, 2018:15-16).

Formal aspects of films are crucial to filmmakers as they express their cinematic ideas. Other aspects of film composition such as editing and montage are also important. Shimamura (2013) reflects about the role of editing:



“What, then, is the role of editing? Eisenstein proposed that we think of each shot as a bundle of stimuli. Cutting shots together can build up associations that will shape our perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. At its simplest level, editing can arouse motor responses” (Shimamura, 2013:35).

Roughly, all formal elements combined should contribute, harmonically, to the progression of the narrative and guide the audiences’ attention in following the plot across scenes.

#### ***1.4.1 Documentary studies***

Cinema studies can be seen as an area that explores films—with many styles, countries and cultures of production and distribution—from 1895 to the present. Among various angles to examine, this study is interested in focusing on one genre: documentary film.

Before defining what constitutes a documentary, it is necessary to establish the concept of document. Le Goff (1978) states that every document has a contestable historiographical value, since it is “the fruit of choices and intentions of those who draw it up, thus being a partial point of view of history” (Le Goff, 1978:546). Thus, it cannot contribute as unquestionable proof, being:

“a montage, conscious or unconscious, of history, of the epoch, of the society that produced it, but also of the successive epochs during which it continued to live, perhaps forgotten, during which it continued to be manipulated, albeit by silence. The document is something that remains, that lasts, and the testimony, the teaching (to evoke the etymology) that it brings must first be analyzed by demystifying its apparent meaning. The document is a monument. It results from the efforts of historical societies to impose on the future, voluntarily or involuntarily, a certain image of themselves” (Le Goff, 1978: 547-548).

Bringing this concept to the field of cinema, Grierson (2014) states that “the documentary is the creative treatment of reality.” The genre was launched with Robert

Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* in 1922, the result of over ten years of meetings between the North American explorer and the Inuit, the people represented in the film.

Through his testimony, Flaherty enabled the development of emotional situations, which were not usually explored in exclusively observational footage. About the film, Barnouw (1993) remarked "the drama, with its potential of social impact, engaged with something more real: people being themselves" (Barnouw, 1993: 39). And so the documentary as a film genre was born, a combination between "(...) 1) poetic experimentation; 2) narrative storytelling; and 3) rhetorical oratory" (Nichols, 2005:123).

A documentary film can start from a project and/or documentary script, or have an improvised starting point, a situation not previously elaborated, researched or scripted. Regardless of the approach, the concept of representation is fundamental to think about the documentary genre within cinema studies (Nichols, 2005).

The documentary genre was heavily influenced by Italian neorealism (Nichols, 2005). The national film movement, and the narrative styles that derived from it, "created a common thread between fiction and non-fiction, which remains until today: to tell a story or give voice to a historical worldview do not need to be seen as polarized alternatives" (Nichols, 2005: 129). In other words, represented reality can be constructed in several ways, using various resources. In this light, the documentary:

"It represents a particular view of the world, a view we may never have come across before, even if the aspects of the world represented in it are familiar to us. We judge a reproduction by its faithfulness to the original, its ability to look like the original, to act like it, and to serve the same purposes. We judge a representation more by the nature of the pleasure it provides, the value of the ideas or knowledge it offers, and the quality of the orientation or direction, tone or point of view it instills. We expect more from representation than from reproduction" (Nichols, 2005: 47-48).

Nichols (2005) argues that there are six types of documentary: 1) expository; 2) observational; 3) participatory; 4) performative; 5) poetic; and 6) reflexive. Each mode contains its own specific characteristics and operating mechanisms.

Nichols (2005: 128) states that “the sense of photographic realism, of revealing what life has to offer when it is shot with simplicity and sincerity, is not something to be considered as truth, it is a style.” And the idea of realism can be constructed through three techniques. The first is photographic realism, which “generates a realism of time and place”, the second is a psychological realism, which “implies the transmission of the intimate states of characters and social actors in a plausible and convincing manner”, and the third is emotional realism, which “relates to the creation of an appropriate emotional state in the viewer” (Nichols, 2005:128-130).

These three ways of constructing the realistic aesthetic still need to take into account the theory of the “third meaning” by Barthes (2006) which distinguishes three levels in the filmic image. The first is of an informative character, which refers to an acquired knowledge of the setting, the characters, etc.; the second concerns the knowledge originated through the symbols linked to the theme of the film and its author; and the third is moved entirely by the emotion generated, the affection towards the spectacle. Thus, filmic representations can be presented in a visual, symbolic, and affectionate way (Barthes, 2006).

According to Nichols (2005), the boundaries of documentary are drawn by institutional, professional, textual, and audience factors. In the institutional aspect, the author proposes what one should expect and demand from a documentary film degrees of reliability, objectivity, credibility, and references to the historical world. These aspects are incorporated as molds for the production; but the mold is not fixed, Nichols (2005) points out that the idea of a documentary changes as the documentarians' idea of what they do changes.

Documentary cinema is the kind of film that is in the field of non-fiction, but which, in addition, produces "assertions about the world outside of us" (Ramos, 2014: 22). The documentary genre is the film category that presents itself with the greatest tendency and credibility to portray reality; but, even so, it must be seen as only a representation that contains an apparent truthfulness.

### ***1.5 Framing studies***

This study first addresses representation in the media as a way of understanding the mechanisms involved in the creation of meaning. How meaning is produced and shared speaks directly to the epistemology of framing. Many scholars have investigated framing and frames in the media. Most work involves news media framing (De Vreese, 2005; Tankard Jr, 2001), however this study is mainly interested in understanding visual framing (Coleman, 2010).

A *frame* was first defined as a “spatial and temporary bounding of a set of interactive messages” (Bateson, 1972:197) that functions under the premises of metacommunication (Hallahan, 2008).

*Frame Analysis* has academic roots in the fields of sociology and media theory. In contemporary media studies, “frames” can be seen as organizing principles that circulate in a determined social mindset and persist over time to, meaningfully and symbolically, structure the social world. According to Goffman (1974), *Frame Analysis* examines how frames organize experience and structure the meaning of messages.

The concepts of framing and agenda-setting are closely related, but framing expands the research (Mass Communication Theory (Online), 2017). Agenda-setting is based on two main ideas: 1) the media and the press do not reflect reality, they shape and filter it; 2) media focus on certain issues orient the public to perceive those issues as more important (Rogers and Dearing, 1988). Framing theory goes beyond the agenda-setting tradition because it suggests that the media highlights certain events and then places them within a field of meaning (Goffman 1974). That is to say, how the frame is presented to the audience influences the understanding people have and how they process that information.

Not only do frames tell the audience what to think about (agenda-setting), but also how to think about that issue (Mass Communication Theory (Online), 2017). Goffman (1974) argues that there are two main primary frameworks: 1) natural, that regard events as physical occurrences, without any focus on the causation; 2) social, that regard events as socially driven occurrences, in other words, subject to the manipulations and intentions of social players. Social frameworks can only be built on natural frameworks and have a key role in how information is processed, communicated, and interpreted. Goffman states that people use frameworks on a daily

basis, whether they are conscious of this or not (Mass Communication Theory (Online), 2017). The psychology of framing is complex and involves persuasion and belief structures:

“The standard model of communication-based persuasion typically involves a source who presents a message about an attitude object to an audience. If the audience member both understands and believes the message, and the message is discrepant from his or her prior attitude, then the attitude should change in the direction implied by the message” (Nelson et al., 1997: 225).

According to Fairhurst and Sarr (1996), there are seven main framing techniques: 1) metaphor, to frame an idea through comparison; 2) stories, to frame a topic via narrative; 3) tradition, to reinforce culturally significant rituals and ceremonies; 4) slogan, to frame an object with a catchy phrase; 5) artifact, to frame an object that holds more meaning than its practical utility; 6) contrast, to describe an idea in terms of what it is not; 7) spin, to present an idea with the intention of conveying a value judgment (positive or negative).

Regardless of the technique used, audiences rely on perceptions of reality built from interactions with peers, personal experiences, and interpreted representations and selections from mass media (Scheufele, 1999). Simply put, all forms of media provide additional layers for perceiving the social world.

According to Entman (1991), there are five main ways to frame news narratives: 1) conflict, when the conflict is highlighted as opposed to the consequence; 2) human interest, when personality is promoted more than other aspects; 3) consequence, when the consequence of actions is emphasized; 4) morality, when news coverage takes a moral tone, or, simply, inputs judgment on a series of events; and 5) responsibility, when responsibility—for a solution or cause—is attributed.

In this light, journalists create frames in a conscious way: selecting, organizing and presenting ideas, events, and topics. “The act of making news is the act of constructing reality itself rather than a picture of reality” (Tuchman, 1978: 12). And frames are essential to this construction. “A frame is a central organizing idea for news

content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (Reese, 2001: 10). So not only do frames help structure facts, but they allow the facts to take on meaning and relate to larger systems of meaning. “By tackling the question of how meaning is structured, framing relates closely to ideological analysis, but it places greater emphasis on the nature of the organizing structures and how they get established” (Reese, 2001: 19).

Frames are “the persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse” (Gitlin, 1980: 7). Bearing this in mind, framing gives mass media great power: the perceived attention of a public issue is directly related to the amount of coverage this issue has on various media products (Reese, 2001).

Reese (2001) states that “frames are *organizing principles* that are socially *shared* and *persistent* over time, that work *symbolically* to meaningfully *structure* the social world” (Reese, 2001: 11, original emphasis). The researcher explains each aspect of this statement systematically: 1) organizing: the frame depends on how it successfully organizes information; 2) principles: the frame relies on an abstract principle; 3) shared: the frame must be shared on some level to reach significance; 4) persistent: the frame relies on its durability, its ability to persist over time; 5) symbolically: the frame relies on symbolic expression; 6) structure: the frame offers structures or patterns that can be identified. With all of these definitions in place, the researcher addresses in detail how frames emerge, persist, and affect audiences. Reese (2001) also makes distinctions on the initial organization of frames. While some frames are cognitively organized, appealing to basic psychological biases, others are cultural:

Cultural frames do not stop with organizing one story, but invite us to marshal a cultural understanding and keep on doing so beyond the immediate information. These are the “strategic” frames that speak to a broader way to account for social reality. (Reese, 2001:13)

In visual studies, framing is characterized by the careful selection of an angle, scene or viewpoint when creating, editing or selecting an image (Coleman, 2010). The mood of a scene or its characters can be explained by analyzing the placement of

subjects and the amount of space in the shot (Coleman, 2010). The following section gives a more detailed account of how frames can be built through mise-en-scène elements in films and direct audiences towards certain meanings and perspectives.

### *1.6 Mise-en-scène*

Translated from French, according to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, mise-en-scène means “placing on stage.” The technique is a result of the coordination of everything (décor, props, people, etc.) placed in front of the camera. Simply put, mise-en-scène is a term that encompasses all elements that contribute to the visual presentation of a film.

This study will rely on the works of numerous scholars to give a comprehensive view on mise-en-scène and all of the meanings it articulates (Aumont, 2006; Cassidy, 2013; Gibbs, 2002; Lewis, 2014 ; Lacey, 2018; Monaco, 2009; and Pierson, 2010).

Traditionally, the elements of mise-en-scène and their definitions are present in studies about fiction cinema, both to discuss narrative issues, language, and analytical procedures. However, in the field of documentary cinema, the concepts of mise-en-scène all apply.

Some scholars focus on the conceptual variations of mise-en-scène and scene, thought especially in relation to documentary cinema and mainly focused on the concepts of staging (Feldman, 1977; Lewis, 2014); and auto mise-en-scène (Comolli, 2015; Freire, 2012).

To define the concept of mise-en-scène, it is possible to consider the succinct idea that it is "the director's control over what appears in the filmic frame" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013: 205). In addition to the director's control, the authors also attribute responsibility to the audience suggesting that mise-en-scène can also be identified by what the viewer remembers after seeing the film: “Of all the techniques of cinema, mise-en-scène is the one with which we are most familiar. After seeing a film, we may not recall the cutting or the camera movement, the dissolves or the offscreen sound, but we will almost surely recall items of mise-en-scène” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013: 119).

Kolker (2011) defines *mise-en-scène* as “the film's articulation of narrative space,” (Kolker, 2011: 22). The author suggests that *mise-en-scène* contributes to storytelling and to the creation of “narrative thrust”. To put it in another way, the elements of *mise-en-scène* are the propulsive force of a film, elements that guide the cognitive assumptions of the audience, and “everything seen in the *mise-en-scène* contributes to individual viewer perception which ‘completes’ the film as a coherent story,” (Kolker, 2011: 11, original emphasis). Kolker (2011) suggests that *mise-en-scène* allows audiences to make sense of the story being told and Gibbs (2002) says that the *mise-en-scène* elements are a result of what viewers see on screen and the way they are invited by the filmmakers to view it.

According to Barsam and Monahan (2010), within the sphere of formalism, there are five main *mise-en-scène* elements that create mood and meaning among a films’ shots: 1) set design; 2) lighting; 3) space; 4) costumes; and 5) acting.

Because this study only considers documentary films, costumes and acting will not be elaborated further. However, set design, lighting and space will be detailed and discussed more thoroughly.

When it comes to analyzing the set design, it is important to remember that documentary films, originated from real life experiences, incorporate contemporary social issues in their narratives to build bridges of understanding with their viewers (Marcus and Stoddard, 2009). With this in mind, the documentary provides a common experience for all viewers allowing them to discuss related news, controversies, and family histories (Russell, 2012). Therefore, it can act as a testament of time and allow audiences “to reflect on how exposure to the film influences one’s own views on the issue” (Marcus and Stoddard, 2009:420). Set design refers to the choice of a set and how it is designed to give a film’s narrative a sense of place, mood and character mindset. The set design can be divided into two main categories: *décor* and props.

According to Sreekumar and Vidyapeetham (2015), *décor* and props—such as furnishing and specific objects—can trigger interpretations from the audience and convey a message. Lewis (2014) states that exterior and interior architectures not only convey the personality of characters, but also give context of their social, political and economical surroundings. Lathrop and Sutton (2014) highlight that the set design is an



essential visual element of a given film, in which the audience can see and determine the time and place of the narratives. According to Ramos (2014) there are three types of staging in the documentary tradition.

The first is constructed staging, formed by studios and non-professional actors. The second is staging in the location, which occurs in the circumstances of the world where the main characters live and transit. And the third is attitude staging, which refers to the behaviors adopted by the characters when in presence of the camera and the film crew. Furthermore, when it comes to staging, Lewis (2014) suggests that placing an object in the foreground will highlight its significance in the narrative.

When it comes to lighting, Bordwell and Thompson (2008) indicate four major features: color, directions, source, and quality. The researchers discuss how lighting can play a fundamental role in creating a “range of tonalities” (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008: 156).

“Light becomes the mood that gives its tone to a film. It calls upon our memory to react to physical phenomena such as cold, rain, fog, sun, or dryness, and come up with psychological equivalents such as annoyance, sadness, mystery, fear, anguish, comfort, joy, gaiety, etc. As these effects produce immediate impressions in viewers, the cinematographer is able to obtain psychological reactions out of mere technical means” (Geuens, 2000:153).

There are two main categories of lighting relevant to this study: high-key lighting and low-key lighting. According to Lacey (2018), high-key lighting happens when the scene is evenly, and brightly, lit. This type of lightning is the most common because it allows a more rapid flow of shooting. In contrast, low-key lighting requires a careful set-up and is frequently used for expressive purposes, “characters who have half of their faces obscured by shadow might suggest that the person has a hidden side” (Lacey, 2018:20).

Lighting is one of the aspects of *mise-en-scène* that is used to frame characters’ personalities. Lewis (2014) states that low-key lighting sets the emotional tone of a given scene and, when it is manipulated, with any color tint, for example, it can increase the narrative’s dramatic effect.

Poland (2015) investigated the impact of three lighting styles on audience perceptions. In her doctoral thesis, *An Examination of Film Lighting and Its Impact on Audiences' Emotional Response*, the researcher found out that “high key will cause audiences to feel higher levels of uplifting emotions such as happiness, joy, or humor; and a film in low key will cause more feelings of suspense, mystery, and intrigue” (Poland, 2015:1).

When it comes to analyzing space in a shot, there are many categories: negative or positive; closed or open; shallow or deep; and if it uses frontality or off-screen techniques. Kolker (1999) lists some factors that determine space: the depth of field, the size of people, places and props in a frame, and the distance from one character to another. Coleman (2010) also attributes meaning to visual elements when arguing that the use of camera angles (looking down or up), the paraproxemic variable (different camera distances, eg.: long shot, medium shot, etc.), nonverbal expression (gestures, posture etc.), and other visual cues play a significant role in visual framing and how a film is perceived.

Cassidy (2013) makes clear distinctions between positive and negative space. Positive space refers to areas, subjects or objects of interest and focus in a film, and it is used to create points of engagement with the audience (Cassidy, 2013). According to Cassidy (2013), distributing positive space in a frame is a technique that creates scale, mood and weight or balance (symmetrical or asymmetrical). Positive space can also occupy the entire frame, which is called “filling the frame” and normally accompanies a close-up or extreme close-up camera distance.

Negative space, or “white space”, surrounds positive space in films and is typically empty (Cassidy, 2013). Negative space can simplify a composition, create scale, weight and indicate the character’s emotional state (Cassidy, 2013). This composition technique is usually accompanied by a medium or long shot camera distance.

Whether filmmakers use more positive or negative space in their frames depends on what they wish audiences will focus on and how they want them to feel. Both compositional techniques create an effective tonal tone. Bálinit and Tan (2015) state that audiences use spatial proximity to describe their subjective experiences with film

characters. “A sense of closeness is associated with a more intimate and emotionally intense experience of character engagement, while a sense of distance is associated with the lack of relatedness” (Bálint and Kovács, 2016:3).

Adding to the definitions of space, Monaco (2009) states that closed spaces are strictly controlled by elements of *mise-en-scène*, everything has function and relates more to formalism. By opposition, when the formal elements do not seem to be staged, and the space relates more to realism, the space is open (Monaco, 2009). Scholars normally associate open space with documentaries, however, this study considers that the very act of bringing a camera into a location diminishes realism and the possibility of a true open space.

Monaco (2009) argues that closed space carries “self-sufficient meaning” structured by schematic patterns. This means that an object's meaning is its function in a larger whole and implies a complete control of how the filmmaker constructs the filmic world. Despite differences between open and closed space, it is important to keep in mind that the terms are not absolute and that a combination of them in a film is not only possible, but preferable.

When it comes to depth of field, shallow focus refers to when only one plane of the scene is in focus while the rest is blurred. On the contrary, deep focus refers to when the foreground, middle ground, and background are all in focus (Pierson, 2010). Deep space happens when elements of a frame are positioned both near to and distant from the camera, shallow space does not allow this wide distribution and focuses only one plane (Pierson, 2010).

Pierson (2010) argues that shallow focus indicates introspection since it portrays characters as unaffected or unaware of the world around them. This technique can indicate an elevated emotional state of mind or internal struggle (Pierson, 2010). When it comes to deep focus, Pierson (2010) states that filmmakers wish to make audiences aware of the setting and how characters interact with what surrounds them. Emotionally, this means that viewers adopt an active, distanced, and observational position, which allows access to all of the multiple stories contained within a frame.

As stated before, Lacey (2018) argues that there are six distance categories when it comes to labeling the paraproxemic variable (the camera distance). In this section, they will be more detailed.

According to Gibbs (2002), filmmakers use extreme close-ups and close-ups for five main reasons: 1) to convey emotion; 2) to change the narrative pace; 3) to highlight a character's subtleties; 4) to communicate that something or someone is important; 5) to make the story relatable for viewers.

Medium close-up shots and medium shots are used for three main purposes: 1) to enhance body language; 2) to fill a transition into another shot; 3) to allow characters to interact with props and their surroundings (Gibbs, 2002). Since medium shots highlight both the characters and their environments, they send visual cues of how the characters navigate the world around them.

Long shots and extreme long shots are often used: 1) to show a characters' surroundings by serving as an establishing shot (which indicates time, place, and upcoming actions); 2) to indicate power dynamics (especially through scale); 3) to establish a certain state of mind (Gibbs, 2002). Many times, long shots indicate that the subject or character is just a small piece of a larger puzzle.

Pierson (2010) states that if the main subject faces the camera directly, a space with frontality occurs and if the viewer is left to imagine a suggested image and/or context, an off-screen space occurs. It is important to note that even when the frame uses off-screen techniques, the audience recognizes the context.

All elements of *mise-en-scène* are narrative procedures that can bring the audience closer or further away from the characters. Within documentaries, linguistic codes (such as monologues, voice-overs, inserts, etc.) and visual codes (such as shot types, lighting, filming and editing techniques, etc.) contribute to create mood and meaning for what is perceived on screen.

Considering all of its different approaches, the use of *mise-en-scène* helps structure the visual framing of a film, enables the reading of the narrative, and the creation of a mood from start to finish. Elements of *mise-en-scène*, more specifically set design, lighting and space, will guide the methodology of this study.

## 2. Methodology

With the research question of this study being *RQ: How do documentaries featured in the New Yorker portray immigrant families through mise-en-scène?* this paper analyzes, through close textual analysis (Lewis, 2014), seven documentaries featured in *The New Yorker*.

The films were selected based on intentional sampling methods. In film studies, intentional sampling methods are composed of non-probabilistic procedures that select a group of films for a sample with the purpose of meeting specific criteria.

To select the documentaries, the criteria of this study was: 1) The description that *The New Yorker* provided about the film had to indicate that it talked about immigrants. An example of this criteria can be found in the description of ***Guanajuato Norte***: “The first time that Wenceslao (Winny) Contreras left Mexico for the United States, he did not intend to look back. It was the spring of 1984, and an uncle had agreed to let Contreras join his journey north,” writes Stephania Taladrid<sup>7</sup>, a contributing writer at *The New Yorker*. 2) The description that *The New Yorker* provided about the films had to indicate that it talked about immigrant families and all of the possible dynamics that play out in this context. An example of this criteria can also be found in the description of ***Guanajuato Norte*** above. 3) The description that *The New Yorker* provided about the films had to incorporate words that referred to family roles, such as “father”, “grandmother”, “daughter”, etc.. An example of this criteria can be found in the description of *Seasons*: “In Gabriella Canal and Michael Fearon’s documentary “Seasons,” a mother and daughter find themselves at a crossroads as they consider the future of their family farm,” reads the description elaborated by *The New Yorker*<sup>8</sup>.

If two out of the three criteria were met, the film could be considered to be a part of the sample of this study. Taking into consideration the parameters established, the seven documentaries selected were:

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<sup>7</sup> **An Intimate Look at a Farmworker’s Divided Life**, in “Guanajuato Norte”, by Stephania Taladrid. <<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-documentary/an-intimate-look-at-a-farmworkers-divided-life-in-guanajuato-norte>> Accessed May 22, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> **A Mother’s Plea to Keep Her Farm Running**, by *The New Yorker*. <<https://www.newyorker.com/video/watch/the-new-yorker-documentary-a-mothers-plea-to-keep-her-farm-running>> Accessed May 22, 2022.

1. *Ale Libre* (16'33, in this study "Movie I"), directed by Maya Cueva, and released on 09/29/2021.
2. *Guanajuato Norte* (19'04, in this study "Movie II"), directed by Ingrid Holmquist and Sana A. Malik, released on 08/19/2020.
3. *Seasons* (21'50, in this study "Movie III"), directed by Gabriella Canal and Michael Fearon and released on 05/04/2022.
4. *Sing Me a Lullaby* (28'59, in this study "Movie IV"), directed by Tiffany Hsiung, and released on 01/11/2021.
5. *Team Meryland* (27'35, in this study "Movie V"), directed by Gabriel Gaurano, and released on 09/15/2021.
6. *The Prince of Luna Park* (15'11, in this study "Movie VI"), directed by Daniel Lombroso, and released on 09/01/2021.
7. *Yves & Variation* (15'22, in this study "Movie VII"), directed by Kervin Marseille and Katie Sheridan, and released on 08/12/2020.

Together, the seven films amount to over 100 minutes of audiovisual content, making it infeasible to expand the scope of the research. Out of the movies selected, they portray, respectively, families with origins from: Mexico, Mexico, North Korea, Taiwan, Mexico, Italy and Haiti.

To assess the films and their mise-en-scène elements, this study uses close textual analysis (Lewis, 2014).

Close textual analysis is a qualitative method that has been used by many film scholars such as Bateman and Schmidt (2013), Lewis (2014), and Taylor (2014). This method requires noticing and questioning all of the elements that create meaning within the film.

Besides perceiving the individual aspects that contribute to the meaning of a film, close textual analysis also involves a comprehensive understanding about how the audiovisual material fits into the larger context of its historical, social, political and cultural environment.

To establish 'meaning' within film analysis, this paper considers the phenomenology of film experience and the concept of "wild meaning" (Sobchack 1992). The concept of wild meaning is "the pervasive and yet undifferentiated

significance of existence as it is lived rather than reflected upon,” (Sobchack, 1992: 11). In other words:

“The moving picture, too, perceives and expresses itself wildly, and pervasively, before it articulates its meanings more particularly and systematically as this or that kind of signification” (Sobchack, 1992: 12).

Films induce perceptions, and Sobchack (1992) also suggests that the audience’s experience is a composition of emotion, attention, and thinking of what is projected before them on the screen. The lens of wild meaning allows a subjective openness in the relationship between the viewer and the film. Therefore, this study does not aim to suggest that media products can have one "official" or "true" meaning, rather, it encompasses the fact that there will always be various interpretations, but maintains the word ‘meaning’ as a guideline that structures deliberations about visual *mise-en-scène* elements.

In order to perform a close textual analysis of a film and understand its meaning, Lewis (2014) suggests that the focus should be on the formal elements of films. In other words, the author refers to the films’ form and to elements of narrative, sound, camera work, editing and *mise-en-scène*. This study focuses on three elements of *mise-en-scène*: set design, lighting and space. The study does not consider acting and costumes as their “sense of construction”, or, sense of formalism, seems unlikely for documentary films.

Furthermore, this study performs a close textual analysis on the films with the following approach: 1) first, the researcher identifies the family composition in the film; 2) second, the researcher considers scenes where family member interact; 3) third, the researcher uses a stop-clock to measure how long the family dynamics play out in a scene; 4) the researcher analyzes the *mise-en-scène* elements to understand the meaning of the scenes in which the family members interact. The scenes are analyzed through *mise-en-scène*, therefore, they are described in terms of camera placement and lenses, set design, lighting, depth, proximity, proportions, and other visual aspects that outline moods and relationships between elements and characters in the story.

Drawing from the studies of Coleman (2010) about visual framing, and the studies of mise-en-scène by Cassidy (2013), Monaco (2009) and Pierson (2010), this research offers a recap of definitions stated previously and follows the table below:

Category	Code	Description/main focus
a) Set Design	Décor	The choice of decorations in a film and their significance.
	Props	The objects used by the characters in <i>The New Yorker</i> documentaries and their significance.
b) Lighting	Low Key	Low brightness, higher contrast and more shadows.
	High Key	Higher brightness, low contrast and low shadowing.
c) Space	Negative Space	Everything in the frame that's not the subject of the director's focus.
	Positive Space	Positive space happens when the frame shows, mainly, the main subject.
	Closed Space	Complete control of formal elements of mise-en-scène.
	Open Space	Not a strict control of formal elements of mise-en-scène.
	Shallow Space	The scene is staged with very little depth of field between elements.
	Deep Space	The scene is staged with a high depth of field between elements.



	Frontality	Frontality refers to the staging of the subject so that they face the camera.
	Off-screen	Requires context and a suggested image that is left to be imagined by the viewer.

With these categories, codes and descriptions, it is possible to explain the extent to which elements of mise-en-scène provide meaning and mood to the visuals in *The New Yorker* documentaries that portray immigrant families. Studying these documentaries may expand the body of knowledge on films focusing on mise-en-scène analysis and immigrant families.

The study of each individual documentary is structured as follows: 1) a brief summary is given about the plot of the film; 2) three elements of mise-en-scène: a) set design, b) lighting and c) space are identified; 3) all three elements of mise-en-scène are analyzed on each scene where family dynamics take place; 4) the quantity of time family dynamics play out in the documentary is registered to make a comparison of how much time the family was shown in relation to the overall time of the film.

For this study, only the scenes in which the family physically interacts, in the same space/time, are taken into consideration. Therefore, scenes that show family albums or family photographs on mobile phone screens for example, are not taken into account. Furthermore, scenes that have four seconds or less are also not taken into consideration because this study considers that five seconds is the minimum time required to fully analyze mise-en-scène elements and their meaning.

### 3. Mise-en-scene Analysis

#### *I. Movie I: Ale Libre (16'33), directed by Maya Cueva, and released on 09/29/2021.*

**Summary:** Alejandra Pablos faces deportation from the United States to Mexico. Her mother moved to the US in 1986, when Alejandra was a baby, and lawyers failed to mention that the family had to petition citizenship for all members, including the baby. Alejandra's family assumed that if a parent became a US citizen, their children would automatically become citizens as well. After living in the US for all her life, Alejandra gets pulled over by policemen after a night out with friends and they demand to see her documents. After many processes took place, US authorities put her on probation for two years. From the neighborhoods of Arizona to the halls of Congress, "Ale Libre" shows her ongoing fight, as she pleads her case to stay in the US and her asylum court hearing approaches.

#### **Mise-en-scène:**

**Scene I** - [Indoor/Night] - Alejandra's house.

**Shot I** - 10 seconds: 10:49 - 10:59: Alejandra and her mother look at a mobile phone together.

- a) Set design:** Décor: Fruits on the foreground. **Props:** Phone
- b) Lighting:** Low-key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Close-up

**Shot II** - 57 seconds: 10:59 - 11:56: Alejandra is in her kitchen with her mother and her brother.



Figure 1: Shot of Alejandra's family in her kitchen. This is the shot in which family dynamics unraveled the longest in *Ale Libre*. Source: *The New Yorker*.

- a) **Set design:** Décor: Fruits on the foreground; kitchen appliances. **Props:** Kitchen utensils
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene II** - [Outdoor/Day] - The entrance of Alejandra's home.

**Shot I** - 10 seconds: 12:52 - 13:02: Alejandra and her mother embrace.

- a) **Set design:** **Decor:** Bricks on the wall and an open door in the background. **Props:** No props
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, open space, shallow space

**Camera:** Close-up

**Scene III** - [Outdoor/Day] - The patio outside of the courthouse.

**Shot I** - 6 seconds: 13:42 - 13:48: Alejandra and her mother embrace other people after the court ruling.

- a) **Set design:** **Decor:** Brick wall and glass window. **Props:** Handbag, sunglasses
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Negative space, open space, deep space

**Camera:** Long shot

### Takeaways from the mise-en-scène in Movie I:

Family dynamics were shown in 1'23 minutes out of the 16'33 that compose *Ale Libre*. In other words, family dynamics composed 8.36 percent of the film.

Taking into consideration all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in the three scenes and four shots where family dynamics unravel for more than four seconds in *Ale Libre*, this study presents **Figure 2**:

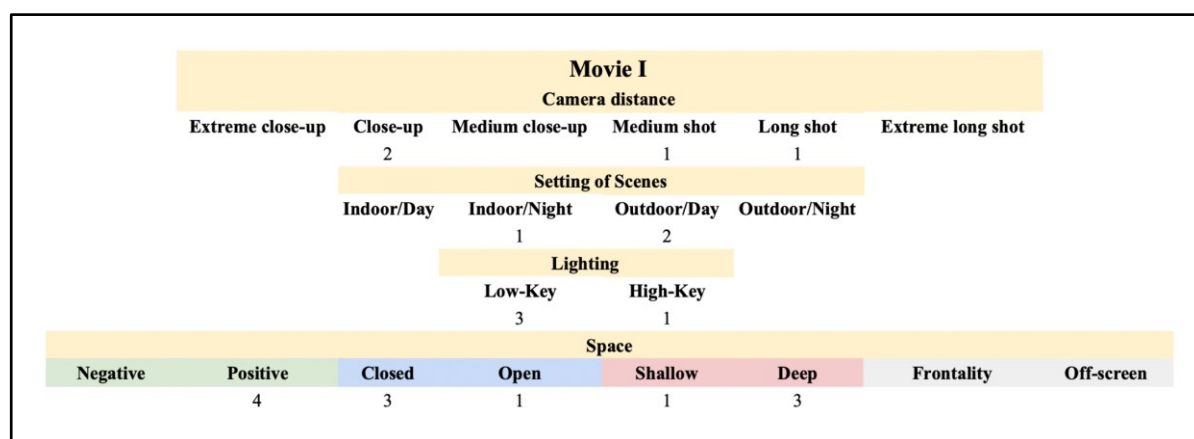


Figure 2: A compilation of all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in *Ale Libre*. Source: Own elaboration.

**Figure 2** shows that “close-up”, as discussed by Gibbs (2002), was the main camera distance used to portray family dynamics. In terms of setting, outdoor scenes and everyday objects, such as phones and bags, were prioritized. Low-key light, assessed by Lacey (2018), was used more than high-key. And, in terms of analyzing space, the pattern that appeared the most in *Ale Libre* is “positive, closed and deep”, as discussed by Cassidy (2013), Monaco (2009), and Pierson (2010).

**Movie II: Guanajuato Norte, (19'04), directed by Ingrid Holmquist and Sana A. Malik, released on 08/19/2020.**

**Summary:** “Guanajuato Norte” explores the meaning of home. The farmer Wenceslao (Winny) Contreras left Mexico for the United States in the spring of 1984, at the age of 16. With his uncle, Wenceslao traveled nearly two thousand miles by bus from Tierra Blanca, his home town in the state of Guanajuato, to Tijuana. Wenceslao

knows that his life is divided between the US and Guanajuato, where his family—his wife Maura and their two children—resides. In many ways, Wenceslao followed the steps of his father who worked as a bracero, a seasonal agricultural worker, in Michigan. The difference is that Wenceslao was eligible for the amnesty bill of 1986, signed by Ronald Reagan, that allowed him to preserve a job in the U.S. while keeping his ties to Mexico. Now, Wenceslao continues to work to be able to provide for his children something that was denied to him: a higher education. The farmer normally returns to Tierra Blanca once a year, in December, when his working fields in Connecticut that compose the Rose's Berry Farm are frozen.

**Mise-en-scène:**

**Scene I** - [Indoor/Day] A room in the farmhouse.

**Shot I** - 13 seconds: 11:30 - 11:43: Wenceslao shows a photo of his father to the camera while talking to his mom. They are laughing and making jokes.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Chairs, computer **Props:** Photos
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, open space, shallow space, frontality, off-screen

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene II** - [Outdoor/Day] On top of a hill, in front of the car.

**Shot I** - 11 seconds: 12:58 - 13:09: Wenceslao hugging his daughter and son.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Colorful houses, car **Props:** Phone
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium to medium close-up

**Scene III** - [Outdoor/Day] On the street.

**Shot I** - 6 seconds: 14:08 - 14:14: Wenceslao and his wife are walking on the street holding hands.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Balconies, street elements **Props:** Balloons
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close up to close up

**Scene IV** - [Indoor/Day] Inside the church.

**Shot I** - 7 seconds: 14:29 - 14:46: Wenceslao and his wife are sitting at the church and talking about their daughter.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Church chairs **Props:** Earrings
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, shallow space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene V** - [Indoor/Night] Graduation prom.



Figure 3: Shot of Wenceslao and Mayra at the graduation prom. This is the shot in which family dynamics unraveled the longest in *Guanajuato Norte*. Source: *The New Yorker*.

**Shot I** - 29 seconds: 15:34 - 16:03: Wenceslao and Mayra are doing a slow dance in the prom.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Bracelet
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key, tinted pink, purple and orange
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, shallow space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Shot II** - 12 seconds: 16:08 - 16:20: Wenceslao and Mayra finish dancing, they hug and wipe off tears.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Bracelet
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key, tinted pink, purple and orange
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

### Takeaways from the mise-en-scène in Movie II:

Family dynamics were shown in 1'18 minutes out of the 19'04 that compose *Guanajuato Norte*. In other words, family dynamics composed 6.82 percent of the film.

Taking into consideration all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in the five scenes and six shots where family dynamics unravel for more than four seconds in *Guanajuato Norte*, this study presents **Figure 4**:

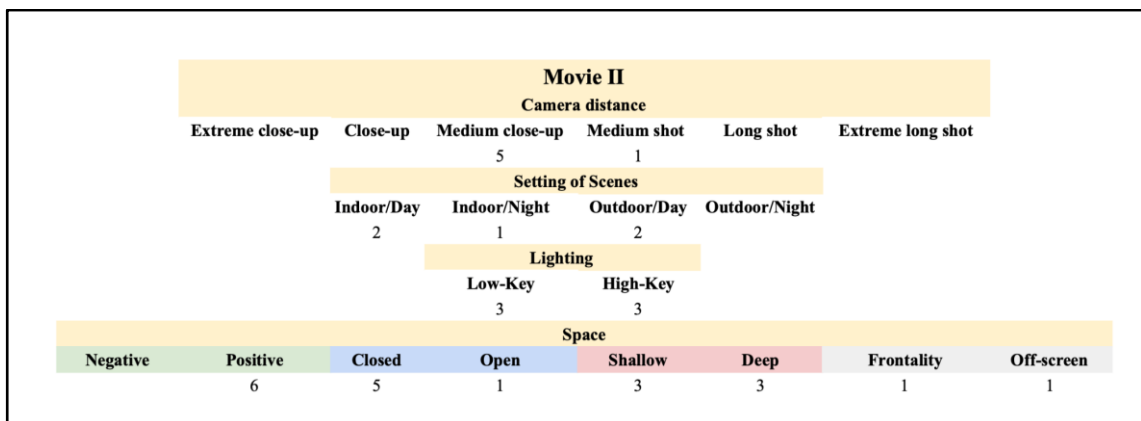


Figure 4: A compilation of all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in *Guanajuato Norte*. Source: Own elaboration.

**Figure 4** shows that “medium close-up”, as discussed by Gibbs (2002), was the main camera distance used to portray family dynamics. In terms of setting, scenes filmed during the day were prioritized and personal objects such as earrings, phones, photographs and bracelets appeared more. There was an equal distribution among shots that had low-key lighting and high-key lighting. In addition, techniques of tinted light studied by Lewis (2014) could be seen in two low-key shots. And, in terms of analyzing space, the pattern that appeared the most in *Guanajuato Norte* is “positive, closed and an equal distribution among shallow and deep” as discussed by Cassidy (2013), Monaco (2009), and Pierson (2010). Additionally, frontality and off-screen spaces appear as discussed by Pierson (2010).

**Movie III: Seasons (21'50), directed by Gabriella Canal and Michael Fearon and released on 05/04/2022.**

**Summary:** “When I first saw this land, I fell in love in five minutes,” Nevia remembers in one of the first scenes of the movie. “Seasons” is a story about family, motherhood, the immigrant experience, Korean tradition and legacy, but, above all, succession. The movie is filmed in Bodhitree Farm—in the New Jersey Pinelands—and shows the immigrant leader of the farm, Nevia No, and her daughter Euni Park as they navigate their relationship and discuss the future of the farm and Nevia’s desire to keep it in the family. *Seasons* was shot in the fall of 2020 and cycles through the farm’s operation the following winter, spring, and summer.

**Mise-en-scène:**

**Scene I - [Outdoor/Day] Street market event.**

**Shot I - 7 seconds: 3:23 - 3:30:** Nevia and her daughter, Euni, are hosting a street market event where they sell their vegetables.

- a) Set design: Decor:** Vegetables, tent **Props:** Phone, masks
- b) Lighting:** High-key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene II - [Indoor/Day] Inside of the farming tent.**

**Shot I - 13 seconds: 4:30 - 4:43:** Nevia and Euni are arguing because Euni started cleaning up too early and now her mom will have to make a mess again.

- a) Set design: Decor:** Boxes with soil, plants, heating lamp, tables. **Props:** Shovels, gloves, aprons, waxed paper.
- b) Lighting:** High Key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Long shot

**Shot II - 13 seconds: 4:43 - 4:50.**

- a) Set design: Decor:** Boxes with soil. **Props:** Gloves, aprons, tables.
- b) Lighting:** High Key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space



**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene III** - [Indoor/Day] Kitchen in the family's home.

**Shot I** - 25 seconds: 7:05-7:30: Euni, Euni's boyfriend and Nevia's mother make mandu (Korean dumplings), and celebrate Lunar New Year.

- a) Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** containers, cutting board, dumplings
- b) Lighting:** Low Key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, shallow space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Shot II** - 6 seconds: 7:30-7:36

- a) Set design: Decor:** Clock, chandelier, paintings, candles **Props:** jars, plates, kitchen utensils
- b) Lighting:** Low Key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Long shot

**Scene IV** - [Indoor/Day] Dinner in the family's dining room.

**Shot I** - 12 seconds: 7:56-8:08: Euni, Euni's boyfriend, Nevia and Nevia's mother eat dinner together.

- a) Set design: Decor:** Painting **Props:** dinner utensils, wine bottle
- b) Lighting:** Low Key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Long shot

**Shot II** - 7 seconds: 8:19-8:26

- a) Set design: Decor:** Refrigerator, lamp, chairs, countertop **Props:** dinner utensils
- b) Lighting:** Low Key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene V** - [Indoor/Day] Inside of the farming tent.

**Shot I** - 6 seconds: 9:33-9:39: The family is sorting through the freshly picked vegetables and putting them in bags.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Tent structure, shelves **Props:** Plastic bags with vegetables, boxes with food.
- b) **Lighting:** High key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Long shot

**Shot II** - 6 seconds: 9:45-9:51

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Tent structure, funils **Props:** Farming utensils, plastic bag, vegetables.
- b) **Lighting:** High key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene VI** - [Outdoor/Day] Inside of the farming tent.

**Shot I** - 7 seconds: 9:58-10:05: Nevia and Euni are walking through the snow together with their bags.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Fence, dry trees, farming tent **Props:** Plastic bags.
- b) **Lighting:** High key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene VII** - [Outdoor/Day] Nevia, Euni and Euni's boyfriend are saying goodbye in the car.

**Shot I** - 8 seconds: 10:06-10:14: Nevia and Euni hug each other before the daughter gets into the car.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Houses, fence, car **Props:** Travel bags, containers
- b) **Lighting:** High key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Long shot

**Scene VIII** - [Outdoor/Day] Nevia and Euni are working in the field.

**Shot I** - 16 seconds: 12:11-12:27: Nevia and Euni discuss who is carrying the tools from the car back to the field.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Car, field **Props:** Hat, boxes, scarf, bucket
- b) **Lighting:** High key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Shot II** - 15 seconds: 12:37-12:52: Nevia supervises the work in the field.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Field, houses **Props:** Buckets
- b) **Lighting:** High key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Extreme long shot

**Scene IX** - [Indoor/Day] Inside the farming tent.

**Shot I** - 7 seconds: 14:03-14:11: Nevia is working and talks about how she can tell someone's personality by the way they move.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Tent structure, lamp **Props:** Farming tools, boxes, seedlings
- b) **Lighting:** High key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Long shot

**Scene X** - [Outdoor/Day] Talking on the farm.



Figure 5: Shot of Nevia and Euni talking about the plant that wasn't watered. This is the shot in which family dynamics unraveled the longest in *Seasons*. Source: *The New Yorker*.

**Shot I** - 26 seconds: 15:50-16:16: Euni is upset because no one watered her plants and they look very dry. Nevia tries to comfort her.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Fence, field **Props:** Plants in boxes, hats
- b) **Lighting:** High key

**c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene XI** - [Outdoor/Day] Taking plants out of the water.

**Shot I** - 6 seconds: 17:53-17:59: Nevia and Euni are drying some plants.

**a) Set design: Decor:** Window, wooden walls **Props:** Tools, buckets, plants

**b) Lighting:** Low key

**c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene XII** - [Indoor/Day] The family is in the kitchen.

**Shot I** - 7 seconds: 20:22-20:29: Nevia, Euni and Nevia's mother are talking.

**a) Set design: Decor:** Stove, microwave, wooden cabinets **Props:** Kitchen tools, gloves

**b) Lighting:** Low key

**c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene XIII** - [Outdoor/Day] The garden.

**Shot I** - 13 seconds: 20:37-20:50: Euni is looking at her mother performing music.

**a) Set design: Decor:** Top of a tree, sky **Props:** Necklace

**b) Lighting:** High key

**c) Space:** Positive space, open space, shallow space, off-screen

**Camera:** Close-up

### **Takeaways from the mise-en-scène in Movie III:**

Family dynamics were shown in 3'20 minutes out of the 21'50 that compose *Seasons*. In other words, family dynamics composed 15,27 percent of the film.

Taking into consideration all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in the 13 scenes and 18 shots where family dynamics unravel for more than four seconds in *Seasons*, this study presents **Figure 6:**

Movie III							
Camera distance							
Extreme close-up	Close-up	Medium close-up	Medium shot	Long shot	Extreme long shot		
	1	5	5	6	1		
Setting of Scenes							
	Indoor/Day	Indoor/Night	Outdoor/Day	Outdoor/Night			
	6		7				
Lighting							
		Low-Key	High-Key				
		6	12				
Space							
Negative	Positive	Closed	Open	Shallow	Deep	Frontality	Off-screen
	18	17	1	2	16		1

Figure 6: A compilation of all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in *Seasons*. Source: Own elaboration.

**Figure 6** shows that “long shot”, as discussed by Gibbs (2002) was the main camera distance used to portray family dynamics. Movie III is the only movie that has such camera distance preference and it highlights the distance between mother and daughter. In terms of setting, outdoor scenes and farming objects, such as shovels, plants and bags, were prioritized. High-key light, assessed by Lacey (2018), was used more than low-key. And, in terms of analyzing space, the pattern that appeared the most in *Seasons* is “positive, closed and deep”, as discussed by Cassidy (2013), Monaco (2009), and Pierson (2010). The high predominance of “deep space” can be interpreted as how the farm is one of the central subjects in the narrative and how Nevla stretches herself to interact with it and provide all of the resources the space needs. Additionally, off-screen, as discussed by Pierson (2010), is an employed technique.

**Movie IV: *Sing Me a Lullaby* (28’58), directed by Tiffany Hsiung, and released on 01/11/2021.**

**Summary:** Growing up, the filmmaker Tiffany Hsiung would hear Chinese lullabies every night in her Toronto home. Her mother, Wendy Ru-Wen Tan would sing them with care and nostalgia. Wendy was adopted and never spoke much about her origins, but Tiffany, in film school, decided to travel from Canada to Taiwan and investigate who could be her biological grandmother. “Sing Me a Lullaby” captures the filmmaker’s investigation of her mother’s story and creates a portrait of how family estrangement shaped her mother’s personality and life.

**Mise-en-scène:**

**Scene I** - [Outdoor/Day] Wendy's school balcony in Taipei.

**Shot I** - 6 seconds: 00:44 - 00:50: Tiffany and her mother Wendy are in Taipei where Wendy hasn't been for 43 years.

**a) Set design: Decor:** school banners in foreign language, trees, star and plane ornaments hanging from the ceiling. **Props:** phone, sunglasses, backpack

**b) Lighting:** High Key

**c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene II** - [Indoor/Day] Grandmother Popa's house.

**Shot I** - 8 seconds: 4:13 - 4:21: Tiffany and her grandmother are looking at photos of Wendy's childhood.

**a) Set design: Decor:** Red couch **Props:** photo album, reading glasses

**b) Lighting:** High Key

**c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene III** - [Indoor/Day] Wendy and Tiffany's house.

**Shot I** - 15 seconds: 04:32 - 04:47: Tiffany and Wendy are talking about finding Wendy's biological parents and Wendy is a bit upset because she doesn't believe that Tiffany can find her parents.

**a) Set design: Decor:** Chair, shelves, house objects, fish tank, table **Props:** sketchbook, pencil

**b) Lighting:** High Key

**c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Shot II** - 29 seconds: 04:48 - 05:19

**a) Set design: Decor:** a painting **Props:** sketchbook, pencil

**b) Lighting:** High Key

**c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space, off-screen

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene IV** - [Indoor/Day] Tiffany's biological grandmother's house in Taipei.

**Shot I** - 49 seconds: 11:05 - 11:54: Tiffany finds her biological grandmother. Grandmother reads the letter from her daughter and they both cry.

- a) Set design: Decor:** Red couch, pink curtains, coffee table. **Props:** Letter, reading glasses, backpack
- b) Lighting:** High Key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene V** - [Indoor/Day] Karaoke Bar.

**Shot I** - 13 seconds: 12:02 - 12:15: Tiffany and her grandmother are singing karaoke

- a) Set design: Decor:** Christmas lights, decoration **Props:** microphones
- b) Lighting:** Low-Key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene VI** - [Indoor/Night] Restaurant.

**Shot I** - 6 seconds: 12:46 - 12:52: Grandmother shows photos of Tiffany's mom and aunt from when they were babies.

- a) Set design: Decor:** Lamp. **Props:** Photo
- b) Lighting:** Low-Key
- c) Space:** Positive space, open space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene VII** - [Indoor/Night] Inside the taxi.

**Shot I** - 10 seconds: 13:50 - 14:00: Tiffany picks up her mom from the airport. They're talking in the car about how she feels to be back in Taipei.

- a) Set design: Decor:** No decor. **Props:** Neck pillow
- b) Lighting:** Low-Key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space, off-screen

**Camera:** Close- up

**Scene VIII** - [Outdoor/Night] In front of the apartment.

**Shot I** - 14 seconds: 14:26 - 14:50: Wendy sees her sister for the first time in over 30 years. They hug and cry.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Plants, motorcycles. **Props:** Suitcase, backpack
- b) **Lighting:** High-Key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space, off-screen

**Camera:** Long to medium shot

**Scene IX** - [Indoor/Night] - Wendy's mother's house.

**Shot I** - 38 seconds: 15:05 - 15:43: Wendy reunites with her biological mother. They hug and cry.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Fridge, TV, houseplants, pink curtains. **Props:** No props
- b) **Lighting:** High Key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up to close-up

**Scene X** - [Indoor/Night] Bedroom.

**Shot I** - 64 seconds: 15:44 - 16:48: Wendy is telling Tiffany about her feelings after her first interaction with her mother.



Figure 7: Shot of Wendy in the bedroom. This is the shot in which family dynamics unraveled the longest in *Sing Me a Lullaby*.

- a) **Set Design: Decor:** Bed, books, lamp **Props:** Bracelet
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, shallow space, frontality, off-screen



**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene XI** - [Indoor/Day] Restaurant.

**Shot I** - 21 seconds: 16:59 - 17:20: Wendy and her mom are dancing in slow motion

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Christmas lights and decorations, couches, TV  
**Props:** No props
- b) **Lighting:** High Key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene XII** - [Indoor/Day] Restaurant.

**Shot I** - 6 seconds: 17:25 - 17:31: Wendy's mother tells Wendy the story of why she had to give her up.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** coat rack, wall decorations **Props:** no props
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Negative space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Shot II** - 11 seconds: 17:35 - 17:46: Wendy cries as she listens to the story.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** no decor **Props:** tissue
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, open space, deep space

**Camera:** Close-up

**Shot III** - 7 seconds: 17:49 - 17:56:

- a) **Set design: Decor:** couch, hand bag **Props:** tissue
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Shot IV** - 24 seconds: 17:56 - 18:20: Wendy and her mom are holding hands.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** no decor **Props:** no props
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Negative space, open space, deep space, off-screen

**Camera:** Extreme close-up to medium close-up

**Scene XIII** - [Indoor/Day] Hospital room.

**Shot I** - 11 seconds: 20:13 - 20:24: Wendy, Tiffany and the rest of the family visit Grandma in the hospital after she has a stroke. They look at some old photos together.

- a) Set design: Decor:** hospital bed, medical equipment **Props:** photos
- b) Lighting:** High-key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene XIV** - [Outdoor/Day] School yard.

**Shot I** - 9 seconds: 21:08 - 21:17: Wendy and Tiffany are in the school yard talking about what a horrible thing it must be to give your child away and not being able to get them back because of money.

- a) Set design: Decor:** colored columns of the playground **Props:** sunglasses
- b) Lighting:** High-key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space, off-screen

**Camera:** Close-up

**Shot II** - 18 seconds: 21:18 - 21:36

- a) Set design: Decor:** slide, playground tools **Props:** sunglasses, backpack
- b) Lighting:** High-key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene XV** - [Indoor/Night] Wendy's mother's room in Taipei.

**Shot I** - 44 seconds: 23:14 - 23:58: Wendy and Tiffany are back in Taipei in 2019 for new years. They are saying hello to Grandma who is sick in bed.

- a) Set design: Decor:** Bed, drawers, wheel chair, bags **Props:** blanket, coats
- b) Lighting:** High key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene XVI** - [Indoor/Night] Family dining room.

**Shot I** - 8 seconds: 24:27 - 24:35: Wendy is helping her mom remember the memories in the video during family dinner.

- a) Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** No props
- b) Lighting:** High-key
- c) Space:** Positive space, open space, shallow space

**Camera:** Close-up

**Scene XVII** - [Indoor/Night] Wendy's mother's room.

**Shot I** - 64 seconds: 24:58 - 26: 02: Wendy is sitting next to her mother who is in bed and in a lot of pain.

- a) Set design: Decor:** Bed **Props:** Blanket, pillow
- b) Lighting:** Low-key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene XVIII** - [Indoor/Day] Karaoke bar.

**Shot I** - 24 seconds: 26:03 - 26:21: Flashback to the time where Wendy and her mom were singing karaoke.

- a) Set design: Decor:** TV, christmas lights and decoration: **Props:** microphones
- b) Lighting:** Low-key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene XIX** - [Outdoor/Day] Balcony looking out to hot springs and nature.

**Shot I** - 6 seconds: 26:32 - 26:38: Wendy explains to Tiffany why she never kissed or hugged them when they were younger.

- a) Set design: Decor:** Fence, structure **Props:** no props
- b) Lighting:** High-key
- c) Space:** Negative space, open space, shallow space

**Camera:** Close-up

**Scene XX** - [Outdoor/Night] Street Festival.

**Shot I** - 10 seconds: 26:51 - 27:01: Wendy and Tiffany are playing the gun game and laughing. Music in the background.

- a) Set design: Decor:** stuffed animals, toys **Props:** toy guns

- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, open space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene XXI** - [Indoor/Night] Karaoke bar.

**Shot I** - 11 seconds: 27:18 - 27:29: Wendy and Tiffany are singing karaoke.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Sunflowers, colorful lights **Props:** microphones
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

### Takeaways from the mise-en-scène in Movie IV:

Family dynamics were shown in 8'48 minutes out of the 28'58 that compose *Sing Me a Lullaby*. In other words, family dynamics composed 30.38 percent of the movie, making it the film that devoted, among all analyzed, the most time to portraying family dynamics.

Taking into consideration all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in the 21 scenes and 26 shots where family dynamics unravel for more than four seconds in *Sing Me a Lullaby*, this study presents **Figure 8**:

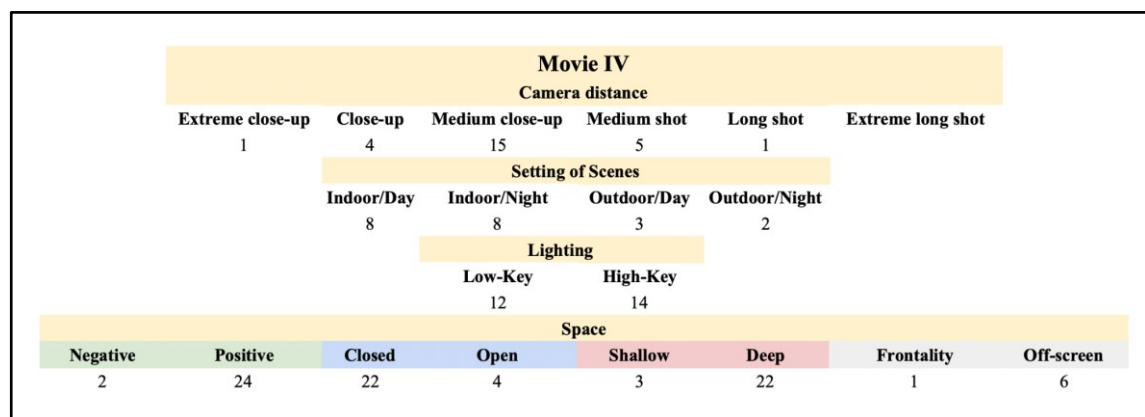


Figure 8: A compilation of all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in *Sing Me a Lullaby*. Source: Own elaboration.

**Figure 8** shows that “medium close-up”, as discussed by Gibbs (2002), was, by far, the main camera distance used to portray family dynamics. In terms of setting, the shots were filmed predominantly indoors, with an equal balance between day and night and personal objects such as bracelets, pillows, etc. When analyzing lighting, even

though the distribution was fairly close, high-key light, discussed by Lacey (2018), was used more than low-key. And, in terms of assessing space, the pattern that appeared the most in *Sing Me a Lullaby* is “positive, closed and deep”, as discussed by Cassidy (2013), Monaco (2009), and Pierson (2010). Additionally, frontality as discussed by Pierson (2010) and off-screen spaces are present. It is important to note that *Movie IV* has the most off-screen shots, implying that the narrative requires many images and contexts to be imagined by the viewer, as stated by Pierson (2010).

***Movie V: Team Meryland (27'35)*, directed by Gabriel Gaurano, and released on 09/15/2021.**

**Summary:** “Team Meryland” follows, for years, Meryland Gonzalez’s dream to represent the boxing Team U.S.A. at the 2024 Paris Olympics. The filmmakers started filming teenager Meryland in 2018, when she was only 12. Back then, she was already a big promise of the sport and was ranked third place for her weight and age. Ignited by a loss in the Junior Olympics, she started a period of intense training. Her parents Jorge and Araceli, immigrants from Zamora, a Mexican state of Michoacán, have always supported her, despite unfavorable conditions to pursue a career in sports. The family lives in a housing project in Watts and Meryland, now 15, is one of the highest-ranked boxers in the country for her division.

**Mise-en-scène:**

**Scene I** - [Indoor/Day] Kitchen table.

**Shot I** - 13 seconds: 06:28 - 06:41: Meryland is having breakfast with her sister.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Glass of milk, plate, fork
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene II** - [Outdoor/Day] In front of the family house.

**Shot I** - 9 seconds: 07:00 - 07:09: Meryland and her mother are leaving the house

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Christmas decoration on the door **Props:** Backpack, keys

- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, shallow space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene III** - [Outdoor/Day] In the car.

**Shot I** - 19 seconds: 08:00 - 08:19: Jorge and Meryland are talking about Meryland's birthday in the car.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** No props
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, shallow space, off-screen

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene IV** - [Indoor/Day] At the training center before a fight.

**Shot I** - 6 seconds: 13:01 - 13:07: Jorge and Meryland are doing warm-up exercises.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Curtains, cables, lights **Props:** Gym bag
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Shot II** - 11 seconds: 13:08 - 13:19: Jorge is wrapping Meryland's hands in bandage.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Bandage
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space, frontality

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene V** - [Indoor/Night] In the kitchen.



Figure 9: Shot Meryland's family in their kitchen. This is the shot in which family dynamics unraveled the longest in *Team Meryland*. Source: *The New Yorker*.

**Shot I** - 22 seconds: 13:30 - 13:52: Araceli is cooking dinner while Meryland hugs her father and little brother watches

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Trash bin, microwave, chairs **Props:** Cooking utensils
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Shot II** - 8 seconds: 13:55 - 14:03: Meryland's little brother and Meryland are in a friendly fight

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Trash can, fridge **Props:** Funny hat
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene VI** - [Indoor/Day] Next to the ring of the main fight

**Shot I** - 16 seconds: 24:31 - 24:47: Meryland hugs her mother after she wins the fight

- a) **Stage design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Bandages
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, shallow space

**Camera:** Close-up

### Takeaways from the mise-en-scène in Movie V:

Family dynamics were shown in 1'44 minutes out of the 27'35 that compose *Team Meryland*. In other words, family dynamics composed 6.28 percent of the movie, making it the film that devoted, among all analyzed, the least time to portraying family dynamics.

Taking into consideration all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in the six scenes and eight shots where family dynamics unravel for more than four seconds in *Team Meryland*, this study presents **Figure 10**:

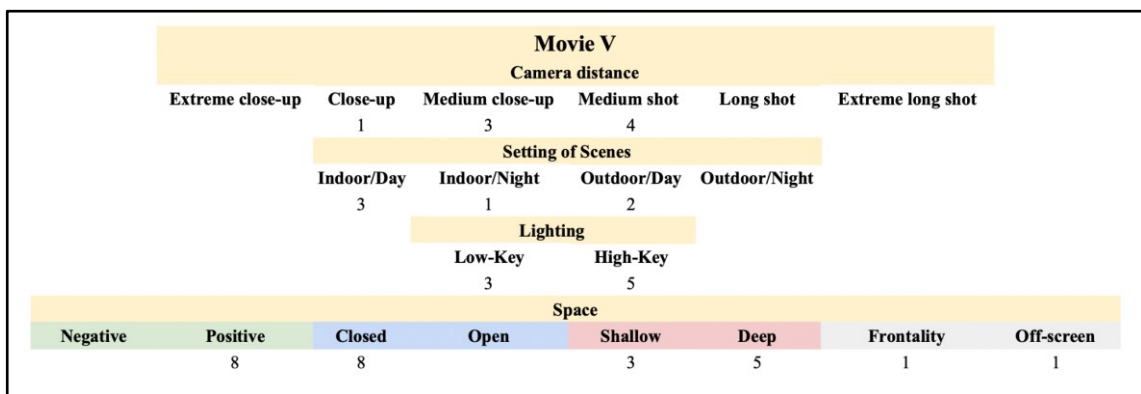


Figure 10: A compilation of all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in *Team Meryland*. Source: Own elaboration.

**Figure 10** shows that “medium shot”, as discussed by Gibbs (2002), was the main camera distance used to portray family dynamics. In terms of setting, the shots were filmed predominantly indoors, mainly during the day, and with objects that sometimes characterized the family home such as a glass of milk, kitchen utensils, etc., and sometimes made reference to the boxing gym such as bandages, boxing gear, etc. When analyzing lighting, high-key light, discussed by Lacey (2018), was used more than low-key. And, in terms of assessing space, the pattern that appeared the most in *Team Meryland* is “positive, closed and deep”, as discussed by Cassidy (2013), Monaco (2009), and Pierson (2010). Additionally, frontality and off-screen, as discussed by Pierson (2010), were techniques employed in some frames.



**Movie VI: *The Prince of Luna Park* (15'11), directed by Daniel Lombroso, and released on 09/01/2021.**

**Summary:** “The Prince of Luna Park” explores a father-son relationship against the backdrop of one of New York’s most legendary amusement parks. The Italian Zamperla family owns and operates Luna Park at Coney Island and has been in the entertainment business for more than a century. The movie follows Alessandro Zamperla as he tries to protect his family’s iconic theme park during the pandemic and prove himself to his father, Alberto Zamperla. Alessandro is torn between trying to be a good businessman and the fear of repeating Alberto’s mistakes as a parent that dedicated too much time to work.

**Mise-en-scène:**

**Scene I** - [Indoor/Day] Office backroom.

**Shot I** - 9 seconds: 02:47 - 02:56: Alessandro and Alberto are making coffee in the office.

- a) Set design: Decor:** Coat rack, kitchen utensils **Props:** Coffee machine, water bottle, face masks
- b) Lighting:** High-key
- c) Space:** Negative space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene II** - [Indoor/Day] Meeting room.

**Shot I** - 26 seconds: 03:04 - 03:30: Alessandro introduces Jim to his father. Then he takes him out to show the kiosk. His father says he won’t come and that Alessandro can handle it.

- a) Set design: Decor:** Table, chairs, paintings, coat rack **Props:** Face masks
- b) Lighting:** High-key
- c) Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene III** - [Indoor/Day] Meeting room.

**Shot I** - 12 seconds: 05:44 - 05:56: Alessandro giving a report to his father about the meetings for when they can re-open the amusement park.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Table, chairs, paintings **Props:** Face masks
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space, off-screen

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Shot II** - 6 seconds: 05:56 - 06:02

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Table, chairs, paintings **Props:** Face masks
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene IV** - [Outdoor/Day] Streets of Coney Island amusement park.

**Shot I** - 13 seconds: 6:27 - 6:40: Alberto and Alessandro talking about the business and re-opening.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Face masks
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene V** - [Outdoor/Day] Parking lot.

**Shot I** - 6 seconds: 9:30 - 9:36: Alessandro is welcoming her daughter and wife at Coney Island.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Face masks, notebook
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Shot II** - 10 seconds: 09:36 - 09:46: Alessandro, his daughter and his wife are walking towards the park.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Face masks
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Negative space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene VI** - [Outdoor/Day] Streets of Coney Island.

**Shot I** - 6 seconds: 09:47 - 09:53: Alessandro is introducing his daughter to one of his friends.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Face masks
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene VII** - [Outdoor/Day] Swings in a park.

**Shot I** - 6 seconds: 9:54 - 10:00: Alessandro is on the swings with his kids.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** No props
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene VIII** - [Indoor/Day] Alessandro's mother's house.

**Shot I** - 12 seconds: 10:01 - 10:13: Alessandro and his mother are admiring Alessandro's little one.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** No props
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene IX** - [Outdoor/Day] Streets of Coney Island.

**Shot I** - 8 seconds: 11:45 - 11:53: Alessandro is explaining his dad about the improvements that will be made once the Covid restrictions improve.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Face masks
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Negative space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Shot II** - 17 seconds: 11:53 - 12:10

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Face masks
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene X-** [Outdoor/Day] On the rollercoaster.



Figure 11: Shot of Alberto and Alessandro on a roller coaster in Coney Island. This is the shot in which family dynamics unraveled the longest in *The Prince of Luna Park*. Source: *The New Yorker*.

**Shot I** - 27 seconds: 13:06 - 13:33: Alessandro and Alberto get on a roller-coaster ride.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Face masks
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space, frontality

**Camera:** Close-up

**Scene XI** - [Outdoor/Night] Balcony looking out to Coney Island.

**Shot I** - 18 seconds: 13:48 - 14:06: Alessandro and Alberto talk about their success on 4th of July.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** No props
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Scene XII** - [Outdoor/Night] Balcony looking at fireworks.

**Shot I** - 7 seconds: 14:12 - 14:19: Alessandro FaceTiming his daughter to show her the fireworks, while Alberto is taking pictures/videos of the fireworks.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Containers, amusement park toys **Props:** Phones
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key

c) **Space:** Positive space, open space, shallow space

**Camera:** Close-up

**Shot II** - 10 seconds: 14:20 - 14:30

a) **Set design: Decor:** Containers, amusement park toys **Props:** Phones

b) **Lighting:** Low-key

c) **Space:** Negative space, closed space, shallow space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

### Takeaways from the mise-en-scène in Movie VI:

Family dynamics were shown in 3'23 minutes out of the 15'11 that compose *The Prince of Luna Park*. In other words, family dynamics composed 22,28 percent of the film.

Taking into consideration all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in the 12 scenes and 16 shots where family dynamics unravel for more than four seconds in *The Prince of Luna Park*, this study presents **Figure 12:**

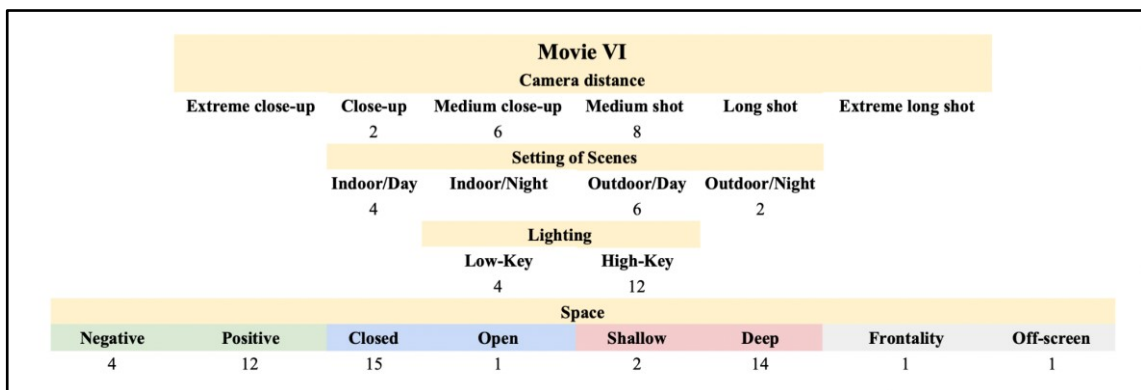


Figure 12: A compilation of all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in *The Prince of Luna Park*.

Source: Own elaboration.

**Figure 12** shows that “medium shot”, as discussed by Gibbs (2002), was the main camera distance used to portray family dynamics. With this choice of camera distance, it is also important to note that the audience often finds Alberto looming at the edge of the camera frame, monitoring each gesture implied in his son’s work. In terms of setting, the shots were filmed predominantly outdoors, mainly during the day, and with objects, such as sharp tailoring and Gucci loafers, that characterized a wealthy family. When analyzing lighting, high-key light, discussed by Lacey (2018), was used

three times more than low-key. And, in terms of assessing space, the pattern that appeared the most in *The Prince of Luna Park* is “positive, closed and deep”, as discussed by Cassidy (2013), Monaco (2009), and Pierson (2010). Additionally, frontality and off-screen, as discussed by Pierson (2010), are present techniques. Frontality, in the case of Movie VI, shortens the space between Alberto and the viewer, giving the feeling that there is a more direct communication. This kind of framing and use of space enables the audience to think from his perspective (Pierson, 2010).

***Movie VII: Yves & Variation (15'22)*, directed by Kervin Marseille and Katie Sheridan, and released on 08/12/2020.**

**Summary:** “Yves & Variation” tells the story of Yves Deshommes, a person that wears many hats. He is a father, a doorman, a musician, an art dealer, and a philanthropist. Yves grew up in Haiti and arrived in New York in 1985, on a student visa. He was 17 years old and became undocumented after his visa expired. Yves lived with an older brother and started playing the violin at the Harlem School of the Arts. In 2010, when an earthquake devastated Haiti, Yves began to import paintings by Haitian artists and sell them in New York. His talent with speech and the way he slides smoothly between English, French, Spanish, and Creole, made him a successful art trader. With the money gained from commissions, he established two schools in Haiti.

**Mise-en-scène:**

**Scene I** - [Indoor/Night] Yves’ home.

**Shot I** - 56 seconds: 02:11 - 03:07: Yves brings big paintings home and his two daughters are very excited.



Figure 13: Shot of Yves arriving in his home after a day's work. This is the shot in which family dynamics unraveled the longest in *Yves & Variation*. Source: *The New Yorker*.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Paintings, doors, furniture **Props:** Painting, cardboard
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space, frontality

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene II** - [Indoor/Day] Yves' home.

**Shot I** - 14 seconds: 03:19 - 03:33: Yves is teaching his daughter violin.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Violin
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, shallow space, off-screen

**Camera:** Close-up

**Shot II** - 11 seconds: 03:33 - 03:44

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Paintings **Props:** Violin
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, shallow space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Shot III** - 37 seconds: 03:44 - 04:21

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Paintings **Props:** Violin
- b) **Lighting:** High-key

c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Shot IV** - 26 seconds: 04:21 - 04:47: Two sisters are playing with the violin while Yves is on the phone.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Paintings, table, chair **Props:** Violin, music sheet stand
- b) **Lighting:** Low-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, deep space

**Camera:** Medium shot

**Scene III** - [Indoor/Day] Restaurant.

**Shot I** - 7 seconds: 09:13 - 09:20: Yves is playing rock/paper/scissors with his daughter.

- a) **Set design: Decor:** Chair **Props:** Glass of water
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, shallow space, off-screen

**Camera:** Medium close-up

**Shot II** - 43 seconds: 09:28 - 10:11

- a) **Set design: Decor:** No decor **Props:** Glass of wine, plates
- b) **Lighting:** High-key
- c) **Space:** Positive space, closed space, shallow space, off-screen

**Camera:** Medium close-up

### **Takeaways from the mise-en-scène in Movie VI:**

Family dynamics were shown in 3'14 minutes out of the 15'22 that compose *Yves & Variation*. In other words, family dynamics composed 21,04 percent of the film.

Taking into consideration all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in the three scenes and seven shots where family dynamics unravel for more than four seconds in *Yves & Variation*, this study presents **Figure 14:**



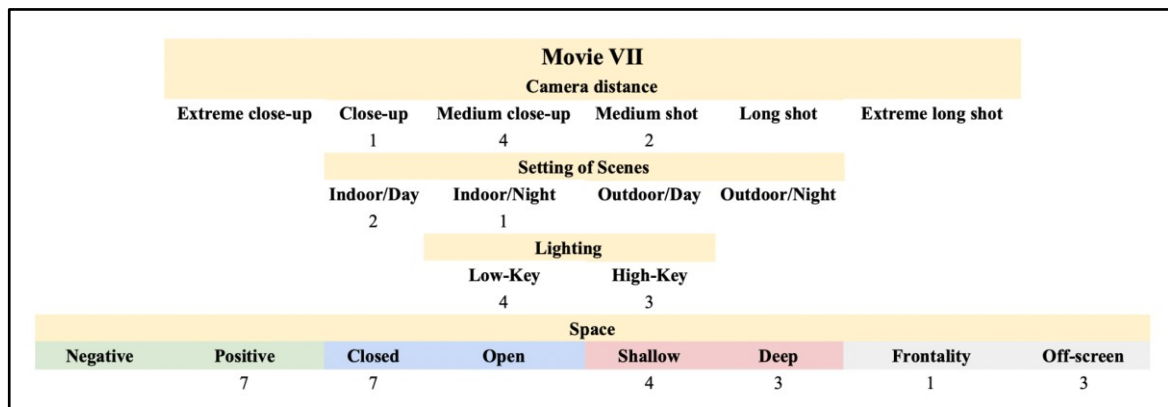


Figure 14: A compilation of all of the mise-en-scène elements analyzed in *Yves & Variation*. Source: Own elaboration.

**Figure 14** shows that “medium close-up”, as discussed by Gibbs (2002), was the main camera distance used to portray family dynamics. In terms of setting, the shots were filmed predominantly indoors, mainly during the day. When analyzing lighting, low-key light, discussed by Lacey (2018), was used, slightly, more than high-key. And, in terms of assessing space, the pattern that appeared the most in *Yves & Variation* is “positive, closed and shallow”, as discussed by Cassidy (2013), Monaco (2009), and Pierson (2010). Additionally, frontality and off-screen, as discussed by Pierson (2010), are employed techniques.

## 4. Findings

This study provides an understanding of how seven documentaries featured in the *The New Yorker* portray immigrant families.

Through close textual analysis of the film's form (Lewis, 2014), specifically visual elements of mise-en-scène such as set design, lighting and space, it was possible to identify many patterns in a total of 63 scenes and 85 shots.

The distribution was: Movie I: 3 scenes, 4 shots; Movie II: 5 scenes, 6 shots; Movie III: 13 scenes, 18 shots; Movie IV: 21 scenes, 26 shots; Movie V: 6 scenes, 8 shots; Movie VI: 12 scenes, 16 shots; and Movie VII: 3 scenes, 7 shots.

Through every shot, films have a formal composition framed by a director that has intentions while creating a story. In cinema's visual cues, films offer means by which they convey meaning both directly and indirectly to the audience (Metz, 2010).

Findings of this study indicate patterns in which immigrant families are portrayed. Before analyzing each mise-en-scène element individually, this is an overview of how immigrant families are, predominantly, portrayed:

- **Camera distance:** medium close-up;
- **Setting of scenes:** indoors, during the day;
- **Lighting:** High-key lighting;
- **Space:** Positive, closed, and deep space.

To further assess the results of the shots, they will be put into tables so they can provide an overview of the findings. The first aspect is camera distance. To analyze it, this study presents **Table 1:**

	Camera distance					
	Extreme close-up	Close-up	Medium close-up	Medium shot	Long shot	Extreme long shot
Movie I		2		1	1	
Movie II			5	1		

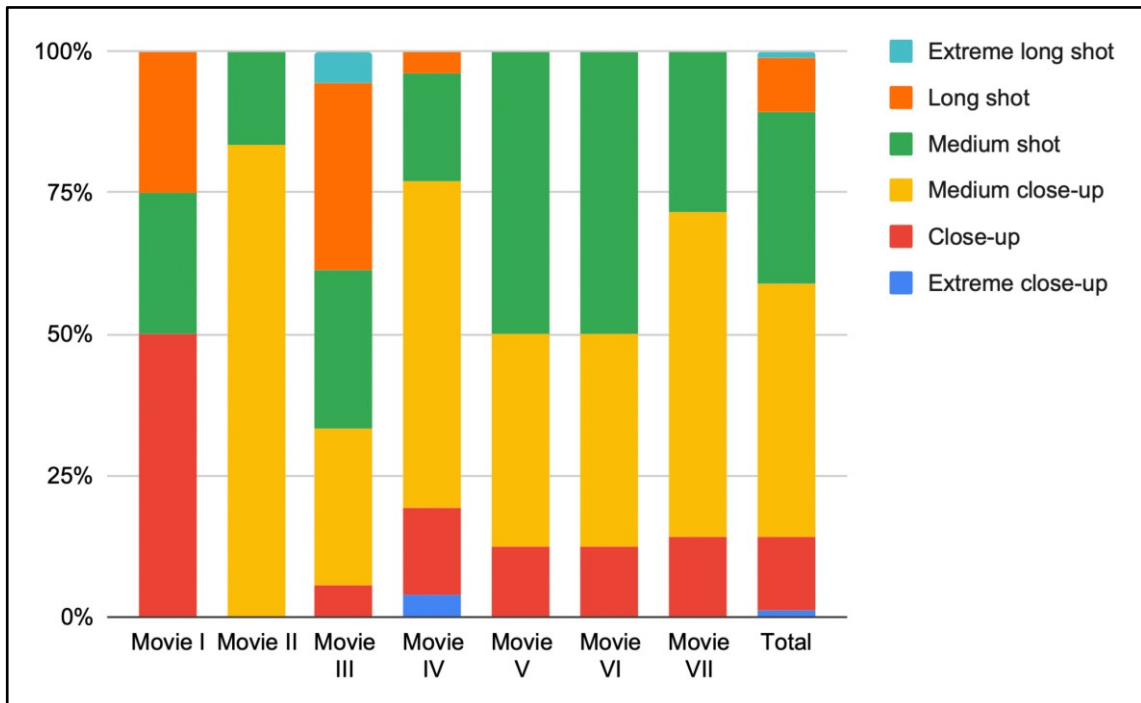
<b>Movie III</b>		1	5	5	6	1
<b>Movie IV</b>	1	4	15	5	1	
<b>Movie V</b>		1	3	4		
<b>Movie VI</b>		2	6	8		
<b>Movie VII</b>		1	4	2		
<b>Total</b>	1	11	<b>38</b>	26	8	1

**Table 1:** The relation on all camera distances analyzed in the 85 shots. Source: Own elaboration.

\*Note: **In Movie II:** one shot starts as a “medium shot” and ends as a “medium close-up shot”. Another shot in the film starts as a “medium close-up shot” and ends as a “close-up shot”. **In Movie IV:** one shot starts as a “long shot” and ends as a “medium shot”. Another shot in the film starts as a “medium close-up shot” and ends as a “close-up shot”.

The majority of the shots were taken with a “medium close-up” camera distance followed by “medium shot”. Short camera distance of frames is an effective way to realize internal focalization (Deleyto, 1991). Shots that portrayed characters’ face, gaze and expression were prioritized and that contributed to not only greater character understanding (Tan, 2018) but also to audiences’ internal focalization (Bálint and Kovács, 2016). On the other hand, a frame is usually linked to external focalization when the background image is dominating, making the human figure seem small in scale (the case of long shots, and greater camera distances) (Deleyto, 1991).

In percentages, the findings are distributed in **Graphic 1:**



**Graphic 1:** The percentages of camera distance distributed throughout the shots that compose each movie. Source: Own elaboration.

Graphic 1 indicates four movies, the majority, showed family dynamics unraveling in three different camera distances. The movie that displayed a broader spectrum of camera distance is Movie IV, with 5 different approaches. Overall, all six camera distances were used to portray immigrant families in the seven analyzed documentaries featured in *The New Yorker*.

When it comes to set design, even though this study identified the decoration and props used in all 85 shots, it did not find a comprehensive theory to code the categories for analysis. Therefore, this study will point out the patterns that emerged from analyzing where and when the scene took place. In other words, location shooting will be detailed according to **Table 2:**

	Setting of Scenes			
	Indoor/Day	Indoor/Night	Outdoor/Day	Outdoor/Night
<b>Movie I</b>		1	2	
<b>Movie II</b>	2	1	2	
<b>Movie III</b>	6		7	

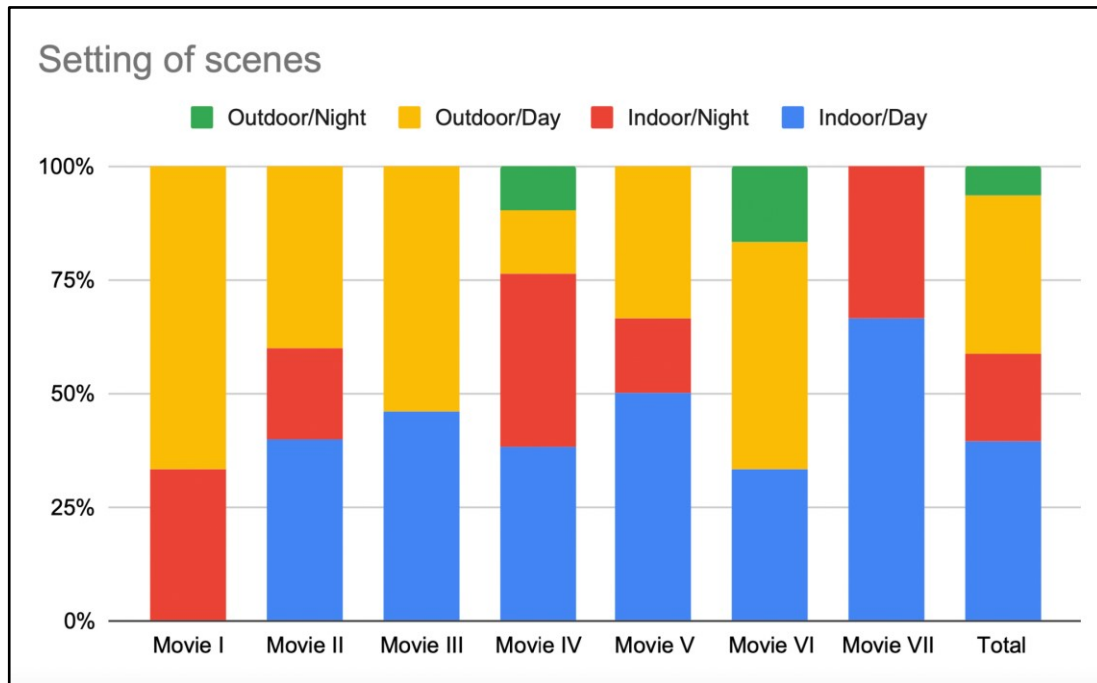
<b>Movie IV</b>	8	8	3	2
<b>Movie V</b>	3	1	2	
<b>Movie VI</b>	4		6	2
<b>Movie VII</b>	2	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	12	22	4

**Table 2:** The relation of all settings of scenes analyzed in the 63 scenes. Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2 indicates that the majority of scenes were shot indoors, during the day. None of the 85 shots analyzed were shot in a studio. There are many reasons why filmmakers prefer to shoot on location. In documentaries, it helps the narrative give a sense of place while still allowing control over the environment (Nichols, 2005).

Bordwell (2008), states a film's composition elements, "cue and constrain the viewer's construction of a story" (Bordwell, 2008:49). The author argues that the formal system of *mise-en-scène* structures time, events, and space to guide audiences' understanding.

Indicating where the shots take space is important to distinguish characters' surroundings and if the narrative chooses to portray them in public, private or hybrid spaces (Bordwell, 2008). Additionally, this study considers that all documentaries were exposed to "attitude staging", as defined by Ramos (2104). With this in mind, this study presents **Graphic 2:**



**Graphic 2:** The percentages of settings distributed throughout the scenes that compose each movie. Source: Own elaboration.

Graphic 2 shows that, overall, all four types of scene setting were employed while portraying immigrant families in *The New Yorker*. The setting of the shots not only represent states of place and time arranged by interior architectures such as props and furnishings, but also communicate the personality of characters Lewis (2014). With this in mind, this study suggests that the setting of each film depicts the personal lives of the immigrant families portrayed.

When it comes to lighting, as defined by Lacey (2018), there are many possibilities in which the two techniques analyzed, low-key lighting and high-key lighting, can establish meanings. To further assess these processes, this study presents

**Table 3:**

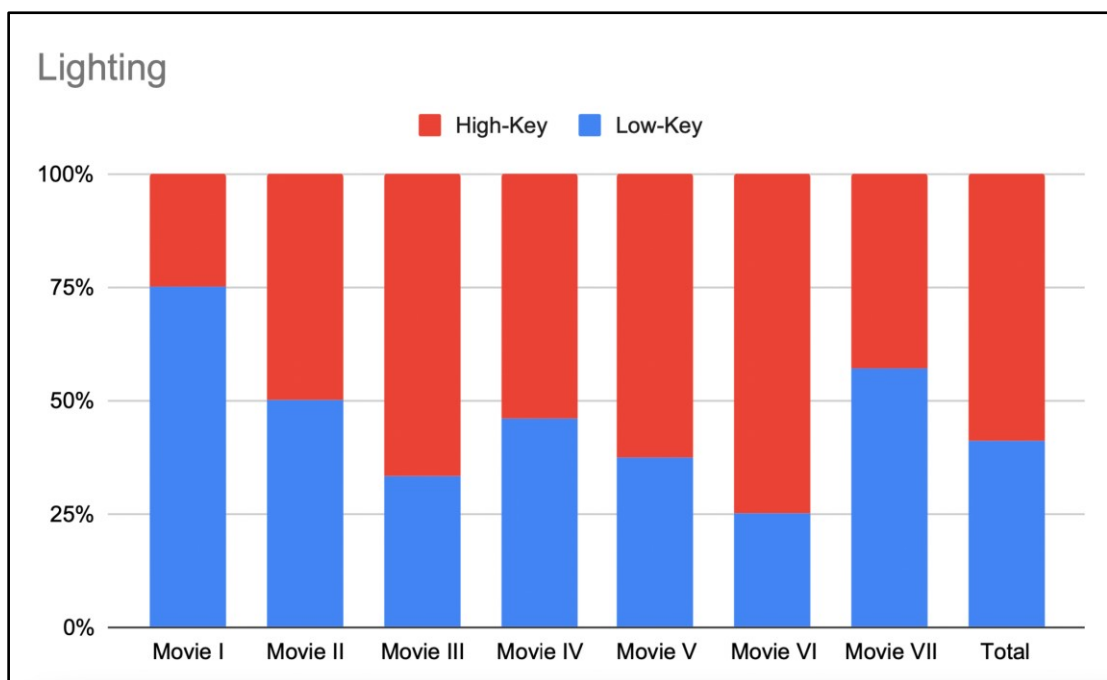
	Lighting	
	Low-Key	High-Key
Movie I	3	1
Movie II	3	3
Movie III	6	12
Movie IV	12	14
Movie V	3	5

<b>Movie VI</b>	4	12
<b>Movie VII</b>	4	3
<b>Total</b>	35	50

**Table 3:** The relation of lighting analyzed in the 85 shots. Source: Own elaboration.  
\*Note: In Movie II: two shots are “low-key tinted light”, which means that the shot is tinted with color, in this case, pink and orange.

High-key lighting was used more than low-key lighting in the portrayal of family dynamics. It is important to note that high-key lighting, different from low-key lighting, gives emphasis to all decorations and props within a shot.

To visualize lighting in percentages, this study presents **Graphic 3:**



**Graphic 3:** The percentages of lighting distributed throughout the shots that compose each movie. Source: Own elaboration.

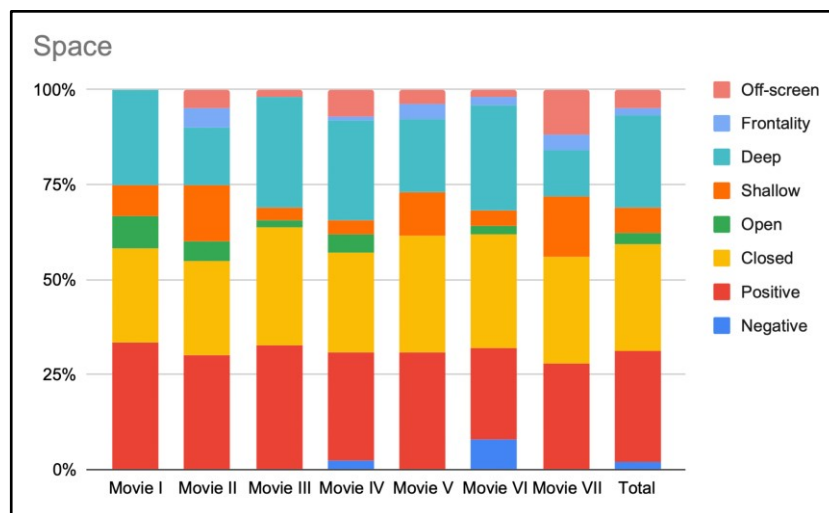
About the use of high-key light and how it influences audiences, Poland (2015) indicated that the compositional technique made people feel higher levels of “uplifting emotions” after seeing the frame (Poland, 2015:1).

When it comes to understanding the patterns of space and its implications, Lewis (2014), states that audiences could grasp the attitude and the social status of a character by the space they navigate. To analyze space patterns this study presents **Table 4:**

	Space							
	Negative	Positive	Closed	Open	Shallow	Deep	Frontality	Off-screen
Movie I		4	3	1	1	3		
Movie II		6	5	1	3	3	1	1
Movie III		18	17	1	2	16		1
Movie IV	2	24	22	4	3	22	1	6
Movie V		8	8		3	5	1	1
Movie VI	4	12	15	1	2	14	1	1
Movie VII		7	7		4	3	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>13</b>

**Table 4:** The relation of space analyzed in the 85 shots. Source: Own elaboration.

The pattern of space that appeared the most is “positive, closed, and deep”. To visualize this in percentages, this study presents **Graphic 4:**

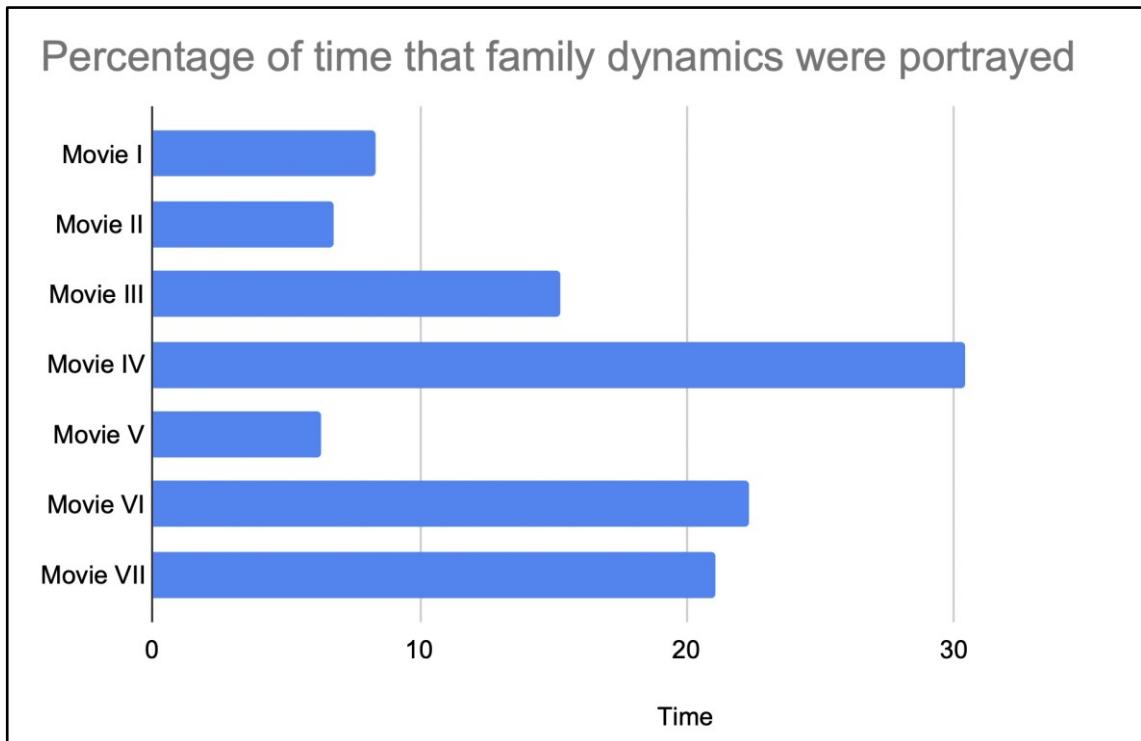


**Graphic 4:** The percentages of space distributed throughout the shots that compose each movie. Source: Own elaboration.

Lotman (2016) suggests that some cinematographic tools use depth-emphasizing cinematography to reinforce *Embodied Simulation*. Opposite to this, other cinematographic tools reinforce *Theory of Mind* processes and cause an alienation effect. Other settings of space relate to the works of Cassidy (2013), Monaco (2009), and Pierson (2010).



Considering the time that immigrant families had on the screen, Ickes (2001) suggests that the amount to which people correctly evaluate the content of other people's feelings and thoughts happens between one-fifth and one-third of the time. With this in mind, this study presents **Graphic 5**:



**Graphic 5:** The percentages of space distributed throughout the shots that compose each movie. Source: Own elaboration.

The time that family dynamics are shown on-screen influences character engagement and audiences' perspectives. Data shows that only Movie IV, Movie VI, and Movie VII, in other words, not the majority of movies, surpass the mark of one-fifth, or 20 percent.

The findings of this study indicate that elements of mise-en-scène interact with each other to visually frame immigrant families and offer their representations to the perception of the audiences.

## **5. Conclusion and discussion**

This study contributes to the knowledge of how *mise-en-scène* plays a crucial role in understanding representations of immigrant families and their visually constructed frames in documentaries. The paper emphasizes the role of set design, lighting, space, and camera distance in understanding the mood and meaning of films.

*The New Yorker* documentaries analyzed were: *Ale Libre*; *Guanajuato Norte*; *Seasons*; *Sing Me a Lullaby*; *Team Maryland*; *The Prince of Luna Park*; and *Yves & Variation*.

Guided by the *RQ: How do documentaries featured in The New Yorker portray immigrant families through mise-en-scène?*, this study performed a close textual analysis (Lewis, 2014) on 63 scenes and 85 shots.

The study reinforced how visual narrative procedures affect the viewer-character relationship, and articulate representations that organize cognitive and perceptual responses to films (Sobchack, 1992).

The findings indicate that immigrant families are, mainly, shown: 1) indoors, during the day; 2) with high-key lighting; and 3) with positive, closed, and deep space settings. The camera distance that appeared the most is “medium close-up”. These findings give insight into the complex relationship of visual narrative strategies that portray immigrant families and how they relate to audience perception.

In terms of methodological implications, this study, through textual analysis, proved that the method enables a close reading that leads to a deep visual understanding of films. This happens by the interaction of all elements of the films’ frames. With this in mind, this study has implications for research on film studies, analysis of *mise-en-scène*, and immigrant families in the media. Furthermore, this study adds to the body of knowledge of visual framing in the media (Coleman, 2010) by providing seven cases that are significant to *mise-en-scène* research.

When it comes to addressing the limitations, this study showed that perspective-taking is a basic component of empathy, closely related to the ability of mentalization and focalization (Bálint and Kovács, 2016; Decety and Jackson, 2004; Tan, 2018; and Zillmann, 1995), however it did not conduct surveys or focus groups to understand the impact of the shots on audiences’ emotional response. Therefore, the study cannot make any claims on that matter and is limited to the researcher’s interpretation and “wild meaning analysis” (Sobchack, 1992) of the scenes.

Even though this study was interested in visual framing, there are some elements of a films’ composition that could have been considered: angles of the camera, sound,

montage, and editing techniques. Moreover, this study took into consideration films that were produced by different filmmakers and that portrayed immigrant families from different backgrounds. If it had more consistency and balance in the analyzed material, it would be possible to provide cross-reference results.

For future study, researchers can expand the scope of the work and concentrate on only one element of *mise-en-scène* (eg.: lighting), but provide all of the possible meanings it articulates in the portrayal of immigrant families. With the findings, it would also be interesting to organize a focus group that has the technical expertise to read and analyze the framing of visual compositional elements of the films, and hold a discussion on how they interpret particular shots and scenes. Furthermore, personal interviews can also be conducted to see the extent to which audiences feel certain emotions (eg.: empathy) under certain *mise-en-scène* structures.

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