Cinematography and Special Visual Effects

**The Importance of the Visual Image**

Aesthetic quality and dramatic power of the image are important to the overall film quality. Photographic effects have to work with the overall film both psychologically, dramatically, as well as aesthetically. Creating images for the sake of creating images destroys a film’s unity and will negatively impact the film.

Special camera techniques must have an underlying purpose (3D filming that doesn’t fit In with plot). New techniques should be used to communicate a story instead of showing off the technique.

Photography should not be a dominating force, all parts should have equal emphasis including performances, directing, the music, and the camerawork should all blend.

**The Cinematic Film**

Cinematic film is a *motion* picture – flowing images not static images

Cinematic film should have a natural rhythm that grows out of the images, sounds, and motion

Cinematic film makes maximum use of the flexibility and freedom of film – film can be free from the spoken word; film communicates concretely through images and sounds; film is free to show multiple vantage points; film can manipulate time and space; film is free to make clear transitions in time and place.

Cinematic film can create an illusion of depth: not a flat screen but a window through which the audience observes a three-dimensional world.

If the script or subject matter doesn’t have the traits mentioned above than the director, cinematographer, and editor must build them for the film.

**Cinematic Points of View**

Appreciating the workings of cinematic film requires a viewer to look beyond what is on the screen to how the images are shown and why the images are being shown in a particular way. The camera is an eye that sees the action in a movie in particular ways with cinematic points of view.

Questions to consider when watching a film

From what position and through what kind of eyes does the camera see the action?

What effect do the camera’s position and its particular way of seeing the action have on the viewer’s response to the action?

How is the viewer’s response affected by changes in the point of view? (Important question because the camera does not remain in one place. Keeping the viewpoint consistent works in literature but in film viewpoint consistency is boring)

All four camera views can be used in every film to varying degrees, depending on the situation within the story and the director’s creative vision.

**Four points of view are used in film**

Objective (camera as sideline observer)

Subjective (camera as participant in action)

Indirect-subjective

Director’s interpretive

* **Objective Point of View**

Provides a view that is like a window. Earliest of camera views. Camera acts as a window for audience to look in on the action which was John Ford’s “philosophy of the camera” that he applied regularly in his work. The audience doesn’t participate. Static Camera is recording the action. Suggests an emotional distance. Straightforward camera angles suggesting an impersonal observer. The audience has to look for important visual details.

* **Subjective Point of View**

Provides the audience with the viewpoint and emotional intensity of a character involved in the action. **Hitchcock** specialized in creating in the audience a strong sense of being directly involved in the action. Hitchcock used elaborate camera angles to force audience into becoming the characters and directly experiencing the character’s emotions. The camera moves in this type of viewpoint to duplicate what the human eye sees so we become the character.

Maintaining this viewpoint causes confusion in the audience. Commonly a combination of objective and subjective viewpoints is used in a movie. Alternating between objective and subjective views provides a clear understanding of the story and a strong flow of audience involvement.

* **Indirect-Subjective Point of View**

Provides the audience with an up close view of the action so the viewer feels involved with action but does not provide the viewer with the character’s perspective. This viewpoint allows the audience to feel as if they are participating in the action without seeing the action through a character’s eyes. Must be close to the action. In Psycho, the camera places the audience in the shower so they feel the personal danger of the attack.

* **Director’s Interpretive Point of View**

Provides a view based on how the director wants the audience to see it. Manipulates the viewer’s perception. The audience becomes consciously aware that the director wants them to view the action in an unusual way.

Elements of Cinematic Composition

**Artistic composition is based on three basic visual concepts**

1. Vertical lines suggest strength, authority, and dignity.

2. Diagonal lines crossing the frame suggest action and dynamic movement – the power to overcome obstacles

3. Curved lines denote fluidity and sensuality while circular movements evoke feelings of euphoria or joy

Goals of Cinematic Composition: Movies are not static so every shot must be designed with the goals of cinematic composition. The three goals of composition are (1) Direct attention to the object of greatest significance (2) Keep the image in constant motion (3) Create an illusion of depth

1. Focusing Attention on the Most Significant Object

Size and closeness of the object: Eye is directed toward larger, closer objects

Sharpness of Focus: viewer’s eye is automatically drawn to what it can best see

Movement: Eye is drawn to an object in motion

Extreme Close-ups: shot of a person or object taken at close range

Arrangement of People and objects: Focuses our attention by the directors arrangement of people and objects in relation to each other

Foreground Framing: Director frames the object of greatest significance with objects or people in the near foreground.

Usually the object is emphasized with the brightest lighting and sharpest focus.

Lighting and Color: Special uses of light and color draw the eye to the object of greatest significance

Size and Closeness of the Object

2. Keeping the Image in Motion

6 terms

Fixed frame movement: Camera remains in one position, pointing in one spot, as the subject moves laterally, in depth, or diagonally

Panning: Moving the camera's line of sight in a horizontal plane, to the left and right.

Titling: Moving the camera's line of sight in a vertical plane, up and down

Zoom Lens: A series of lenses that keep and image in constant focus, allowing the camera to appear to glide toward or away from the subject without any movement of the camera

The mobile camera: Portable one person camera with a built-in gyroscopic device that prevents any sudden jerkiness

Editing and Movement: Creates vibrant rhythms through cuts and transitions

Fixed-Frame Movement

Panning and Tilting

The Zoom Lens

The Mobile Camera

Editing and Movement

Dead Screen and Live Screen

3. Creating an Illusion of Depth

Movement of Subject (Fixed Frame): Director creates the illusion of depth by filming the subject moving towards or away from the camera

Movement of Camera: A camera mounted on a truck or dolly may create the illusion of depth by moving toward or away from a relatively static object

Apparent Camera Movement: The zoom lens gives us the sensation of moving closer to or farther away from the camera. Not as effective as a mobile camera in creating the illusion of depth, as the objects to the sides do not change their position in relation to one another as they do when the camera moves

Change of Focal Planes: In one continuous shot, focusing the camera lens on objects in different planes of depth

Deep Focus: The use of special lenses that allow the camera to focus simultaneously and with equal clarity on objects anywhere from two to two hundred feet away

Three Dimensional Arrangement of People and objects: By placing characters and objects in a shot in separate focal planes, the cinematographer has created a true three dimensional shot.

Foreground Framing: Subject is framed by an object or objects in the near foreground.

Special Lighting Effects: By carefully controlling the angle, direction, intensity and quality of the lighting, the director can further add to the illusion of depth

Use of reflection: Mirrors, windows, etc.

Movement of Subject (Fixed Frame)

Movement of Camera

Apparent Camera Movement (Zoom Lens)

Change of Focal Planes (Rack Focus)

Deep Focus

Three Dimensional Arrangement of People and Objects

Foreground Framing

Special Lighting Effects

Use of Reflections

**Specialized Cinematic Techniques**

Handheld Camera

Camera Angles

Color, Diffusion, and Soft Focus

Special Lenses

Fast Motion

Special Lighting Effects

Movie Magic: Special Visual Effects in the Modern Film

The F/X of Animated Feature Films…Especially for Adults