

## WEEK FIVE, LECTURE FIVE: Composition

### I. Composition

- A. The code of the director
  - 1. Turning a 2D space into a 3D space
- B. Three aspects of composition – framing, staging, and photographing
- C. How things are arranged in the frame, versus visual design - **what** is placed in the frame.
- D. How the lens shapes cinematic space

### II. Framing

- A. Framing is the visual structure enclosing the action.
  - 1. The black frame helps draw attention, distinguishes from the background
  - 2. Working within boundaries; all art works within borders
  - 3. Selecting and ordering from life
- B. Aspect Ratio
  - 1. The rectangle comes from the theater
  - 2. Classical Framing – 1.33:1 (4:3) – the Edison/Lumiere ratio
  - 3. Widescreen Framing – 1.85:1 (5.5:3) – standard since 1950s, close to HD television (1.78:1, 16:9)
  - 4. Anamorphic/Cinemascope/Panavision – 2.35:1 (7.05x3, 21:9)
  - 5. Other aspect ratios, less common, covered in lecture slides
- C. Aesthetic Considerations
  - 1. Center of interest is usually the center of the frame, 1/3 from the top
  - 2. Filmmakers will offset the action in the frame
    - a. Decentering vs. centering

- b. Toploading (oppressive) vs. bottomloading (uplifting)
    - c. The edge is uneasy
    - d. Oblique frames – off balance, unreliable
  - 3. Framing can separate or call attention
    - a. Fragmentation of the frame – objects or light split the frame, or you can have a truly split screen (a la Pillow Talk)
    - b. Matting/Masking – frames take different shapes
    - c. Frames within frames
  - 4. Classical rule of framing – show what is essential
- D. Off-Screen Space
  - 1. We feel that the world continues beyond the frame, unlike theater
  - 2. Six zones of off-screen space – right, left, above, below, in front (behind the camera), and behind the set

### III. Staging

- A. Proxemic Patterns – the arrangement of objects and players in relation to each other within the frame.
  - 1. Proxemic Patterns within the frame
    - a. The spatial relationships among the elements in the frame.
    - b. i.e. Placing two actors right next to each other in the frame versus far apart.
    - c. The second type of proxemic patterns (outside the frame) is part of photography – how the lens and the camera shape the space
- B. Lines and Planes
  - 1. Lines
    - a. Horizontals = calm, flowing

- b. Verticals = Dominant, energetic, erect
- c. Diagonals = dynamic, unstable, in motion
- d. Jaggeds = chaos, conflict, danger

2. Planes

- a. One plane is flat
- b. Multiple planes create depth, open up space

C. Movement

- 1. Movement is more interesting than stasis
- 2. Moving right to left is stronger than left to right (for people who read left-to-right languages habitually) because it opposes the natural parsing direction for writing
- 3. Moving toward the audience is stronger than moving away

IV. Photographing

A. The element added by the camera, not present in theater

B. Proxemic Patterns outside the frame

- 1. The relationship between the spectacle/subject and the spectator/camera
- 2. Depends on the distance of the camera from the objects it is photographing and on the focal length of the lens.
- 3. Six Basic Perspectives (drawn on board)
  - a. Extreme long shot
  - b. Long shot – full human figure
  - c. Medium long shot – knees up
  - d. Medium shot – chest up

- e. Close-up – just the head
- f. Extreme Close-up – details, parts

### C. The Lens

#### 1. Effects of focal length:

- a. Wide angle (short focal length) – barrel distortion, exaggeration of distance along the focal axis, “fish-eye” distortion in close-up, relatively deep focus (high depth of field), everything else held equal (focal distance, aperture, size of substrate or sensor); focal length < 35mm on a 35mm sensor/film gauge.
- b. Medium – approximates human sight, focal lengths around 50mm on a 35mm sensor/film gauge
- c. Telephoto or long focal length – flattens space, reduces distance between planes of focus, relatively shallow focus (low depth of field), everything else held equal (focal distance, aperture, size of substrate or sensor); focal length > 80-100mm on a 35mm sensor/film gauge

#### 2. Aperture

- a. Adjustable opening in the lens that allows light in.
- b. When open wide, it allows for proper exposure in lower lighting, but also reduces the depth of field. When closed, it increases depth of field, creating deeper focus, but consequently allows less light onto the film strip/sensor.
- c. Rendered as fractional  $f/$  or  $t/$  number (former is more common in photo equipment, latter more common in film equipment; the difference has to do with measuring the light at the end of the lens or at the sensor/film strip).  $f/2.0$  is much wider open than  $f/22$ .
- d. Its shape determines the shape of out of focus highlights (bokeh)

3. Anamorphic lenses
  - a. Squeeze the image to allow for wider aspect ratios to be recorded on standard 35mm film; a corresponding lens unsqueezes the image in projection
  - b. Warp space, especially obvious with movement in out of focus areas
4. Zoom lens
  - a. Zoom lenses have variable focal lengths (as opposed to “prime” lenses, which have fixed focal lengths and are much more common in film production)
  - b. Zoom vs camera movement – different effects in spatial rendering

## V. Perspective

1. Created through proxemic patterns (focal length and camera distance), angle, and movement.
2. The way the director brings us into the world, puts us in the space of the film
  - a. Perspective is ideological, it creates an attitude

### B. Reciprocity of Space and Time

1. Whatever you do to space will influence the perception of time and vice versa; space and time are correlative
2. An extreme long shot plays faster than an extreme close-up of the same duration because of the number of things to look at

### C. Angle – the tilt or inclination from which the camera views the subject

1. Most films shot 5 ½ feet from ground; average human perspective
2. High angles – make audience feel dominant
  - a. Play faster because they are unfamiliar, more dramatic

3. Low angles – make the subject look powerful

#### D. Camera Movement

1. The camera can physically move within space
  - a. Dollying, tracking, trucking, sliders, helicopter/drone, crane, steadicam, gimbal stabilizer
2. The camera can be moved from a stationary position
  - a. Panning, tilting
3. Movement and/or stasis affect time

#### E. Subjective and Objective Camera

1. Subjective camera – the physical eye of the person
2. Objective camera – stands outside the characters (99.9% of the time)
3. Mindscreen – inside the mind of the character – i.e. dreams, fantasy sequences

#### F. Distortions – fast motion, slow motion, reverse, freeze frame, repetition

1. None of these exist in the real world