

## FIL 2000 - Film Appreciation

UNIT TWO:

### *Depth, Volume, and Space*

Film - Really a flat, two-dimensional picture, but as viewers, we tend to accept it as having depth.

This strictly illusory dimension is also the most flexible screen dimension and one that filmmakers can utilize to draw us into a visual presentation.

Depth in Screen Space -

Linear Perspective (including forced perspective/Crowding effect)

Three-Dimensional Arrangement of People/Objects

Placement in Screen Space (Height, Size)

Light, Shadow, Colors

Linear Perspective - All equally spaced objects appear to lie closer together in the distance than in the foreground. We perceive "distant" space as shrunk compared to foreground space.

The manipulation of parallel lines - often used by filmmakers to create the illusion of three dimension within a film.

One element of linear perspective is the vanishing point. This is where parallel lines converge at the horizon line (at eye level).

Linear perspective also has an effect on visual motion or lateral movement (a car seems faster near us than when further away). This aspect is especially important to remember in animation design.

Two other aspects of Linear Perspective:

Forced Perspective - When the camera remains stationary, filmmakers, by manipulating linear perspective through set design can create the illusion that there is depth to the screen image.

Various line formations can assist in this illusion and the type of lens used to film the action.

Crowding Effect - Can create the illusion of depth by simply crowding objects toward the upper part of the screen.

Three-Dimensional Arrangement of People/Objects -

Entails the overlapping of various elements within the screen area.

When we see overlapping images (overlapping planes) on the screen, we perceive that there is depth to the screen space since objects (characters) are positioned either in front or behind other objects.

Placement in Screen Space -

Height in the Plane - If the camera is shooting parallel to the ground, those images that are higher in the picture field and therefore closer to the horizon line appear further away from us.

Size - Large subjects or objects (in relation to the screen border) appear closer to us, while smaller ones appear further away.

Light, Shadows, Colors - All can help produce a depth illusion (in regard to colors: cool/far, warm/close)

## *Lenses and Filters*

Like the human eye, the camera has a lens that bends rays of light into a sharp focal point on sensitive material.

Unlike the eye, a camera's lens provides different kinds of depth perception. Filmmakers can exploit a lens' technological properties for a variety of effects.

Depth Characteristics of Lenses - Three basic types of lenses available:

Lenses are generally classified according to their focal length which is the distance from the plane of the film to the surface of the lens.

Normal Lens - The most common choice for filmmakers. It most closely mimics the way the human eye perceives reality.

Wide-Angle Lens - Photographs a wide angle of view. Also has effect of greatly emphasizing our sense of depth perception and often, as well, distorting linear perspective.

Telephoto Lens - Long lens acts like a telescope to magnify distant objects.

Although a telephoto lens does not distort linear perspective, it does have the sometimes useful effect of suppressing depth perception. It has a narrow angle of view.

Wide-Angle Lens - Deep depth of field.

Telephoto - shallow depth of field.

Fish-eye Lens - An extreme wide-angle lens. It bends both horizontal and vertical planes and distorts depth relationships. It is often used to create unusual subjective states such as dreams, fantasies, or intoxication (rarely used nowadays).

Depth perception can also be affected by the narrowing or opening of the lens aperture. Stopping it down increases depth of field, while opening it up decreases it.

Deep-Focus Photography - The style of photography that strives for sharp focus over the whole range of action.

Shallow-focus photography - Maintains focus over a specific area of screen space, while blurring others.

Shallow focus is a means in which to direct a viewer's attention to a particular object.

Change of Focal Planes -

A director can change focus during a shot to maintain focus on a subject moving away or toward the camera (follow focus) or to direct the viewer to shift attention from one subject to another (rack focus).

Soft Focus - Or slightly blurred can help to convey certain subjective states (going from sharp to soft focus - see The Graduate, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington).

Filters -

Filters: Alter the way light reacts with the film emulsion (select filters to make sky appear cloudless, or filters to change the appearance of various screen objects). Various filters can compensate for the difference that varying kinds of light might have on color film.

*Shots and Opticals*

Shots:

Full Shot - Shows the entire scene - the complete room, all the action on a wide street, the whole regiment of the cavalry to the rescue. The full shot is also called an establishing shot (or universal shot).

Long Shot - Has the central figure of interest (a rider on horseback) at some distance from the camera. Most often, the camera lens is set at infinity.

Medium Shot - The most common shot in television. The term "medium" is relative to what is being shot. Thus, a medium shot of a building will reveal only a portion of the building. A medium shot of a person will reveal the person perhaps from the knees up.

Close Up - A shot that tightly frames an object of interest (e.g., a person's face, hand, etc.).

Extreme CU - Zeros in on detail: the pupil of an eye as it contracts in terror, a thumbprint being lifted from a drinking glass, etc.

POV - A character's point of view: how something looks from his/her eyes. Can also be considered the camera's (our) point of view.

Reverse Angle - A change in perspective, usually the opposite of the POV shot.

Two Shot - The subject of the shot is two people.

Opticals:

Fade In/Out - FADE IN is used at beginning of scene, FADE OUT at the end. Can be used to suggest to viewers that an emphatic period of time has passed.

Dissolve - The slow diffusing of a shot. It most commonly takes the form of a "lap dissolve" (overlapping dissolve), in which one shot is fused to the next by gradually darkening the frames of the first and blending them with the gradually lightening frames of the second. The technique usually suggests a time-lapse, but not as emphatic as a fade out/fade in.

Cut - Simply two shots spliced together - immediate transition from one shot to the next.

Match Cut - A cut from one shot to another in which the two shots are matched in action or

subject by (1) a continuity of action by the same subject; (2) a similarity in action by two different characters or perhaps by the same character at different times moving in the same direction in the same part of the image; or (3) a similarity in the two subject's shape and form - for example, close-ups of two characters engaged in conversation, a portrait becoming a "live face," or the much cited scene in Stanley Kubrick's, 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) where the bone hurled into the air by a primitive ape-man becomes a space satellite. Such cuts either allow for continuity or create an immediately recognizable similarity between two images.

Jump Cut - A cut between two shots that seems abrupt and calls attention to itself because of some obvious jump in time or space.

Wipe - Pushing the frames of one scene off the screen as they are replaced by the first frames of the succeeding scene. Of all transitional devices, this one calls more attention to itself, and therefore, should be used judiciously.

Computer-Generated Effect - Computer technology utilized for transitional effects - particularly in variations of wipes (e.g., cube effect as seen during a sports game).

Camera Movement:

Pan Shot - The camera swiveling from left to right or vice versa to obtain a complete view of a scenic vista. It is always a side to side camera movement.

Tilt Shot - Essentially, the camera moves up or down on its vertical axis. Following a balloon, the fall of a skydiver, a person getting up from a chair, etc.

Dolly Shot - A camera on wheels or tracks. The camera either moves toward or away from characters or action. (Also, a "tracking shot" where the camera follows the action laterally)

Zoom Shot - The camera remains stationary while focal distance is changed (either zooming in toward action or away).

A dolly shot makes viewers feel they are moving directly into the action, while a zoom shot simply "brings" the action to them. Therefore, a dolly shot is often more effective as a dramatic device.

Zoom/Dolly - Changing the focal distance toward an object while simultaneously dollying back. Creates a distorted feeling of space (e.g., Vertigo, Jaws, Poltergeist).

Other possible terms to be discussed:

Crane Shot

Pivot

Steady-Cam

Slow Motion/Fast Motion

Freeze Frame

Thawed Frame

### ***Mise en Scene and Editing***

Mise en Scene - Term literally means "putting-in-the-scene".

The whole complex of pictorial elements inside the frame area.

How a filmmaker is using light, color, the placement and movement of performers, costuming, set design, etc.

Mise en Scene can refer to the overall visual style of a particular film presentation.

Often, mise en scene is related to a single shot; montage to how individual shots are put together.

Mise en scene can also refer to that part of the cinematic process that takes place on the set, as opposed to montage which takes place afterwards.

Critics of mise en scene: Emphasis on mise en scene (which might include long un-cut/"real-time" takes) is often regarded as static, montage as dynamic.

This is not necessarily the case. Since we "read" a shot, we are actively involved with it. The film director alters and modifies our reading of the shot (using light, color, sets, screen composition, sound, various screen ratios, etc.).

Edit - The words "editing" or "cutting" suggest a trimming process, in which unwanted material is eliminated - one edits or cuts raw material down.

Montage - Suggests a building action, working up from the raw material - a film presentation is seen as being constructed rather than edited.

Sergei Eisenstein's definition of Montage: Adjacent shots should relate to each other in such a way that A and B combine to produce another meaning, C, which is not actually recorded on the film.

Montage can refer to the following:

- Process that creates a third meaning out of the original two meanings of adjacent shots.

- Process in which a number of short shots are woven together in order to communicate a great deal of information in a short period of time (often referred to as dynamic cutting).

- Parallel montage which allows the film director to alternate between two activities (or stories) that may or may not be interrelated, cross-cutting between them.

- Accelerated montage in which interest in a scene is heightened and brought to a climax through progressively shorter alternations of shots between two or more subjects (chase sequences).

- The flashback and flash-forward permit digressions and forecasts.

-Involved montage allows a sequence to be narrated, without particular regard for chronology; an action can be repeated, shots can be edited out of order.

Also, see jump cut and match cut (*discussed above*).

Each of these extensions of montage look toward the creation of something other than simple chronology, a factor very little emphasized in Decoupage Classique.

Decoupage Classique - The "Hollywood" style of film construction. All the editing practices of the Hollywood grammar were designed to permit seamless transitions from shot to shot and to concentrate attention on the action at hand (invisible editing).

The function of editing was simply to push the story forward in a linear fashion.

Some Final Notes Regarding Eisenstein and the development of MONTAGE:

The idea of juxtaposing one shot with another came to Eisenstein from the Japanese language in which a word followed by another often means something completely different from either of the two words (knife + heart = sorrow, for example). Eisenstein aimed to construct films not from shots or scenes but from the ideas implanted into the minds of his audience from his shots' juxtaposition with one-another. There are numerous instances of Eisenstein's montage theory at work in his masterpiece, Battleship Potemkin (1925).

Eisenstein's idea of intellectual montage - the juxtaposition of two shots to produce an idea - was as important if not more important to the development of the cinema as D. W. Griffith's development of invisible editing and narrative structure. Whereas Griffith's ideas served Hollywood-style productions, Eisenstein's theories fueled a more intellectual view on life and a more complex execution of that view in film. Soviet montage films did not simply define a film movement but they paved the way for improvisation, reinterpretation, and improvement on the techniques of montage.

Eisenstein's innovations stand even today as landmarks in the history of cinema. Not only did he hope to get a certain emotional response via his montage, he designed the length

and position of his shots relative to each other to get an identical emotional response from every member of the audience. Nothing was left to interpretation but nothing was overt. Eisenstein's syntheses transcended the frame and worked their way into the minds of the audience, enraging them, making them afraid and holding them captive.

Other Thoughts:

Open/Closed Ended Framing (Form) - Open uses a primarily realist filmmaker approach - The techniques are likely to be onobtrusive, with an emphasis on informal compositions and apparently haphazard design. The frame is exploited to suggest a temporary "masking," a window that arbitrarily cuts off part of the action. Closed is a visual style that inclines toward self-conscious designs and carefully harmonized compositions. The frame is exploited to suggest a self-sufficient universe that encloses all the necessary visual information, usually in an aesthetically appealing manner.

Recorded Continuity - Action may occur within a single, continuous shot. An action begins, develops, and closes in exactly the amount of time it would in reality (real-time).

Constructed Continuity - The film director builds a complete action with separate shots, each contributing only one link in the chain of development (screen-time). Constructed continuity can refer to the manipulation of time (compression of action, events, etc.)

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*Realism/Formalism*

Film theory debates the essence of the cinema and provides conceptual frameworks for understanding film's relationship to reality, the other arts, individual viewers, and society at large. Like traditional literature, critical theories also apply to films. For our purposes, these two theories in particular tie directly into our class discussions regarding film aesthetics, *especially Mise en Scene and Editing*.

Realist Theory - The movie screen's framed space presents such a powerful sense of captured reality that some theorists see it as the core of the cinema's power.

Andre Bazin - One of the leaders of the Realist School. Felt that film's composition is a record (like photography), that provides a realism of space.

Bazin believed that film created the perfect illusion of reality - It was not reality itself, but something more directly linked to real objects than any other art form.

Argued that deep-focus photography was the most proper form of cinematic expression since it provided on screen the spatial density of something real.

Filmmakers who manipulate screen space with editing or other techniques (rack focus, extreme angles) do make films with some degree of spatial density, but they use space for their reasons and so impose meanings on the viewer.

Bazin preferred a "neutral" style of film making where the director lets the camera observe and follow action within screen space for long periods of time without interruption, and utilizes deep-focus photography.

Deep-focus photography - did not impose a viewpoint on viewers, but rather, provided for an interplay between themselves and the movie's framed space.

Also allowed viewers to roam the screen image without directorial interference (drawbacks: ambiguity, uncertainty)

- Compare foreign films to American films. Foreign films often incorporate more realist aspects than American films.

Elements of Realist Theory -

- Deep-focus photography
- Invisible editing (doesn't draw attention to itself)
- Real-time (non-manipulation of time)

Formalist/Expressionist Theory - Argued that editing and montage are ultimately the major source of film's power because they make movies totally unique from all other forms of art.

Rudolf Arnheim (Film as Art, 1957) believed that filmmakers who seek naturalness in movies are engineers, not artists.

An artist diverts the viewer's eyes from mere subject matter to a movie's form (the unusual ways it arranges things).

Arnheim concluded that mechanical devices like editing, fades, backward motion, shallow focus, which critics like Bazin considered drawbacks to a perfect illusion of reality, actually were tools of the creative film artist.

The Formative School (Formalists) believe that movies shouldn't need to give us pictures of reality, but through a filmmaker's own choices (and manipulations), sever the passive everyday connection and establish something new.

The formative School stresses that movie art should have no uncertainty or ambiguity. This explains these theorists strong attachment to montage, shallow and rack focus (as opposed to deep focus), and manipulation of time.

By careful construction of images, the filmmaker leads the viewer to see exactly what is desired.

Elements of Formalist Theory -

- Shallow focus photography
- Montage/Visible editing
- Screen time (manipulation of time)