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Introduction to Film

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### Drifting Through Story

In the film *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (2006), we are given a look into the main character Sean's struggle to fit in wherever he goes, until he unintentionally ends up in Tokyo's underground car scene. Director Justin Lin delivers one of the most famous race scenes- however it's set was not on a track but rather a parking garage. Starting at 28:56, Sean races against D.K., AKA Drift King. This high-stake moment becomes more than a competition between two big egos; using lighting, motion and set design, the film shows us who these characters are and how they relate to each other. All of this is done without the use of much dialogue.

The cars themselves are not like other films, as they don't just speed down the freeway. They drift, spin and slide through tight areas with other cars and pedestrians. The use of geometry portrays the cars to create arcs and spirals. The way the camera follows these motions, often from low angles or right behind the cars, puts us right in the middle of the action. But it's not just about the car action for action's sake; the movement actually tells a story. D.K.'s drifts are smooth and precise, showing he has experience and confidence (hence his name.) Meanwhile Sean's driving is sloppy, and he often crashes into walls, showing he is still trying to figure things out. Their driving styles go as far as to reflect their personalities and put in motion meaning.

Lighting also plays a big role in setting the tone. The garage is lit with harsh fluorescent lights, giving a cold feel. Flashes of neon from the outside mix in and reflect off the cars to add a burst of color. As the cars race past, we see the hint of red from the taillights to further emphasizing the speed of the cars. Not every area is lit, parts are kept in the dark which makes the race feel unpredictable and dangerous for the characters. The whole set has an underground, edgy vibe that fits the world of illegal street racing.

Next, because this shot was in a real Tokyo parking garage, and not in a soundstage with a bunch of CGI, it feels believable and allows the viewer to feel like they are there. One can spot graffiti, signs and people crowding the streets. The tight, concrete space makes the race feel more intense. There is barely any room to move, so every turn feels risky. With this setting, the stakes are raised, and pressure is added making the drivers' skills or lack thereof stand out more.

Usually, we are taught that *mise-en-scène* is about what's placed in the frame, whether that's costume, lighting, lighting, props and setting. Tokyo Drift though shows movement can be just as important. The way the cars and characters move through areas adds a layer of meaning. D.K.'s smooth style shows control. Sean's clumsy drifting shows he's inexperienced but still growing. Motion isn't just action- it's storytelling.

## Work Cited

*The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*. Justin Lin, Universal Pictures, 2006.