The film is also sutured by its almost wall-to-wall late 1960s-early 1970s soul soundtrack (with nods to the kids' favorite program, "Soul Train"). In Joke, Spike Lee "and to call the filmmaker "a gentler, kinder Spike Lee." CROOKLYN is a love Joie (who plays Aunt Maxine), Cinqué, and Spike differ about how much of CROOKLYN is strictly autobiographical and how much
New York Times figure prominently in the latter film. (CROOKLYN confines drugs to two menacing glue sniffers, STUY enclave, with a side trip to New Jersey (standing in for Virginia), covering about six months.
conveys the foreignness of the suburban world via an anamorphic lens, which squeezes the image. Lee: "We knew that some people were going to add to evoking the era, the songs comment on the action, often in heartrending ways. Lee's visual style veers from cinéma verité naturalism to flamboyant expressionism (including slow motion, upside-down shots, breaking the fourth wall, and his signature actors-on-dollies shots that give the impression of characters floating). Most audaciously, in the extensive section depicting Troy's visit to her affluent relatives in Virginia, Lee conveys the foreignness of the suburban world via an anamorphic lens, which squeezes the image. Lee: "We knew that some people were going to hate it. But I felt it was important to try something new; to try to be innovative, try to tell a story a different way."

Despite the family's conflicts, CROOKLYN is much less edgy than Lee's six previous "joints." It avoids the racial conflicts of DO THE RIGHT THING and JUNGLE FEVER, and the drugs that figure prominently in the latter film. (CROOKLYN confines drugs to two menacing glue sniffers, one of whom is played by Spike.) The relative lack of in-your-face confrontations inspired the New York Times's Janet Maslin to headline her review, "A Tender Domestic Drama From, No Joke, Spike Lee" and to call the filmmaker "a gentler, kinder Spike Lee." CROOKLYN is a love letter to a vanished (and idealized) time and place, conveyed immediately in the opening credits sequence: amid rows of elegant brownstones and street signs such as "A Cleaner Block is Up to You," children enjoy innocent, pre-Nintendo games—some of which (hopscotch, double dutch jump rope, red light-green light, stickball) Spike had to teach the cast—all accompanied by The Stylistics' soothing "People Make the World Go Round."

CROOKLYN's episodic structure, built on a series of vignettes, led J. Hoberman of The Village Voice to complain that it has "no particular plot," and Maslin, although praising the film, to call it "messy." But the vignettes are the plot, and the seemingly random, often comic, slices of life evolve into a poignant coming-of-age story. Most remarkably, the coming of age is that of a strong, resourceful Black girl, unusual not only for Spike Lee, but also for cinema generally. CROOKLYN is held together by the charismatic performance of eight-year-old Zelda Harris. Like the other children, Zelda was making her film debut; her previous acting experience, starting at age three, was co-starring with Big Bird and the Muppets in 20 SESAME STREET episodes.

The film is also sutured by its almost wall-to-wall late 1960s-early 1970s soul soundtrack (with nods to the kids' favorite program, "Soul Train"). In addition to evoking the era, the songs comment on the action, often in heartrending ways. Lee's visual style veers from cinéma verité naturalism to flamboyant expressionism (including slow motion, upside-down shots, breaking the fourth wall, and his signature actors-on-dollies shots that give the impression of characters floating). Most audaciously, in the extensive section depicting Troy's visit to her affluent relatives in Virginia, Lee conveys the foreignness of the suburban world via an anamorphic lens, which squeezes the image. Lee: "We knew that some people were going to hate it. But I felt it was important to try something new; to try to be innovative, try to tell a story a different way."