

Sourcelessness

How did softlight affected naturalism in early european cinema?

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Screen Studies

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Contents

Introduction	2
What is soft light?	2
Pre Realism	3
Italian Neo Realism	4
Rome Open City (1945)	4
Shoeshine (1946)	5
G.R. Aldo	5
Post War France Cinema	5
how not all of French cinema from 1950 to 1960 is the new wave	6
Polish Film School Movement	6
The British New Wave	6
List of Figures	8
Bibliography	8

“An endless struggle with great benefits of satisfaction when you get to the end” (Broomfield, 2017)

this is a inline test to see if it works

Introduction

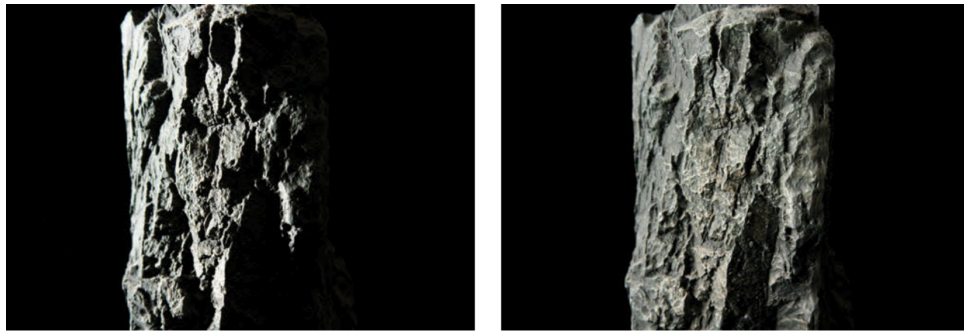
In this essay i will be looking at how the evolution of soft light and how it plays a major a part of creating a natural looking image. i will look at the main contibutors in the evolution of soft light from 1940's till the 1970's.

Saying one cinematic movement is responsible for the the entirety of softer lighting in film wouldnt be right. However in film there have been Film Movements that have created noticable change to how we light today. in this essay i will be looking at 4 Major movements. Sarting with Italian Neo Realism then moving onto the avantgard movement in france from 1950 till 1960 going on to the polish film school movement in the same time frame lastly going on to the british new wave from 1960 till the 1970's.

What is soft light?

To be able to understand the history of soft lighting i will look at the ways soft light is created and the effect it produces Jay Holben discribes this process will in two issues of the American Cinematographer entitled Shot Craft: Light Quality 101 (Holben, 2020)

“The closer the source is to your subject, the softer the light will be. As light becomes softer, the shadow transition becomes longer and more gradual. Soft light is, by its nature, very low in contrast_. It can be non-directional and even feel”sourceless,” meaning that it’s hard to determine what direction the light is coming from. It can hide the texture of an object, even at extreme angles. Extremely soft light can create a nearly shadowless environment.” Holben (2020)



Examples of hard light and soft light from the same raking side angle on a stone with a heavily textured face. Note that the hard light accentuates the appearance of the texture while the soft light greatly reduces it.

Figure 1: *Light Quality 101* (2020)

When using softer lighting in a film there are some inherent benefits and drawbacks. — in his essay puts it best

one of the major drawbacks to using softer lighting from a non artistic point is that it requires a lot more light to get a good exposure.

The Benefits

faster turnaround as a scene would not have to be relit for every shot

The Drawbacks

greater power requirements as

would this work if this doesn't work just one more test

Pre Realism

looking at the soft 1930's and lens filters

“Earliest silent movies were shot in studios under glass roofs with muslin cloth stretched across, so were under soft light. One of the most popular lights in the silent era were Cooper-Hewitts, which were gas-discharge fixtures in tubes, a cross between a mercury vapor streetlamp and a fluorescent tube, and produced a soft light. Cinematographers like Charles Rosher did lovely lighting effects by mixing hard carbon arc lamps with soft Cooper-Hewitt lamps. So soft lighting is not a modern phenomenon. David Mullen (2012) History of Hard and Soft Lighting.” (David Mullen, 2012)

“Sound killed the use of the noisy Cooper-Hewitts (as did color). But many 1930's movies still created

soft lighting using tungsten lamps through spun glass or silks. By like all styles, people became tired of it and the sharper, crisper look using harder lights become the norm by the 1940's. David Mullen (2012) History of Hard and Soft Lighting.” (David Mullen, 2012)

Italian Neo Realism

During an interview in Masters of Light, Néstor Almendros discussed the look of Italian films during the neorealist movement talking about the use of Softer and more natural lighting, mentioning G.R. Aldo (born Aldo Graziati) as one of the most influential people during this time because of his revolutionary work on Umberto D., (1952) and La terra trema, (1949)

Néstor Almendros also discussed where this softer lighting style might have originated “Films of the period like Open City and Shoeshine made by other cinematographers had an interesting look, not because the director of photography wanted it that way; it was due to lack of money.” (Schaefer and Salvato, 2013:5)

Rome Open City (1945)

“Roma città aperta was shot in the same way that conventional feature films were shot at the time, mostly in a studio. However, the production was ‘poor’ for purely historical reasons: electrical power and production funding were scarce and unreliable. The ‘look’ of a film is largely the product of the lighting. For the interiors, mostly shot in a studio, the filmmakers had no alternative but to use large amounts of artificial light, and one problem they faced was that of getting power for the lighting units. They had a generator, but fuel was hard to obtain. Once they had solved the problem by purloining current from a nearby American forces newspaper office, there was no reason why the DP should not light his sets in the normal way (except that Arata found himself short of bulbs for the lighting units).” (Wagstaff, 2007)

Shoeshine (1946)

G.R. Aldo

La Terra Trema

Umberto D. (1952)

Post War France Cinema

From 1950 to 1960, France was rife with artistic experimentation, including one of the most influential film movements. The Nouvelle Vague brought upon us the birth of auteur theory. In the age of experimental auteurs, there were also experimental cinematographers, most notably the likes of Raoul Coutard, Henri Decae and Léonce-Henri Burel.

Although Robert Bresson's work is not thought to be part being part of the French New Wave, However it still was none the less highly influential in a multiple of ways, his way of lighting being one of them. The lighting in Bressons' films had evolved though multiple films and Cinematographers, two of the most notably being Philippe Agostini and Léonce-Henri Burel. Agostini's films with Bresson had softer elements with elements of softer lighting using the standard techniques of to achieve soft lighting. However, this change with Bressons' collaboration with Léonce-Henri Burel where this technique was used to a far greater extent, most notably on the films *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951), *A Man Escaped* (1956) and *Pickpocket* (1959).

look at the catch light used in *A Man Escaped* and how it gave life to the image

the inefficiency of lights and how they aren't very light efficient so they need strong lights to power

(soft light was used since the beginning of cinema how)

Raoul Coutard's more notable work with soft light was in (*Le petit soldat*, 1963)

(*Le petit soldat*, 1963)

(*Le petit soldat*, 1963)

Look at Henri Decae's work with Jean-Pierre Melville and François Truffaut on *400 Blows* Henri Decae also worked with Jacques Dupont

"It might be hard to understand now but these films had a profound effect on European cinema. They inspired the French 'New Wave' of Goddard and Truffaut; the 'Kitchen Sink' realism of the 60's in



Figure 2: *Le petit soldat*. (1963)

the UK; the students of the Polish Film” (Roger Deakins, 2017)

how not all of French cinema from 1950 to 1960 is the new wave

Polish Film School Movement

Looking at how they also took influence from Italian neo realism

The British New Wave

how technology is used to

looking at John Alcott and creating even more reflectors Much later new varieties of reflector materials were developed for Kubrick and cinematographer John Alcott.

Ozzie Morris’ use of space lights and

“It’s interesting to look at the work of Geoffrey Unsworth and Ozzie Morris because they came out of the British studio system and their lighting styles was always a mix of old-school hard light and more modern soft-light techniques – and then compare them with someone like David Watkin who came out of shooting industrials, documentaries, and commercials. Also, look at Unsworth’s work on “2001” (1968), which is mostly soft-lit” David Mullen (2017)

“It was the demands of such cinematographers for a softer look, especially in the shooting of commercials, that influenced what the film equipment manufacturers made rather than the other way around. The development of Space Lights made economical sense when film directors and cinematographers demanded their large interior stage sets looked real. HMIs were invented because there was a demand

for ever larger sources of light that could be softened down or bounced to appear more naturalistic. Much later new varieties of reflector materials were developed for Kubrick and cinematographer John Alcott.” Roger Deakins (2017)

List of Figures

Figure 1. Holben, J. (2020) *Light Quality 101*. Figure 2. *Le petit soldat*. (1963)

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