

FIL 2000 - Film Appreciation



Trivia Contest: Who was the co-writer of the above film? Who was the film editor? List three films this editor eventually directed. Finally, which film (by another Hollywood director) did Welles purportedly watch over 40 times while filming his own masterwork? First two Film Appreciation students to e-mail Armstrong the correct responses will receive two (2) bonus points for the Unit Two Exam.

UNIT TWO:



Cinematography - Lighting & Color

Lighting Functions - Environment:

Basic purpose of lighting - To help us, or make us, see and feel in a specific way. Lighting can clarify and intensify the film-viewing experience.

Space - Lighting orients us in space (what an object looks like - round/flat, rough surfaces, hard edges, etc.).

Interplay Between Light and Shadow - It is not just the light that reveals the shape of the object, but the shadows. Lighting for shadows is an important space-orientation factor.

Time - Control of light and shadows helps the viewer to become oriented in time (day/night, hour of day, and seasons). Lighting must be consistent with other time indicators (dusk sun weaker than mid-day sun).

Emotion: Establish Mood and Atmosphere - Can reflect whether a scene is happy or sad, mysterious, etc.

Low-Key Lighting - Depends on contrasts between light and shadow. Few bright areas.

Predictive Lighting - Helps to predict (foreshadow) a future happening. Light that changes from bright to dark (happy to mysterious). As with any element of film design, however, predictive lighting rarely operates alone, but in conjunction with other aesthetic elements (e.g., suspense music).

Aims to articulate space - to clarify and intensify the three-dimensional property of things and the space that surrounds them. Often expressionistic - the filmmaker uses sharp shadows and pools of light to create a heavily emotional atmosphere.

Film Noir - Term coined by French film critics for a particular type of film that appeared in America after WWII. "Black film" evokes a mood of cynicism and despair. Stylistic mark - Dark settings: City worlds of deep shadows and unseen threats. These movies combined harshly realistic subject matter with precisely controlled craftsmanship (femme fatale, anti-hero, psychotic killers).

Their narrative content tended to reflect a concern with psychosis and a sense of impending doom.

Low-key lighting varies from moderate to high contrast between light and shadows (e.g., Night of the Hunter - moderate, Raging Bull - high contrast).

High-Key Lighting - Uses predominately bright light to avoid deep shadows and reduce contrasts (sometimes called flat lighting - musicals, comedies, etc.).

May have no aesthetic function except for visibility - (low-contrast between light and shadow). Does not carry the same emotional impact that low-key lighting (in its various forms) can elicit.

Symbolic Implications (in regards to characters) -

Above/Front - Lighting in many movies is from above and in front (feels normal to viewers).

Above - Lighting from directly above can suggest a character's spirituality.

Below - Lighting from below generally makes the subject appear sinister (even if the actor/actress assumes a totally neutral expression).

NOTE: Simply lighting from the front is rarely used since it tends to flatten the contours of facial features.

Addition of backlighting can produce an image that is softer. It can produce a feminine, romantic effect (often used in the 1930s to highlight an actress' hair).

Existing Light -

Filmmakers may often use it as a deliberate realistic device (see Kubrick). Using plain daylight, indoor scenes under ordinary house lights, etc.

Light source itself as a highly effective dramatic agent. Showing light source - the sun or a turned on lighting instrument. Can heighten the emotional impact of a scene (flashlight shining in someone's eyes, motel neon sign, etc.).

Post-Production Lighting Effects -

Lighting effects produced through optical processes (including computer-generated effects). Lighting effects are artificially created - lighting not necessarily found in the real world.



Color has been involved in movie experience from the very beginning. (paint, dyes, various tinting/toning processes).

1935 - Technicolor (dye process)

1950 - Eastman Kodak (chemical process)

Black and white film prevailed for many years. The balance only shifted gradually until today where color is the predominant mode of visual production.

The utilization of color can work for (or against) a filmmaker in the following broad areas:
Informational Function - Brings out detail. Can help viewers distinguish between objects/characters. However, if filmmaker lets colors get out of hand, the accumulation of detail may lead not to clarity, but to distraction on the part of film viewers (viewers have a heightened awareness of not only details, but of colorfulness in general).

Realism - Color can provide realism, establish a time-frame, and can be representative of the essential qualities of an environment, event, or object.

Mood (Atmosphere) - Colors influence our perceptions of an environment and/or the environment for a character(s) - e.g., warm colors can emphasize romance, eroticism, nostalgia - cool colors, depression, gloom, death, melancholy - garish colors, disorientation, psychosis, uneasiness, etc.

Color Symbolism - White (pure), black (evil). Filmmakers often reverse and manipulate color symbolism (contradictory symbolism). Effective only if audience realizes that the color is supposed to mean something (often hard to pull off).

Leitmotifs in Color - Directors may associate colors with a given character(s). A "trade-mark" effect.

Psychological (warm/cool colors) - Color also affects perceptions of temperature and weight. We perceive warm colors as hot and heavy; cold colors as cool and light.

Three-Dimensionality (advancing/receding properties) - Some colors seem to advance toward the foreground (red, orange, yellow, lavender - advancing colors). Objects in these colors appear larger and closer to the camera than they are. Some colors recede into the background (beige, green, pale blue - receding colors).

Taking advantage of the advancing and receding characteristics of color fosters the illusion that the image on the screen is three-dimensional.

Colors can create harmony or discord within a visual sequence.

Color composition can be a highly effective means in which to focus audience attention to that which the film director feels is important visually.

Color may draw attention to the outer rather than inner reality of an event/character.

Sometimes it is best to deemphasize colors in order to not have film viewers simply focus on the outward appearance of characters/film events.

Screen Composition



In visual media such as film, the screen is our principal frame of reference. Visual Composition helps clarify and intensify events within the frame (spatial field):

Horizon Line and Meaning - - lower third (emphasizing sky) - upper third (emphasizing earth)

Screen Position:

Main Direction - Horizontal/vertical - By emphasizing one or the other, a film producer can suggest the following:

- Horizontal (calmness, normalcy)
- Vertical (power, formality, strength)
- The Canted Shot (tension, disorienting effect)

Rule of Thirds - Cinematographers try to avoid perfectly symmetrical images where an object of interest is centered and everything else is evenly positioned around it (e.g., don't want characters always placed in the center of the screen - non-dramatic composition).

Traditionally, cinematographers place objects of interest along one of the imaginary lines that divide the image into thirds laterally and horizontally. Director should also give characters not only head room, but lead (or nose) room.

Toland's Rule - The strongest point of screen composition appears to be along a diagonal line from the lower left to the upper right corner of screen space (with focus on the upper right corner).

Often, relevant information is presented on the right side of screen. Seems normal and balanced for viewers (Westerner's reading). Right side of screen is often perceived as "heavier" than left side.

Film-makers will balance screen areas by placing more objects on left side to provide equilibrium and stabilize right side of screen space (unless, of course, they want to create

tension within audience by going against this compositional factor). Reversing this expectation (utilizing a reversal of Toland's rule) often creates tension (see any Leone film).

Camera Angles

Eye-level - Most common camera angle. Feels natural and unobtrusive.



Low-angle - Increases the height of figures in the foreground (implications - character's dignity, dominance or power).



High-angle - Decreases the apparent height of a character (implications - character is weak, less significant than other characters).



Practical function: These type of camera angles may simply be used to accentuate our depth perception, or reveal objects that would otherwise be blocked from our view.

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



A POV shot can also be a "subjective" camera shot - i.e., audience sees how a drunk character might see.

NOTE: Camera angles must be analyzed in relation to their context - how are they being used in relation to the narrative of the media presentation?

Lenses



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

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

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.

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. 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.

The narrowing or opening of the lens aperture can also affect depth perception. 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 –

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).

FILMS VIEWED:

“READING A FILM” (Several Unit Two exam questions will reference these two films so, hopefully, enjoy the films but, PAY ATTENTION!)

Body Heat (1981)

Do the Right Thing (1989)

END OF UNIT TWO MATERIAL