# STUDYING AND UNDERSTANDING FILM

# Abstract

The study of film is a way of understanding more strongly about a movie or even its directors or producers. We will look at montage theories at the start of the modern century, or at the era of motion pictures. The technical quality of the film may seem confusing, Film studies exist to help clear the confusion as—it helps us understand the art of the film. At the end of the nineteenth century the modernization of the film gave birth to a whole array of film producers and [directors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film_director) with their own styles and methods followed after that.

Earlier films concentrated on the production and theoretical evaluation of the cinema instead of skillful quality, systematic narrative of past events and the principles of explanation and prediction used in schools of higher learning (Tan, 2018). Ever since film was created, the innovation of studying film as a subject grew to determine the evolution of elements and film appearance, In 1919 the [Film school](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerasimov_Institute_of_Cinematography)s in Russia were the first schools in the world to focus on the progress of film as a type of study. Several motion film schools too, were founded in 1929, which began with an arrangement together with the [Academy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_of_Motion_Picture_Arts_and_Sciences) [of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_of_Motion_Picture_Arts_and_Sciences). A major in film studies was offered in 1932 but without noting the differences that were adopted in film studies (Silver. 2007) Other schools and universities started their curriculum of cinema and film, however, with no division between the theory and practical approaches.

In 1938, during the German occupation, many schools opened and were teaching this subject. To complete studying film studies, you will have to finish a short film.

**Keywords**: Film theory, Movies, Directors, Heinrich George

I will always remember the times when I was learning Film, one of the first things I needed to know were these three names, Sergei Eisentein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Alexander Dovchenko (Schwarz, 2018). I refer to them as grandfathers of film theories. They had wonderful ideas which had something to do with their experiences. Coincidently, they came out with similar montage theories.

I have always wondered what are the concepts of cinema, and the theories of these three grandfathers that have opened the door for many filmmakers today. When I first got into editing, movement and editing was mind-boggling. Editing to make sense, the fundamentals that every filmmaker should know before getting into video editing or just holding a camera. This prepared me for a life in film production and editing motion pictures and documentaries, two different editing concepts. The visual components of my films are usually overlooked, but are just as important as my script. It is the way of communicating moods and emotions, variety and style

I discovered that a film is difficult to understand. There are several theories that you will need to be familiar with. To study film, scholars need to analyse it. We write what we see (indicate the expression) from film. We look at Jurassic Park(1993), we can indicate when Alan Grant(Sam Neil) walks beside a brachiosaur, and looks up in shock, Or we can indicate the film’s defined areas (how the film is constructed) in the same way, we can indicate how the camera turns left and right and follows to the right as Grant and the brachiosaur move. Expressing is a must but not a rule for film writing. You will repeat what you see in the film.

So I needed to reinforce a statement with studying the nature of it which involves scrutinizing a films overall appearance or elements, that is, the film’s plan and structure. I searched for patterns that gave importance to films, or significant action. The film’s elements added up to form a new existence that does not appear in each part, to make it simple, important appearance is the corresponding of a person’s interpretation of the visuals.

But how do we identify aesthetic emotions? You need to discipline yourself to value the particular attributes of a film, or each event in a film. You need to achieve an extensive study of the interior process of a film, and be perceptive to the unparalleled meaning of every camera position or framing in each event of a film. Not all camera positions are the same. A follow shot in Spielberg’s film Jurassic Park is not the same as a follow shot in Max Ophuls film “Letter from an Unknown Woman” (Brownrigg,2003)

# Film Aesthetics

It’s not a ridiculous idea to study the cinema, the question we ask ourselves: How do we learn film? Film has been studied from many styles and ways. We can recognise ten styles to film (the list is not long);

1. A historical outlook about film which may emphasise leaders, such as the Lumiere brothers or Edison, and/or technological methods such as the age of sound, the growth of colour.
2. Knowledge of procedures: either historically, which inquires knowledge such as: when was the first close-up used? or judgement and skills
3. Knowledge of famous people (studio, Moghuls, stars…..)
4. Knowledge of the connection of film and other performances, usually theatre or a novel.
5. A succession of past occurrence of old films
6. Film in association to the community. Film can be read in connection to important friendly events, or, war
7. Systematic narrative of studios in Hollywood
8. Knowledge of directors
9. Knowledge of film categories – either formally or as a social rite
10. Rules of the film industry by means of censorship and antitrust.

Mise -en-scēne

One of the most commonly used term in film analysis is mise-en-scēne, which means ‘placing on stage’ or ‘presenting a play’. The term comes from the theatre, which indicates that everything is placed on stage-set design, lights and actor movement. Mise-en-scēne frequently has an uncertain meaning: At times it is used in-depth to explain the filmed occurrence associated with the shooting of events, while other times it is used in a simpler sense (almost to its true theatrical meaning), to indicate the filmed shots. Mise-en-scēne means in front of the camera or set, lighting and acting. The filmed events are also known as mise-en-shot, which literally means ‘placing the shots’ or simply called ‘shoot’.

# Mise-en-shot

The difference between mise-en-scēne (staging) and mise-en-shot (shooting, or filming), has been confirmed. mise-en-scēne points out the shooting angles-set design, lighting and the acting. In this sense, mise-en-scēne points to a theatre or movie production that leaves before shooting. We can visually understand from the way it’s shot. The system of shooting, of converting mise-en-scēne into film, mise- en-shot, a term, created by the Russian film maker Sergei Eisenstein.

An important portion of filmmaking includes the mix between the filmed shots mise-en- scēne and how they are shot (mise-en-shot). To achieve success, filmmakers need to position a positive insight between mise-en-scēne and mise-en-shot.

The principal boundaries of mise-en-shot include:

* Camera placing
* Appearance of movement
* Development of shots
* One shot
* Development of editing

Let us look at the choices directors have in depicting a scene on film. The three choices are employing:

* The long take
* Deep focus photography
* Continuity editing

# The long take

A long duration of a shot is called a long take as in take one. By itself, this distinction is not very instructive, due to the fact we have no formal knowledge with which to explain the ‘long continuance in time’. Fortunately, analyst Barry Salt managed to calculate the approximate length of film shots in Hollywood across the years. The work he did is broad and informative revealed the most common shot for each decade. For example: the most simplest shot length in 1940s, a shot approximately changes every 9 seconds

**Deep focus photography**

During deep focus photography the foreground, middle-ground and background are always in focus providing space at the same time for a few action shots. These shots are edited to create action.

The combination of the long take and deep focus photography helps in creating absolute great shots. The long take with deep focus photography had always been used by the most famous director, Orson Welles back in the 1940’s. Some scenes in ‘The Magnificent Ambersons’ (1942), were used by Welles and filmed using the extended take with great depth of field. Welles made those obvious choices.

Why did he make those choices? We can only answer this question by taking into account, The Magnificent Ambersons , parlour scene, the two combinations of long take and deep focus photography were used. George sits in the front while his aunty feeds him strawberry shortcakes, while discussing about Eugene. Uncle Jack meanwhile gets into the frame and makes fun of Aunty Fanny who is in love with Eugene. She runs out of the shot sobbing. This whole time the camera stays in the same location..

Welles decided not to interrupt this shot and scene as they developed, therefore the mise-en-scene was translated into mise-en-shot.

Because the camera did not move all through especially at the emotional crisis that Agnes Moorehead was going through as she rushes away, the camera still focused on the strawberry shortcake. This shows to us that the position of the man cannot move because he was strapped to a chair.

Bazin (1999) says by showing the extended sequence and the unmoving camera, it takes the audience away from the shot and actors

# Continuity Editing

A series or sequence of shots is broken down by using a technique called editing. Extended takes and great depth of field photography are time consuming; so usage of editing could be advantageous. Continuity editing is a lot about taking shots and angles and creating a smooth story. It would be a good idea for filmmakers to use editing instead of long takes. Let us first find out the techniques of continuity editing. Shots are controlled by a series of shots and techniques. This helps the audiences visualise the story and to understand it better, and not just randomly sticking together pieces of scenes and shots together. Imagine a jigsaw puzzle, All the shots are everywhere, You have to find the right shot and place it, Then you can see the whole picture in place. We can realise a movie better if proper editing is used, Our minds

are fitting the story together. The 180-degree action line is used to bring the audience to the story. Here are some styles that creates understanding and direction-

* The eye-line match

An eye-line match example would be this – a woman turns and looks to the left, in the following shot, a subject or object will be shown.

* The match on action

An action match, is a straight cut from one shot to the following shot, the action is continued from one shot to the other. This same shot continuity creates consistency and direction

* Continuity direction

In direction of continuity shot, is when a character goes out of a shot from the right, then he goes in from the left in the following shot. Point-Of-View (POV) continuity, is basically moving the camera how an actor would. For example, if the actor is dizzy than it will make sense if the camera sways from left to right, just as a person would and eventually go black, which represents fainting or blacking out

* Cutting at the point of action

The shots must be edited together to feature editing versus the long take scenes, Would you move the main pivotal points on the shots and actors just to risk confusing the audience?

The director who demanded on complete control over shots and actors was Alfred Hitchcock. To shoot a continuous long may make you lose control, cinematically of course. The screen speaks its own language and by treating each scene as a piece of raw material, it manages to maintain its show visual aesthetic patterns. The advantage of editing over the long take and deep focus is that the director can fully involve the spectator in the action.

In Hitchcock’s famous movie Notorious (1946), the spy Alicia is rescued by Dalin from Alex Sebastian the Nazi.. The action is simple, Alicia is guided down the stairs and straight to the front door, while the others and Alex’s mother watches. There are15 shots on Alicia and Dalin, Alex 17 shots, Alex’s mother 5 shots, the Nazis 9 shots. By cutting all of these 4 points together, the spectators get to know all the sequence, and access the actors reaction as the story unfolds. The wonderful thing about this is that the fast cuts do not make the action faster, but actually slows it down especially going down the staircase. The suspense gets longer.

# Editing in Jurassic park (1993)

In the Jurassic Park opening scene, where the wardens are letting the dinosaur go, one of the wardens is snatched and pulled in by the dinosaur, This scene has 43 shots and each shot is 2 minutes 30 seconds. This fast editing is essential to get the audience into the action by placing two points - outside the box and inside it. During the filmmaking process, Spielberg, the director uses fast editing for the audience to focus on the peak of action; rather than the actors’ performances. Spielberg seldom uses storyboards, instead, he breaks down the scenes to bring out the action with camera angles, camera movement and the placement of characters.

# Montage

Continuity editing attempts to create a coherent scenic space whereas montage editing attempts to create symbolic meanings. It achieves this by juxtaposing shots together. Continuity on the other hand is sequential editing.

The symbolic meanings created by montage is also called Associations. It simply means creating a chain of associations that has no connection to one another. For an example an Egyptian hieroglyph or, two hieroglyphs may not make any sense as it is in the simplest form, and represents a product. The value of another degree, each taken separately corresponds to an object and concept. For example:-The representation of water of an eye signifies weeping – that’s a montage for you.

So basically hieroglyphs and montages create abstract and symbolic meanings by juxtaposing concrete objects. An example, the famous Odessa steps sequence, where the battleship Potemkin fires on the headquarters. There are three shots of the stone lions- the first depicts a lion lying down, the second depicts a lion seated and the third a lion standing up. What does it mean? When these three shots are put together, it depicts that the stone lion has moved from a sleeping position and has stood up. It gives the impression or the illusion of a lion being woken up. They may be abstract and symbolic, but there may be three possible answers as to why Sergei Eisenstein (Soviet film director and film theorist), inserted these three shots, and they are:

* To show that the statue of the lion is disturbed by the plunder
* The Russian people are represented by the lion statue to arise
* Maybe it Is just a big drama to create cinematic movement

In the movie Psycho (1960) by Alfred Hitchcock, in the scene where Marion Crane takes a shower, where it just cuts back and forth from Marion to the knife held by Norman’s mother. It does not show Norman’s mother getting stabbed, but the cutting in and out creates the effect of a dramatic murder scene.

# The Five Different Types of Documentaries

What does it take to make a Documentary? Let’s take a look at the basic importance of documentaries:

* The story is not fabricated, it is shown as real, as natural as possible. No cinematic magic is needed. It is absolutely real
* They deal with facts and reality; the reality of the world is constructed.
* A documentary filmmaker just perceives and makes notes of the value of its reality

In actual fact the camera should not be there, just having a camera present influences the filmed events. The camera is not just put there and rolled. The documentary filmmaker cannot objectively record because of technical choices are made, such as camera angles, camera lens and editing decisions.

I guess the issue is, how do the selections made by the documentary filmmaker manipulates the events? A better word would be is to shape events, to sound more positive.

Here below are the five types of documentaries:

# Expository Documentary

The typical characteristics includes a voice-over documentary combined with images that are descriptive and informative, offers a series of facts that are illustrated by images with a voice-over that addresses the spectators. The voice- over provides abstract information that the image cannot carry. The expository documentary has to be descriptive and informative, It is the classic mode of documentary, which we see almost all the time on television

An example would be the documentary Coalface (1935), It generally informs the public about the everyday working of the industries and corporations that shape people’s lives, which puts it in the category of a public relations film. However, there is an extraordinary sequence of shots depicting the machinery of the pit particularly the winding gear that brings the miners to the surface. They are close-ups of the machinery abstracted from their surroundings, which isolates the rhythmic movement of the machinery rather than illustrating its function. The fast pace editing - 32 shots in 39 seconds, where the emphasize is movement and rhythm. The use of close-ups and rapid cutting creates an abstract effect that takes the sequence far beyond the merely descriptive and illustrative.

# Observational Documentary

The observational documentary is more known for what it does not contain, and that is no voice of god commentary, no interviews and no intertitles, it is a direct representation of the filmed events. The filmmaker is an uninvolved bystander, to observe events as they unfold in real time. It is also called direct cinema.

Technically, on occasions it tends to use long takes. The sound is recorded directly while the camera is rolling. In the documentary High School (1968), the typical, day to day events that takes place in this school was captured. Not dramatic or unusual, just everyday events, of different classes in progress.

The observational mode establishes a sense of place by refusing to manipulate or distort the events. What was filmed is actual, transparent and non- judgemental.

High School only depicted an aspect of school life - which is the interaction and conflict between the teachers and students. In one part of the scenes a shot of a teacher waving her arms, drilling the students, then there is the cut to a music teacher conducting percussion musicians. The repetition of the action tells us that the students are simply being drilled, rather than taught.

# Interactive Documentary

The filmmaker’s presence is prominent, which means that interactive documentaries draw people and events to the filmmaker. It is mainly on interviews, which specifically draws out comments and responses from those who are filmed. The filmed persons can express their opinions and views, and the filmmaker may juxtapose one opinion with a contrary opinion, which gives us a balanced undisturbed view.

The filmmaker may sometimes appear on screen, just to hold the documentary together, unlike the expository documentary, where the narrator holds the film together, and the observational documentary, where the events themselves hold the film together only if editing is done.

There are many ways in which the filmmaker can interact with the people. The filmmaker could appear on screen formally or informally, sharing the same space and the spectators can see them interacting with one another. An example of this kind of documentary is Crocodile Hunter (1998) . The filmmaker, however may decide to remain off-screen, where the interviewees answers to someone off-screen.

Interactive documentaries gather information through interviews, including the negotiation of the terms and conditions under which the interview is to take place.

Remember that in all documentaries there is a power relation involved, it is masked in the expository and observational documentaries, but it is apparent in interactive documentaries.

The ethical question about filming someone is made apparent in the interactive documentary, using all the tools and interviews to his or her advantage. In the content of Roger and Me (1989), the irony, humour and anger had been aroused in the spectator. The story is about a town called flint which is losing its population after General Motors moved to Mexico. As a result Flint became one of the poorest towns in America. The excitement of this documentary is the repeated attempts to interview Roger Smith to explain. The attempts adds humour.

A strong social message is justified through editing, showing the rich and their lifestyle and the poor evicted from their homes. Through editing strategy Moore manages to interact with shots of a family being evicted from their homes on Christmas eve, Unemployment affect the poor, unfortunately the rich do not understand that.

# Reflexive Documentary

In this type of documentary let’s go one step further by attempting to expose the conventions of documentary representation, with the effect of challenging the documentary’s apparent ability to reveal the truth. It focuses on how they are filmed and how they are edited.

The reflexive documentary is just direct, it does not try to show reality. It challenges the documentary’s status as objective. An honest documentary presents its limitations and shows its version is better than pretending to be objective or on the fence. A perfect example is the documentary Man with a Movie Camera (1928)

It is one of the most radical documentaries, attempting to change the audience’s perception of everyday reality through unconventional techniques to raise the spectators’ consciousness.

Man with a Movie Camera, shows the camera recording events, the editor rearranging shots on the editing table, a film being projected and an audience in a cinema watching a film. It reminds us that what we see is a reconstructed reality mediated through the film.

# Performative Documentary

This type of documentary has a paradoxical status because it deflects attention away from the world and towards the expressive dimension of film. The performative documentary shows the surroundings and the world differently. It represents the world indirectly and guides us to understand the facts...

It aims to present its subject in a subjective, expressive, stylized, evocative and visceral manner. The events are rendered in a vivid way that encourages the spectator to experience and feel them, and at the same time, we have to ask ourselves whether the shots are changed or as a representation.

The dominant performative elements in the opening minutes of Thin Blue Line (1988), The enactment itself; close-ups of guns, maps, newspaper headlines and pulsating police lights; rapid editing; exaggerated camera positions; and the sound track. Through these techniques we are encouraged to experience and feel the events, rather than simply watching them from a distance.

# Conclusion

We have been watching movies for as long as I know. By now you know what cinema and film are. If you have been around long enough, you may experienced that formats come and go. The knowledge of the art of filmmaking makes us understand that film comes from a strategic world of toys and machines that provides the impression of the reality of movement.

The film has been around for more than a hundred years, It seems to have taken a life cycle, an inevitable birth, the firm accumulation of glories and the start of the last ten years of humiliating, irreversible decline. The profitable cinema has agreed to a rule taken from film-making, a bold relation or non-relation art, in the hope of duplicating, past successes.

The film is incomparable because it is an art but it is also a technically productive enterprise. Audiences are attracted to the magic of the silver screen. They need to evolve a deeper understanding than what is mainly seen. Audiences understand and analyse a full-length movie through practice and depict how they define meaning in a film. Also, they can expand their own personal evaluation of film. It may be initially difficult to understand the techniques used by filmmakers, but once known, they will add significant value to the film.

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