

WEEK FOUR, LECTURE FOUR: VISUAL DESIGN

I. Elements of Visual Design

A. Costume, Hairstyle, Makeup

B. Décor – Set, Set Dressing, Props

1. Can be studio-built, location, and/or computer generated.
2. Sets – real and built, on-location or onstage
3. Set Dressing – everything added to the bare space of the set to make it expressive
4. Prop – an object used to move the story forward; used by actors

B. Lighting

1. Photography – Greek “photos” = light; “graphein” = to write.
 - a. “To write with light.”
2. Three-Point Lighting system
 - a. Key Light – Main source, from front, usually off to one side
 - b. Fill Light – 90 degrees from key light; fills in shadows
 - c. Back Light – behind the subject; creates depth, separates subject from background; can also create glamour or halo effect
3. Effects of Light Direction
 - a. Heavy back light creates depth and separation, sometimes frames front of subject in an ethereal halo;
 - b. Front lighting – erases texture, blanches out features
 - c. Lighting from below – grotesque, eerie
 - d. Overhead lighting – spotlight, ethereal
 - e. Side lighting – outlines features
4. Degree of Lighting Intensity

- a. High-Key Lighting – not much ratio between key and fill; washes out, floods with light; low contrast, bright
- b. Low-Key Lighting – high ratio between key and fill, high contrast
- c. Hard Lighting – shadows, edges
- d. Soft Lighting – diffused, reflected or bounced

C. Resolution – grain, clarity

- 1. The amount of fine detail; depends on film stock, gauge, and lab work
- 2. Film Stock
 - a. Fast stock is very sensitive to light, can shoot in low light.
 - i. Will be grainy and lack resolution.
 - b. Slow stock is less sensitive and needs more light
 - i. Very sharp with high resolution
 - c. Black-and-white or color
- 3. Gauge – size of the film stock – 8mm, super 8, 16mm, 35mm, 70mm
 - a. Larger film gauge = more resolution, more light captured; the size of the film strip / sensor also affects the interplay with the lens (we'll discuss this next week)

D. Color

- 1. Carried by objects, lighting, and filters, as well as choice of stock and digital color grading
- 2. Used to express or reveal (not imitate) reality.
 - a. There is no perfectly accurate color system. In a cinema, colors generally seem brighter due to viewing conditions (in the dark, the bright and colorful screen pops.)
- 3. Meaning can be conveyed through color
 - a. Contrasts create conflict and draw the eye; drama is contrast
- 4. Black and White vs. Color

- a. The human eye can perceive approximately 20 exposure stops between light and dark.
- b. Neither B&W nor color is more real, it depends on the subject.

E. Title Design

- 1. Representational – credits over a diegetic part of the film, over images from the world of the film
- 2. Abstract – outside of the world of the film; graphics, animation, etc.
- 3. The two can also be combined

F. Special Effects – four types

- 1. Makeup Effects
 - a. Street makeup – regular makeup
 - b. Character makeup – a part of the character; prosthetics, teeth, etc.
 - c. Special Effects makeup – beyond character; blood, wounds
- 2. Mechanical Effects
 - a. Staged in front of the camera; explosions, wirework, squibs
- 3. In-Camera Effects
 - a. Done with the film and camera during production; process shooting, double exposure, etc.
- 4. Post-Production Effects
 - a. Those done in a lab after production, CGI (computer generated imagery), green-screening, matte work, etc.

II. Functions of Visual Design

A. Direct Attention

- 1. Lighting can outline or hide objects, establish depth

B. Shape Setting - tells us place and time

C. Mood and Atmosphere

1. Mood – the emotional overtone, the feeling conveyed
2. Atmosphere – physical sensations, sensory effects – smells, weather, etc.

D. Delineation of Character

E. Visual metaphor

1. Something objective/physical/concrete used to convey something subjective/spiritual/abstract
2. “objective correlative” – an objective representation of a subjective or abstract concept

F. Visual Motif – anything repeated for effect

G. Enunciate subject, theme, or conflict

H. Character or Plot Catalyst

I. Symbolic Associations of Color

1. Lighter colors bring us closer, darker pushes us away.
2. Various culturally contingent color associations – i.e. green=spring, youth, red=passion

J. Title design as anticipation of thematic values of the film