

FIL 2000 - Film Appreciation

UNIT THREE:

Movement (Motion):



Like photographic images, motion can be literal and concrete (The Hurricane), or highly stylized (Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon).

The meanings associated with various portions of the framing area are closely related to the significance of certain kinds of movements:

Vertical Movement - We generally consider the upper part of a frame as being more dynamic than the bottom half.

Since our eyes apparently have a natural tendency to move upward over a frame composition, vertical movements within screen space tend to suggest power, authority, excitement.

Downward Movement - Downward movements tend to suggest opposite ideas: grief, death, insignificance, depression, weakness, and so on (The King and I).

Lateral And Depth Movement - Supposedly, since we tend to read a picture from left to right, movement in this direction seems psychologically natural, whereas movements from the right to left often seems tense and uncomfortable. Film directors often exploit this aspect. Frequently the protagonists of a movie travels

toward the right side of the screen, while villains move toward the left (Red Badge of Courage, many other westerns).

Or, the protagonist, "in possible danger", moves from right to left (see To Kill A Mockingbird, Evil Dead Part II, Run, Lola, Run).

Movement can be directed toward or away from the camera (depth). Since we identify with the camera's lens, the effect of such movement is somewhat like a character moving toward or away from us.

If the character is a villain or monster, walking toward the camera can be seen as aggressive, hostile, and threatening (the "thing" is invading our space).

If the character is attractive, movement toward the camera seems friendly, inviting, sometimes seductive.

In either case, movement toward the audience is generally strong and assertive, suggesting confidence on the part of the moving character.

Movement away from the camera tends to imply opposite meanings. Intensity is decreased. Audiences feel safer when a psycho killer for example moves away, for he/she is increasing the protective distance between us and him/her.

In some contexts, such movements can seem weak, fearful, or suspicious (see Close Encounters - end of opening sequence).

There are psychological differences between lateral movements (side to side) and depth movements (toward or away from the camera).

Generally, if a character moves from left to right (or vice-versa), he or she will seem determined - a person of action.

Of course lateral movements are necessarily photographed in brief takes - not much space to work with going side to side within framed area. Since lateral movements tend to emphasize speed and efficiency, they are often used in action films.

On the other hand, when a character moves in or out of the depth of a scene, the effect is often one of slowness.

Movements toward or away from the camera take longer to photograph than lateral movements.

With a telephoto lens, such movements can seem hopelessly dragged out (The Graduate).

Psychological films/television programs often employ movements in and out of screen depth, especially to create a sense of tediousness, hopelessness, and/or exhaustion. This sensation is based in part on the fact that when depth movement is photographed, the audience tends to anticipate a conclusion of the movement. We wait for the character to arrive at his/her destination (running down a long hallway for example).

Distance and Angle (as partially discussed previously) - In general, the further away action is filmed and the higher the shot (high crane shot for example), the slower the movement tends to appear. If movement is recorded from close and at a low angle, it seems more intense, speeded up (example wagon train in westerns).

If there is a great deal of movement in a close shot, its effect on the screen will be exaggerated. For this reason, filmmakers tend to employ these ranges for relatively static scenes. The animation of two people talking and gesturing can be enough movement to prevent most medium shots from appearing static.

The closer and tighter a shot, the more the motion dominates. A closer more tightly framed shot can suggest more danger and desperation (e.g., a car chase).

Directorial "signature" movements (e.g., Spielberg's "Awe" Effect - slow camera movement toward character's expression, Hitchcock's "subjective" POV dolly shots, Kubrick's "steadycam" shots, Cameron's pivot shots).

Meanings inherent in certain types of movement - Curved and swaying motions are generally perceived as graceful (a tree blowing in a gentle breeze, ocean waves). Those that are straight and direct strike us as intense, stimulating and powerful (pouring rainstorm, cars rushing down a freeway).

Stasis - Filmmakers often use stasis or lack of movement to suggest ideas such as exhaustion, spiritual paralysis, and even death (The Shining). In such instances, even the slightest movement tends to acquire magnified significance.

Remember: Camera movement itself can imply specific meaning within a shot (e.g., crane, dolly, pan, tilt, pivot etc.).

Mise en Scene and Editing



The film editor must know how to tell a story, be politically savvy when working with directors and studio executives, and have a calm and confident demeanor. Millions of dollars of film and the responsibility of guiding the picture through post-production and into theaters rest in the editor's hands. Scenes may have been photographed poorly and performances might have been less than inspired, but a skilled and creative editor can assemble the film so that the audience will never see these imperfections.

To better understand the editing process, imagine you are seated in a movie theater. The lights are dim and credits appear over an establishing shot of a seacoast town in Maine. The title appears on the screen: Blueberry Hill. After the last credits evaporate, you see a long shot of a vacant summer cottage, then a medium shot of a mysterious-looking man pouring lighter fluid on the grass near the house and striking a match. The grass catches fire; the man flees. The vivid crackling of the fire dissolves into the sound of a young girl's laughter as she packs clothing into a cardboard box and sings along with her CD player.

Who created this scene? The screenwriter, director, cinematographer, actors, lighting designer, sound designer, and, finally, the film editor. Working with the director, the film editor shaped the scene into its final form. After hours and hours of reviewing the unedited film, he created this one-minute scene. The scene appears to take place in a seacoast town in Maine during an autumn afternoon. In truth, little of what the

audience sees on screen occurred in Maine, and it certainly was not all filmed in one afternoon.

The actor who played the mysterious man was most likely filmed on a Hollywood set in late summer. The young girl was filmed on a different set in early fall. The establishing shot of the seaside town was filmed months earlier in California, not Maine. The song on the girl's CD and the sounds of the crackling fire were recorded in a studio. But when you see the finished scene, all of the sounds and images work together. They appear to have taken place at one time and in one place. That is the magic of film editing.

Cuts and Transitions: Assembling the Scene

Editors select sounds and images from all the film that has been shot and arrange them to make the movie. They also plan how one shot will best transition to the next. Assembling the opening scene of *Blueberry Hill*, the editor might choose to begin with a wide shot of the bay, focusing on the white caps and buoys that dot the water. From the shot of the grass catching fire, the editor might decide to dissolve to the girl packing clothes into a box. There are dozens of possible transitions the editor can choose, each of which will create a different feeling.

Editing often begins as soon as film has been shot. Early scenes are assembled for the producer and director to view. Occasionally, the actors will also view these early scenes. Many directors choose not to show actors these edited scenes for fear that they will affect the actors' performance.

The first cut of a film, called a "rough cut," takes up to three months to complete. The final cut may take another month to finish. Sometimes the editor works alone, sometimes with the director. The sound designer and music composer join them for the final cut, adding sound effects and the musical score. When the editing is complete and the director and producer have approved the final version of the film, this final cut is sent to a negative matcher. The negative matcher makes a negative of the film that exactly matches the final cut, and the negative is then sent to a film lab where prints are created. These prints eventually end up in theaters.

In the past, editors worked with copies of negatives called "work prints" to plan a film's scenes and transitions. When an editor was satisfied with the final film, he or she would create an edit decision list, a list of each shot in the film and its length. The list would correspond to numbers, called "edge numbers," printed on the edge of

the work prints. These numbers helped a negative matcher accurately copy the work print and cut the negatives.

Today most editors use computers or nonlinear digital editing systems to compile a film. This is more efficient, but for the most part, the process is the same. The work prints, complete with edge numbers, are stored in the computer. The editor arranges the work print, and then creates an edit decision list that will be passed on to the negative matcher.

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 holding them captive.

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.



Bicycle Thieves - Vittorio De Sica (1948)

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.



Psycho - Alfred Hitchcock (1960)

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)

Sound

There are three types of sound in media productions:

Sound effects, Music, and Spoken Language.

These can be employed independently or in any combination.

They can be realistic or expressionistic in nature.

Realistic sounds tend to be synchronous. They derive their source from the images, and are often recorded simultaneously with them (we see the source). Expressionistic sounds tend to be non-synchronous. They are detached from their source. They may provide contrast with the image, or produce a meaning not readily apparent in the visual image. Often, we don't see the source of sound (e.g., music score).

Rene Clair - Observed that a film presentation can let us hear a door slam, so that a director does not have to show us the action as well.

In this, and in other instances sound can be used to replace the shot (we don't have to see a shot of the door).

Clair also pointed out that sound could also act as a continuity device, once the relationship between image and sound had been made clear. During a sequence, there is no need to cut back to re-establishing shots, since the continuity of the soundtrack will provide a perpetual continuity for all the shots.

Sound Montage - Orson Welles was probably the first director to develop sound montage. This is where the dialogue between two or more characters overlaps. Gives us a sense of how language and sounds are actually heard in reality. The language is not so important for what it expresses, but rather, like a musical composition, for the emotional effect it evokes as pure sound.

Robert Altman used sound montage technique in MASH, McCabe and Mrs. Miller, and Nashville. Like Welles, Altman uses language as pure sound, particularly in some of the scenes from McCabe and Mrs. Miller, in which as many as twenty different sound tracks were mixed.

Sound Effects -

Although the primary function of sound effects is generally believed to be atmospheric, they can also be surprisingly precise sources of meaning in film.

1. The pitch, volume, and tempo of sound effects can strongly affect our responses.

High pitched sounds are generally strident and produce a sense of tension. If these types of sounds are prolonged, their harsh shrillness can be unnerving.

For this reason, high pitched sounds (NOTE: This goes for music as well) are often employed in suspense sequences, especially just before and during the climax.

Low frequency sounds are often used to emphasize the dignity or solemnity of a scene (a funeral march with the beat of the drums for example). Low pitched sounds can also suggest anxiety and mystery. Frequently, a suspense sequence begins with such sounds which gradually increase in frequency as the scene peaks.

2. Sound volume works in much the same way. Loud sounds tend to be forceful, intense, and dynamic, whereas quiet sounds strike us as delicate. The soundtrack of Kubrick's A Clockwork Orange is almost consistently loud. Noises are magnified; dialogue is shouted rather than delivered at normal volume. Our ears are assaulted by a barrage of relentless noises. Kubrick uses this technique to "attack" the audience aurally. In effect, the volume never permits us to relax: the noise is as violent in its intensity as the dramatic events of the film.

3. Tempo of sound - The faster the tempo, the greater the tension produced in the listener (e.g., any automobile chase sequence, sequence from Jaws).

4. Off-screen sounds usually bring off-screen space into play: the sound tends to expand the image beyond the confines of the frame.

A war film for instance, with the sounds of guns and cannons, can be constant reminders to the soldiers in the trenches of the dangers they must face when they enter the battlefield.

5. Sound effects can evoke terror in suspense films and thrillers.

Since we tend to fear what we can't see, directors like Hitchcock, Fritz Lang and David Lynch will sometimes use non-synchronous sound effects to strike a note of anxiety.

The sound of a creaking door in a darkened room can be more fearful than an image of someone hiding by a door.

6. Sound effects can serve explicit symbolic functions.

Symbolic noises can be determined by the dramatic content. For example, in Bergman's Wild Strawberries, the protagonist, an elderly professor, has a nightmare. The surrealistic sequence is virtually silent except for the insistent sound of a heart beat - a reminder for the professor that his life will soon end.

7. Sound effects can be used for association.

A character can be associated with a particular sound effect early in a film. Every time we hear the particular sound, we will conjure up the image of the character. In Lang's M, the child murderer is identified by a tune he whistles off-screen. During the early portions of the movie, we never see him, but we recognize him by his sinister tune.

8. Just like our eyes accept the illusionary movement of films/videos, our ears accept sounds presented within films/videos that would not exist in reality.

Media producers aware of this fact, often provide unique sounds within the context of their story to enhance our involvement (e.g., Star Wars - Sounds of spaceships zipping through outer space [remember, outer space is void of sound; it's a vacuum]).

Also filmmakers often "enhance" naturalistic sounds for effect (enhanced reality).

9. Ambiance - Naturalistic sounds can often be utilized to generate a particular atmosphere/mood.

10. Like absolute stasis in a movie, absolute silence in film presentations tends to call attention to itself.

Any significant stretch of silence creates an eerie vacuum - a sense of something impending about to burst (e.g., Bonnie and Clyde).

Silent moments can suggest anxiety, fear, suspicion, and in other contexts, rage, evasion, or total exhaustion.

Silence can also symbolize death, since we tend to associate sound with the presence of ongoing life (e.g., in Little Big Man where the soundtrack is "dead" after the protagonist's Indian wife and child are brutally murdered by some cavalry soldiers).

Music -

1. Music functions in a variety of ways in movies. Beginning with the opening credits, it can serve as a kind of overture, to suggest the general mood or spirit of the film as a whole

2. Certain kinds of music can suggest locales, classes, or ethnic groups. (e.g., Easy Rider, Quadrophenia).

Music can also be used for foreshadowing.

Alfred Hitchcock and Brian DePalma for example will often accompany an apparently casual sequence with "anxious" music - a warning to the audience to be prepared. Sometimes these musical warnings are false alarms; other times they explode into frightening crescendos. Similarly, when actors are required to assume restrained or neutral expressions, music can suggest their internal - hidden emotions.

3. Music can also convey sudden emotional shifts within a continuous scene (e.g., happy one moment, sad the next).

4. Music can also function as an ironic contrast to a sequence. In many cases, the predominant mood of a scene can be neutralized or even reversed with contrasting music (e.g., Bonnie and Clyde, Alice's Restaurant).

5. Characterizations can be suggested through musical motifs (e.g. A particular piece of music is played every time a character appears on screen).

Music can often give viewers the "essence" of a character (good, bad - happy, sad, etc.) Bernard Herrmann's music for Mysterious Island is used to introduce various oversized/horrific creatures to the audience. Their musical motifs are played whenever they appear on screen.

6. Characterization can be even more precise when lyrics are added to music. In Peter Bogdanovich's The Last Picture Show, pop tunes of the 1950s are used in association with specific characters (also Some Like It Hot, American Graffiti).

7. Music can also be used to communicate the major theme of a film.

Dennis Hopper's Easy Rider begins with the two likable protagonists selling drugs in order to stake themselves to a journey they plan to take to New Orleans.

The visuals during this sequence aren't particularly condemnatory, but on the sound track, Steppenwolf's rock tune "The Pusher" makes it clear what we are to think of the transaction.

8. Musicals themselves can also be expressive or realistic (see Cabaret, All That Jazz, Moulin Rouge)

Language -

There are two basic types of spoken language in movies - the monologue (includes on/off-screen) and dialogue.

Monologues are often associated with documentaries, in which an off-screen narrator provides the audience with factual information accompanying the visuals.

Monologues in fiction film - This technique is especially useful in condensing events and time.

An off-screen monologue (off-screen narration) tends to give a movie a sense of objectivity, and provides us with greater insights into the significance of the visuals (sometimes narration is done from third-person perspective).

On-screen monologue - This type of narrative monologue can provide us with the "internal" feelings of a character - often something which only the audience is privy to (e.g., the internal monologue is what a character is thinking).

Originally a dramatic and novelistic device, the internal monologue is in fact frequently used in cinematic adaptations of plays and novels (sometimes used for mixing thoughts and speech -e.g., Olivier's Hamlet).

Dialogue - One of the major differences between stage dialogue and screen dialogue is the degree of articulation.

The theater is a visual as well as aural medium, but in general, the spoken word is dominant.

If information is conveyed visually in the theater, it must be larger than life, for most of the audience is too far from the stage to perceive visual nuances.

The convention of articulation is necessary, therefore, to compensate for visual loss. Stage dialogue is usually not realistic or natural - real people don't articulate their emotions and ideas with such precision.

In movies (and television for that matter), the conventions of articulation can be relaxed. Since the close-up can show the smallest detail, verbal comment is often not as important.

This greater spatial flexibility means that language doesn't have to carry the heavy burden that stage dialogue does - the image conveys most of the dominant meaning. Therefore, dialogue in film can be as realistic as it is in everyday life.

Language permits a director more visual freedom, not less. Because speech can reveal a person's class, occupation, prejudices, and style, the director doesn't need to waste time establishing these characteristics visually.

There are many instances where language is the most economical and precise way of conveying meaning in film.

END OF UNIT THREE MATERIAL