



**FMC 217**  
**FILMS AND AESTHETICS THEORY**

**Course Team**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

**FMC 217 – Films and Aesthetics Theory** is a course for students offering B.Sc. Film Production Programme in the National Open University of Nigeria.

The course consists of three **Modules** and nine **Study Units**. The material has been developed to suit undergraduate students taking Film Production courses at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

The course guide gives you an idea of what the course is all about, what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through these materials. It suggests some general guidelines for the amount of time you are likely to spend on each unit of the course in order to complete it successfully. It also gives you some guidance on your tutor-marked assignments. Detailed information on tutor-marked assignments is found in the separate assignment file which will be available in due course.

## **WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS COURSE**

This course will introduce you to the major aspects of management. In this course, you will learn about what it takes an organisation to attain its objectives.

## **COURSE AIM**

The course aims to give you an understanding of the studies in Film Production.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

- explain the concept of film theory
- discuss various approaches to the study of cinema
- identify the basic equipment required in film production
- highlight the functions of the basic equipment required in film production
- analyse Charles Atman critical approaches to the study of the cinema
- explain the term continuity editing
- state the 1800 rule
- highlight other techniques for achieving the maintenance of the principle of 1800 axis of action line
- highlight the importance of editing in film production.

## **WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE**

To successfully complete this course, read the study units, listen to the audios and videos, do all assessments, open the links and read, participate in discussion forums, read the recommended books and other materials provided, prepare your portfolios, and participate in either face to face facilitation in your centre or the online facilitation.

Each study unit has introduction, objectives, the main content, conclusion, summary and references/further readings. The introduction will tell you the expectations in the study unit. Read and note the objectives. The objectives tell you what you should be able to do at the completion of each study unit. So, you can evaluate your learning at the end of each unit to ensure you have achieved the intended learning outcomes. To meet the intended learning outcomes, knowledge is presented in texts, video and links arranged into modules and units. Click on the links as may be directed but where you are reading the text off line, you will have to copy and paste the link address into a browser. You can download the audios and

videos to view off line. You can also print or download the texts and save in your computer or external drive. The conclusion gives you the theme of the knowledge you are taking away from the unit.

There are two main forms of assessments – the formative and the summative. The formative assessments will help you monitor your learning. This is presented as in-text questions, discussion forums and Self-Assessment Exercises.

The summative assessments would be used by the university to evaluate your academic performance. This will be given as Computer Based Test (CBT) which serves as continuous assessment and final examinations. A minimum of three computer-based tests will be given with only one final examination at the end of the semester. You are required to take all the computer-based tests and the final examination.

## **COURSE MATERIALS**

The major components of the course are as listed below.

- Course Guide
- Study Units
- Textbooks and References
- Assignment File
- Presentation Schedule

## **STUDY UNITS**

The study units in this course are as follows.

### **Module 1 Introduction to Film Theory and Film Production**

- Unit 1 Film Theory: An Introduction
- Unit 2 The Basic Equipment in Film Production
- Unit 3 Continuity Editing

### **Module 2 Approaches to the Study of the Cinema**

- Unit 1 Charles Altman's Approaches & The Theories of Realism
- Unit 2 The Principle of Mise-En-Scene and Mise-En-Shot
- Unit 3 Other Major Approaches to the Study of Cinema and Film

### **Module 3 Aesthetics for Critical Analysis**

- Unit 1 Formalist Film Production Aesthetics
- Unit 2 Constructivism Approaches
- Unit 3 Eisenstein's Aesthetics Theories

## **TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES**

Certain books have been recommended for this course. You should read them where you are so directed before attempting the exercises.

## **REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Ajibade, B. (2013). Nigerian videos and their imagined Western audience: The limits of Nollywood's transnationality. In Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (Eds).

*Global Nollywood: The transnational dimensions of an African video film industry.*  
Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 264-284.

Buckland, W. (2010). *Understand film studies*. London: Macmillan.

Giannetti, L. (1987). *Understanding movies* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Griffith, R. (1976). Cycles and genres. In Bill Nichols (Ed) (1976). *Movies and methods*. Vol. 1. Berkeley: University of California Press: 111-118.

Hayward, S. (2001). *Cinema studies: The key concepts* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Jason Hellerman (2019). Understanding film theory: An essential guide. Available at <https://nofilmschool.com/Film-theory-basic-terms>

Phillips, W.H. (1999). *Film: An introduction*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Shaka, F.O. (2016). Introduction to film and television studies. In Henry L. Bell-Gam (Ed.) *Theatre in theory and practice for beginners*. Port Harcourt: Citelle Press Ltd: 50-77.

## **PRESENTATION SCHEDULE**

The presentation schedule gives you the important dates for the completion of your computer-based tests, participation in forum discussions and participation at facilitation. Remember, you are to submit all your assignments at the appropriate time. You should guide against delays and plagiarisms in your work. Plagiarism is a criminal offence in academics and is highly penalised.

## **ASSESSMENT**

There are two main forms of assessments in this course that will be scored: the Continuous Assessments and the final examination. The continuous assessment shall be in three-folds. There will be two Computer Based Assessments. The computer-based assessments will be given in accordance to university academic calendar. The timing must be strictly adhered to. The Computer Based Assessments shall be scored a maximum of 10% each, therefore, the maximum score for continuous assessment shall be 30% which shall form part of the final grade.

The final examination for FIP 113 will be maximum of two hours and it takes 70 percent of the total course grade. The examination will consist of 70 multiple choice questions that reflect cognitive reasoning.

## **HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THE COURSE**

To get the most in this course, you need to have a personal laptop and internet facility. This will give you adequate opportunity to learn anywhere you are in the world. Use the study unit's objectives to guide your self-study in the course. At the end of every unit, examine yourself with the objectives and see if you have achieved what you need to achieve.

Carefully work through each unit and make your notes. Join the online real time facilitation as scheduled. Where you missed the scheduled online real time facilitation, go through the recorded facilitation session at your own free time. Each real time facilitation session will be video recorded and posted on the platform.

In addition to the real time facilitation, watch the video and audio recorded summary in each unit. The video/audio summaries are directed to salient part in each unit. You can assess the audio and videos by clicking on the links in the text or through the course page.

Work through all self-assessment exercises. Finally, obey the rules in the class.

### **Facilitation**

You will receive online facilitation. The facilitation is learner centred. The mode of facilitation shall be asynchronous and synchronous. For the asynchronous facilitation, your facilitator will:

- Present the theme for the week;
- Direct and summarise forum discussions;
- Coordinate activities in the platform;
- Score and grade activities when need be;
- Upload scores into the university recommended platform;
- Support you to learn. In this regard personal mails may be sent;
- Send you videos and audio lectures; and podcast.

For the synchronous:

- There will be eight hours of online real time contact in the course. This will be through video conferencing in the Learning Management System. The eight hours shall be of one-hour contact for eight times.
- At the end of each one-hour video conferencing, the video will be uploaded for viewing at your pace.
- The facilitator will concentrate on main themes that students must learn in the course.
- The facilitator is to present the online real time video facilitation time table at the beginning of the course.
- The facilitator will take you through the course guide in the first lecture at the start date of facilitation

Do not hesitate to contact your facilitator. Contact your facilitator if you:

- do not understand any part of the study units or the assignment.
- have difficulty with the self-assessment exercises
- have a question or problem with an assignment or with your tutor's comments on an assignment.

Also, use the contact provided for technical support.

Read all the comments and notes of your facilitator especially on your assignments; participate in the forums and discussions. This gives you opportunity to socialise with others in the programme. You can raise any problem encountered during your study. To gain the

maximum benefit from course facilitation, prepare a list of questions before the discussion session. You will learn a lot from participating actively in the discussions.

Finally, respond to the questionnaire. This will help the university to know your areas of challenges and how to improve on them for the review of the course materials and lectures.





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## **MODULE 1: HISTORY OF FILM AND CINEMAS**

### **UNIT 1 FILM THEORY: AN INTRODUCTION CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Film Theory
  - 3.2 Film Production Aesthetics: Formalism and Realism
  - 3.3 Scientific Principle Underlying Film Production
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

You are welcome to this course on Mastering Film Production Aesthetics for Critical Analysis. This is the first unit in this course. In this unit, you will be exposed to the various approaches to the study of the cinema, beginning with the examination of film production techniques which the film critic must understand and master in order to understand and undertake an insightful analysis of a film.

#### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of film theory
- discuss various approaches to the study of cinema
- examine film production techniques.

#### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

##### **3.1 Film Theory**

The term “film theory” is a field of inquiry which covers several theories which are employed in the analysis of film. The first thing to understand is that there is no master theory for the analysis of film. Rather there are several approaches which one may choose from in the analysis of film. This should not be a matter of too much concern for us as film theoreticians. This because other disciplines in the arts such as English Studies, Theatre Arts, Music, Fine Arts and Design, Religious and Cultural Studies, History, and so on, also have a multiplicity of approaches to their studies.

The diversities of theoretical approaches to the study of film have contributed to the enrichment of the study of the discipline of film studies. The various theoretical approaches have also led to the emergence of new fields of inquiry into the criticism of the film industry. What is fascinating about the varieties of theoretical paradigms available in the study of film is that the various theories provoke intellectual debates among scholars on the value of each approach to the study of the film industry. They provoke questions such as, what is the use of film theory to the film industry? This question can be answered by saying that theories help us to understand the film industry better.

By asking general questions about the film industry, film theorists try to explain the way films are made, the way they work, how they convey meaning, what functions they perform in our society, and by what means they affect us. By examining the theoretical approaches to

the study of the film industry, we gain a better knowledge of the way the film industry functions, its production techniques and narrative systems, its production personnel and their functions in the production process, its uses, gratifications and effects.

The study of film theories enables us gain a deep understanding of the importance of the film industry to our society. By studying the film industry, we gain a better understanding of the role of culture, politics, religion and moral values in our society because these issues feature prominently in film production. In this regard, they help us to understand the degree to which films *reflect* the society.

### **3.2 Film Production Aesthetics: Formalism and Realism**

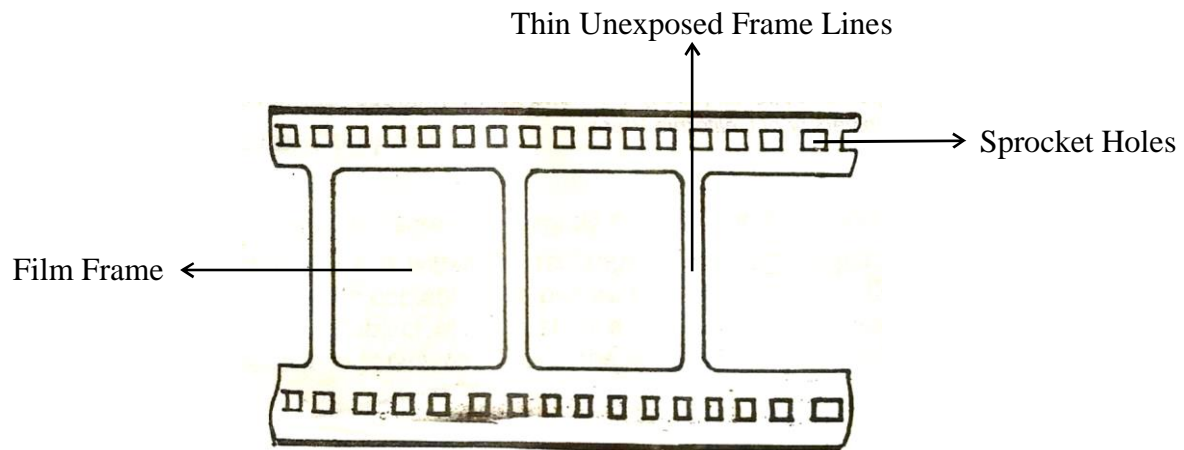
Film is a medium of mass entertainment and education. It is called by various names by different scholars. Some refer to it as “movies,” “motion pictures,” “film” or the “cinema.” The word cinema is derived from the Greek word “*Kinema*” which stands for movement. These names establish the centrality of movement in motion pictures.

In film criticism, one needs a deep understanding of the film production techniques which a filmmaker is employing in telling his/her story. These techniques relate to his/her use of *mise-en-scene* (the use of set design and the visual composition of that set design), his use of *mise-en-shot* (the use of shots, including the use of camera lenses, camera movements, visual effects, the use of long takes, deep focus photography, use of light and colour), rules of continuity editing, film sound, and a theoretical study of film aesthetics which is usually divided into the realists (e.g. Andre Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer) the formalists (e.g. D.W. Griffith, V.I. Pudovkin, Sergie Eisenstein), including the theory of montage.

### **3.3 Scientific Principle Underlying Film Production**

Film production grew out simple optical devices used for entertainment in the nineteenth century. It grew out of circus ground entertainment, but this circus ground entertainment had scientific principles behind it which were known to even Ancient Egyptians. The toys and machines were dependent for their illusion of movement on the *principle of persistence of vision* and that of the *phi phenomenon*.

The principle of persistence of movement states that the brain retains images cast upon the retina of the eye for approximately one-twentieth to one-fifth of a second after we have removed our eyes from the field of vision. The principle of persistence of vision was first scientifically explained by the British Mathematician, Peter Mark Roget in 1824, while that of the *phi phenomenon* which *causes us to see the individual blades of a rotating fan as a unitary circular form or the different hues of a spinning colour wheel as a single homogenous colour*, was scientifically explained by the German Gestalt Psychologist Max Wertheimer in 1912. As shown in Figure 1.1, both principles allow us to see a succession of static images as a single unbroken movement and both principles formed the foundation of cinematography.



**Fig. 1.1:** (35mm Film Gauge)

The *principle of persistence of vision* prevents us from becoming too aware of the flickering movement between light and darkness which early cinemagoers experienced and from which derived the popular names “flickers” or “flicks” until the rotating shutter was invented to shut the dark spaces that separates the film frames. The *phi phenomenon* which is also called the “stroboscopic effect” helps to create the illusion of movement from frame to frame at optical speed of 12 to 24 frames per seconds (Shaka, 2016, pp.51-55).

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

According to Nofilmschool, Film theory is “a set of scholarly approaches within the academic discipline of cinema studies that question the essentialism of cinema and provides conceptual frameworks for understanding film's relationship to reality, the other arts, individual viewers, and society at large.” (Jason Hellerman, 2019).

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that film theory is a field of inquiry which covers several theories which are employed in the analysis of film. You have equally learnt that the word cinema is derived from the Greek word “*Kinema*” which stands for movement. We equally discussed the *principles of persistence of vision* and that of the *phi phenomenon*.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is film theory?
2. The study of film theories enables us gain a deep understanding of the importance of the film industry to our society. Justify with clear illustration.
3. State the two principles underlying film production.

Your answer should include:

1. Brief history of film theory stating the several approaches which one may choose from in analysing film.
2. How film theories enable better understanding of the role of culture, politics, religion and moral values in our society and also how they help us to understand the degree to which films *reflect* the society.
3. You should mention the two principles of persistence of vision and that of the *phi phenomenon* and state them accordingly.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Ajibade, B. (2013). Nigerian videos and their imagined Western audience: The limits of Nollywood's transnationality. In Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (Eds). *Global Nollywood: The transnational dimensions of an African video film industry*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 264-284.
- Buckland, W. (2010). *Understand film studies*. London: Macmillan.
- Giannetti, L. (1987). *Understanding movies* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Griffith, R. (1976). Cycles and genres. In Bill Nichols (Ed) (1976). *Movies and methods*. Vol. 1. Berkeley: University of California Press: 111-118.
- Hayward, S. (2001). *Cinema studies: The key concepts* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
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## UNIT 2 THE BASIC EQUIPMENT IN FILM PRODUCTION

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- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Camera
  - 3.2 Camera Lenses and Picture Frames
  - 3.3 Camera Movements
  - 3.4 Visual Effects
- 4.0 Conclusion
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- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the most frequently asked questions is about what equipment is required for film production, especially the essential ones. In this Unit, we shall focus on the basic equipment for film production.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- identify the basic equipment required in film production
- highlight the functions of the basic equipment required in film production
- use the basic equipment required in film production.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 The Camera

The camera is the main medium for storytelling in film production and the camera is made up of three essential parts: (a) Lens (b) Tube (c) Viewfinder as shown in Figure 1.2.

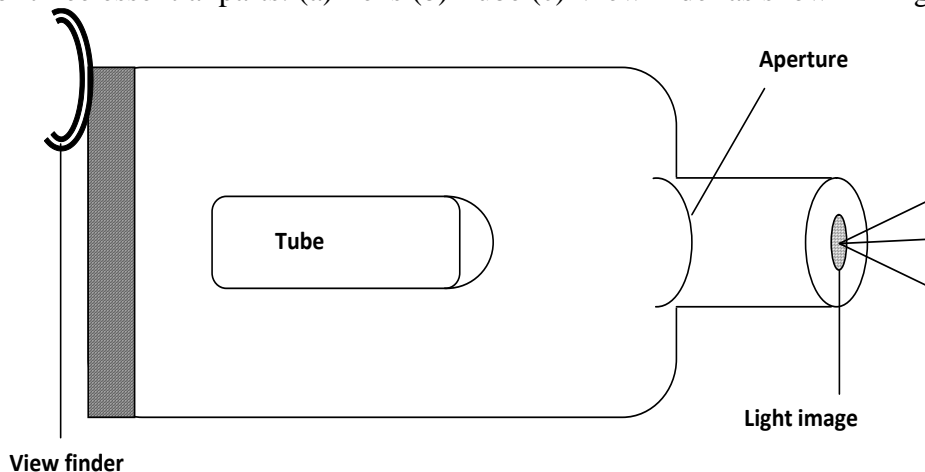
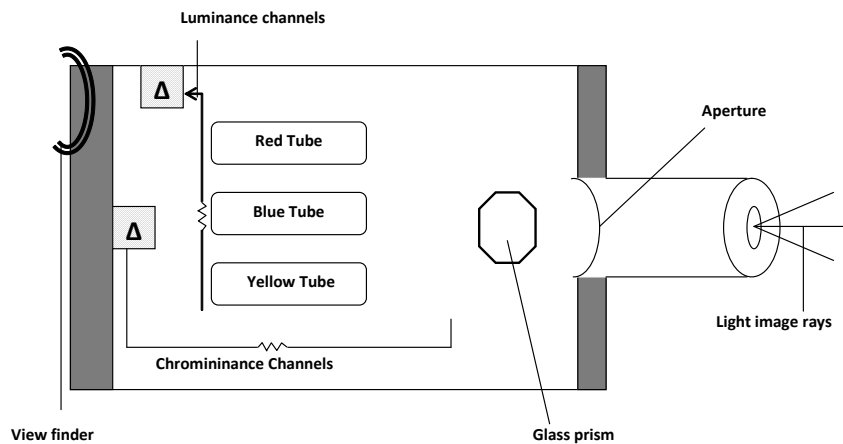


Fig. 1.2: Monochrome [Black and White] Camera

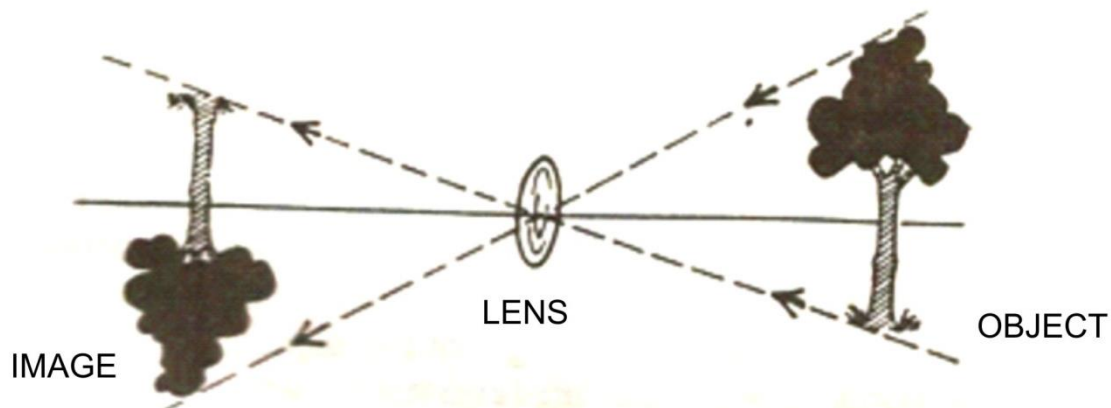
A monochrome camera (black and white camera) has one pick up tube to which light from the camera lens is directed. Two type of tubes existed in the old discarded black and white cameras: the image orthicon tube and the vidicon tube. Cameras with image orthicon tubes were large studio-based cameras equipped with tripods and rollers while the smaller hand-

held portable cameras used for location shooting had vidicon tubes. The image quality of cameras equipped with orthicon tubes was better than those equipped with vidicon tubes but the portability and ruggedness of cameras equipped with vidicon tubes recommended them as great equipment for location shooting.



**Fig. 1.3: Colour Film/TV Camera**

Figure 1.3 shows a Colour Film/TV production camera. Colour Film/TV production cameras are usually equipped with three plumbicon tubes, with one tube for each of the primary colours of red, blue and yellow. As shown in the diagram above, light passing through the camera lens is split by a large glass prism into the primary colours and the light image rays are directed to the pick-up tubes which are called *chrominance channels* because they process the primary colours of red, blue and yellow. The chrominance channels produce the colour picture. After processing by the tubes, the red, blue and yellow signals recombine to form the luminance channel, which is the channel of light. Colour film/TV cameras need more light during film production because colour film cameras have three times the number of tubes compared to the moribund monochrome camera (Shaka, pp.52-54).



**Fig. 1.4: Image Formation through a Lens**

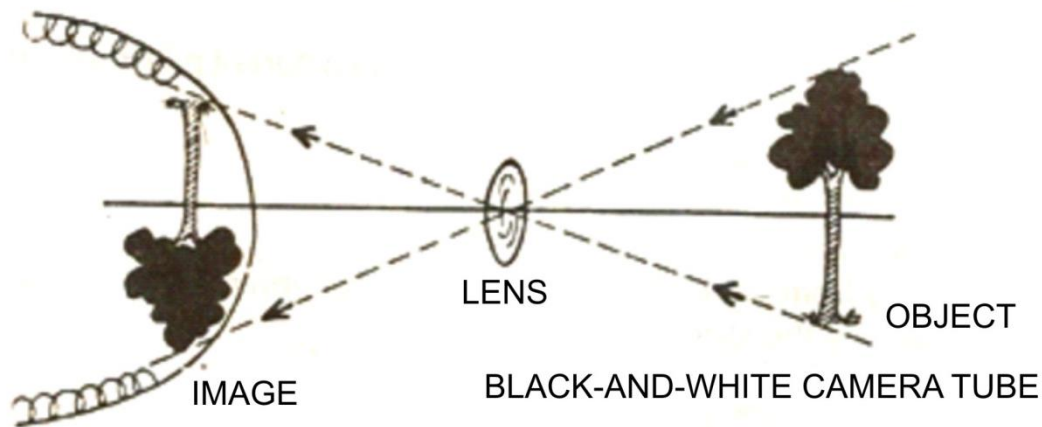


Image on Camera Tube

To take a shot, light image rays from the object or subject being shot pass through the lens and form an inverted image behind the diaphragm of the lens. The light image rays are directed by the glass prism into the colour processing tubes. In digital cameras both the tubes and the glass prism are now replaced by computer chips which perform the same duties. Inside the tubes, there are photosensitive plates, which consist of a large numbers of minute photoelastic cells. This makes it possible for the light image rays to trigger a corresponding pattern of electrical signals. The signals are then scanned by a beam of electrons in the magnetic field of lateral and vertical deflection coils.

In film production, the light image rays from the scene being shot passes through the diaphragm into the glass prism, which is a reflective mechanism that feeds the colour tubes with the primary colour rays. The colour rays are then scanned onto a photosensitive piece of celluloid called “film,” one of the derivation names for the motion picture. Once the shooting of the movie is completed, the piece of celluloid is subjected to photochemical processing for the images to be registered on the film. At this stage, the raw loose footages are referred to as *film rushes*. The film rushes need to be cut and stitched together through the process called *film editing* before the edited film is projected by an equipment called *film projector*.

In the case of a video production, the light image rays from the scene being shot pass through the lens and diaphragm into the glass prism (in digital cameras, the work of the glass prism is now performed by a computer chip) which reflects the rays of the primary colours into the colour processing tubes or chips. Once the colour processing is done, the light image rays are then scanned onto a piece of photosensitive magnetic tape (this role is currently performed by digital video discs). The unedited video copies also need to be edited with the aid of modern editing softwares for us to have our video films. In broadcast television, the scanning process produces a voltage output whose strength depends on the intensity of the light image rays at each point on photosensitive plate or computer chip.

To broadcast the picture, the image of the photographed scene is converted into electrical signals of a variable voltage output which is made to modulate radio waves that are transmitted by a television transmitter or a satellite transmitter. The electrical signal is fed into our television sets through either a TV antenna or a satellite decoder. Inside our television sets there are equivalent primary colour tubes or microchips for receiving the light image rays of the scene shot during production and converting the electrical signals back to the images recorded during production. What we have been describing so far shows that there is a basic optical science behind the entertainment provided us by the cinema.



### 3.2 Camera Lenses and Picture Frames

There are three types of lenses used in Film/TV production and they produce different types of picture frames. We have the *short lens* (also called wide-angled lens which when fixed in the front of the camera produce a *long shot* or wide view which is abbreviated as LS. We also have a *normal lens* or medium angle lens which when fixed in the front of a camera produces a *medium shot* which is abbreviated MS. Lastly, we have a *long lens* or narrow-angled lens which when fixed in front of a camera produces a *close-up shot* which is abbreviated as a CU.

There are however various picture frames between the CU and the LS. We have the ECU (Extreme Close-up), MCU (Medium Close-up), MLS (Medium Long Shot), and ELS (Extreme Long Shot). These lenses produce various psychological impact on the viewer. They also form the basic principles of film production aesthetics, formalism or realism. For now, we need to know that a CU shot brings us into a close proximity to an object or a subject. A close proximity makes for a better appreciation of an object or a closer psychological study of a subject (in terms of human characterisation in a film). A long shot on the other hand creates a distance between the viewer and an object or a subject.

In terms of characterisation, a long shot creates a distance between us and the characters on screen but a long shot is also a great instrument for a better appreciation of a mise-en-scene as we shall soon find out in our study of film production aesthetics. Another type of lens beside the *short lens*, *normal lens* and *long lens* is the *zoom lens*, which is a composite lens than can fold in or protrude out. When it folds in, it becomes a short lens. Midway, it becomes a normal lens, and when it juts out in full, it becomes a long lens. A zoom lens can present any picture frame, seamlessly, between the ECU and the ELS, in one smooth continuous motion. When you zoom into an object, you bring the viewer closer to the object; but you also estrange the viewer from the composition of the mise-en-scene or the setting of the story. Also, when you zoom away from an object or a person, you open up the scene so that the viewer can better appreciate the setting where the object is placed or where a character is performing. Each type of camera operation has its component aesthetic impact in terms of formalism or realism (Shaka, pp.56-57).

### 3.3 Camera Movements

Three aspects of the camera equipment combine to form what can be referred to as visual language. The first one was camera lenses and picture frames. The second is camera movements and the third is visual effects. The following camera movements form part of the basic alphabets of Film/TV production language. Like the alphabets of every language, after you have been taught how to join them together to make a visual statement, your mastery of how you use them to tell a story depends entirely on the filmmaker. The mastery of film language is what has produced cineastes of world renown such as Sembene Ousmane of *Xala* fame or Steven Spielberg of *Jurassic Park*. The followings are the basic camera movements which we need to master if we want to become world renowned filmmakers, film historians or critics:

PAN: The act of moving the camera horizontally on its axis to the right or to the left. We pan to follow a moving action.

TILT: The act of moving the camera vertically up and down on its axis. Thus we tilt up or down to follow an ongoing action.

DOLLY: The act of gradually moving the entire camera with tripod and rollers, toward or away from the scene of narrative interest.

**TRACK or TRUCK:** The act of moving the entire camera with tripod and rollers laterally or along the side or parallel to the scene of narrative interest.

**PEDELSTAL:** The act of raising or lowering the camera by moving the camera pedestal up or down on a scene.

**ARC:** The act of moving the entire camera with tripod and rollers through the path of a circle, toward or around a scene of narrative interest.

**POV ACTOR:** The act of placing a camera in the exact position previously occupied by an actor in order to take a shot of what the actor has been looking at, from the actor's point of view. This type of shot is referred to as a subjective point of view.

### 3.4 Visual Effects

Visual effects also constitute aspects of the visual language. They include the followings:

**FADE IN:** The act of gradually filling a blank screen with a shot thereby introducing a new scene or sequence in a film.

**FADE OUT:** The act of gradually wiping off a shot thereby leaving the screen blank. This visual effect is used to indicate the end of a scene or a sequence of narrative actions.

**CUT:** The act of framing an ongoing action, either within a scene or between two parallel scenes or sequences of narrative actions.

**DISSOLVE:** This is the act of fading out one shot, just as another one is faded in, in such a way that there is a momentary superimposition of the appearing and disappearing shots. A dissolve is a narrative device usually employed by a filmmaker to indicate a rapid passage of series of actions and time.

**SUPER:** The act of superimposing one shot over another in such a way that the two shots are completely visible. In a superimposition, time is concurrent. But it is a narrative device which a filmmaker can use to show the psychological state of a character. For instance, when one is drunk, there is a tendency to see double or when one is fainting or one is given a big slap.

**CHROMA KEY:** The act of placing a person or an object in a scene in such a way that the person or object appears to be a part of the scene when it was originally shot. This device is used to create a background for newscasters. For instance, we usually see newscasters reading the news with the building of the National Assembly or Zuma Rock behind them. This is because both shots had been chroma keyed to form a background for the newscasters (Shaka, pp.57-58).

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

The camera is the main medium for storytelling in film production. It is made up of these three essential parts: (a) Lens (b) Tube (c) Viewfinder. Three aspects of the camera equipment combine to form what can be referred to as visual language.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that the camera is the most basic equipment in film production. There are three types of lenses used in Film/TV production and they produce different types of picture frames. We have the *short lens*, a *normal lens* or medium angle lens and a *long lens* or narrow-angled lens.

### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Describe the essential part of a camera
2. Illustrate with the aid of annotated diagram the image on Camera Tube
3. With the aid of a diagram, discuss the concept of image formation through a lens

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## UNIT 3 CONTINUITY EDITING

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 What is Continuity Editing?
  - 3.2 The Use of Colour
  - 3.3 Editing in the Cinema
  - 3.4 Film Sound
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the concluding unit of this course, so far, we have examined film theory, the basic equipment in film production as well as approaches to the study of the cinema. In this unit, we shall dwell on continuity editing. If you have watched any narrative movie or television show, you have witnessed continuity editing. Continuity editing, also called three-dimensional continuity, is the way a film is put together that grounds the viewer in time and space.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the term continuity editing
- state the 180<sup>0</sup> rule
- highlight other techniques for achieving the maintenance of the principle of 180<sup>0</sup> axis of action line
- highlight the importance of editing.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 What is Continuity Editing?

Continuity editing is a technique intended to create visual coherence in the narrative action. The technique attempts to imitate the spaces of the Renaissance painting with its perspectives and that of nineteenth century theatre, in attempt to create coherence and orientation by positioning the viewer to occupy the position of the fourth wall. In terms of film production, each film creates coherence and orientates the viewer by means of the 180<sup>0</sup> rule in terms of determining the axis of action line. Since a change in shot always involves a shift in the viewer's perspective, if the principle of the axis of line of action is obeyed, then screen direction will be maintained when there is a cut from one shot to another. The technique of continuity editing helps to create synthetic unity of space and time from the fragmented shots.

Other technique for achieving the maintenance of the principle of 180<sup>0</sup> axis of action line includes the followings: (1) *the eye line match*; (2) *point of view cutting*; (3) *the match on action cut*; and (4) *directional continuity*. In the eyeline match technique, when a character in one shot looks at something off-screen, a cut should reveal the thing or the person that the character looked at. In this instance, the line of the character's glance has matched the two shots together thereby creating coherence and spatial orientation. Point of view cutting is a variant of the eyeline match because the structure is the same – a look off-screen, followed by

a cut to reveal the object or person that the character is looking at. What differentiates point of view cutting is that the object/person is shown from the character's optical vantage point.

In this respect, the object/person is seen through the character's eyes. In the match on action cut, the cut from one shot to another occurs when action is being performed, in which the action is continued from one shot to the next. A typical example is a cut from a barber barbing the hair of a client; a cut intended to be a match on action should be to a continuation of the activity of barbing. It is the continuity of the same action across the cut that creates coherence and orientation. Directional continuity is also a related technique.

In directional continuity, when a character enters the screen from screen right and he is walking towards screen left, he should naturally exit through screen left. To show continuity in direction, when he re-enters the screen, he should re-enter from screen right and be seen to exit through screen left. In this way there will be coherence in terms of the direction that the character is walking towards.

In addition to creating continuity across the cut, directional continuity maintains screen direction. All the techniques examined so far help to create an impression of a coherent scenic space and positions the viewer on the same side of the action thereby creating orientation. These techniques are popular for both aesthetic and financial reasons because they position the camera, crews and technicians relatively fixed on the side of the invisible fourth wall, and therefore only three walls of the set need to be built.

### **3.2 The Use of Colour**

Colour has always been rudimentarily used for film production since 1896 when each frame was painted with different colours by using small brushes. In the 1920s, whole scenes or groups of related scenes were dyed in a colour through a process known as colour tinting. By 1932, Technicolour combined three negatives, each sensitive to red, green or blue. In 1935 the first three-colour Technicolour feature film, *Becky Sharp*, was produced. In the 1930s and 1940s, Hollywood decreed that colour should be reserved for certain abstract genres that were not particularly realist such as musicals, fantasy and epics. In the 1950s, the fear of the growing popularity of black and white television made Hollywood to downplay the decree in order to save the movies. Phillips (1999) has warned on the need to use context in the analysis of colour in film production.

Unfortunately, when you study film colour, you cannot be certain you are seeing the colours that the filmmakers intended. Most prints of colour films, including those for theatrical release, vary in quality because most are mass-produced. Eastman colour films, especially those made for many years after 1949, usually turn reddish with age. And nearly all colour photographs available for study are not directly from the finished film and do not convey the film's exact colours... As with discussions of all cinematic *techniques*, discussion of colour is most useful when it is considered in context. Similarly, it is important to remember that colour associations vary from culture to culture (p. 74).

In film criticism, colours are usually classified as either "warm" or "cool". In Western society, the warm colours are usually reds, oranges and yellows. They are symbolically considered as hot, dangerous, lively and assertive. In this respect, characters which are being represented as sexy or feeling sexy may be made to drive red sports cars or wear red clothes. Also women who want to emphasise their sex appeal or who want to show that they are

sexually available have been known to use red to draw attention to themselves in Western culture.

In contrast, colours on the other side of the spectrum such as greens, blues and violets are usually considered cool colours. In Western society, these colours tend to be associated with reason, safety, control, relaxation or sometimes with sadness or melancholy. The use of green traffic lights or blue or green hospital interiors are supposed to calm nerves and reassure patients. When bluish colours are emphasised in a scene, it is usually used to indicate coldness or lack of vitality.

Unfortunately, in many African society, the colour blue is sometimes used to indicate sexiness or a sexualised atmosphere. In Nollywood films, reds are used for ritual genres where it signifies danger; red and white are also used for priestly characters in traditional African society; black for warriors; and gold and violet for royalty. There is therefore need for sensitivity to cultural context in the analysis of colour in film analysis. Colour can also be said to be saturated when it is intense and vivid as applied in the *Wizard of Oz* or it can be referred to as desaturated to indicate that it is mute, pale or dull. Desaturated colours are used to suggest lack of energy or the draining away of life (Phillips, pp. 74-75).

### 3.3 Editing in the Cinema

In contrast to the long take and deep focus photography, editing breaks a scene down into a multitude of shots. The question is: “why would a director go to all the troubles of shifting vantage point on the event and actors and risk disorienting the spectator?” According to Buckland, one “answer is that editing gives the director almost complete control over the events and actors, since the scene comes together only when the shots are edited together” (Buckland, p.17). The importance of editing as expressed by Alfred Hitchcock in 1938 is very instructive in this regard:

...If I have to shoot a long scene continuously I always feel I am losing grip on it, from a cinematic point of view. The camera, I feel, is simply standing there, hoping to catch something with a visual point to it... The screen ought to speak its own language, freshly coined, and it can't do that unless it treats an acted scene as a piece of raw material which must be broken up, taken to bits, before it can be woven into an expressive visual pattern (as cited in Buckland, p.17).

On the other hand, the director who prefers to emphasise the emotional integrity of an important scene through the staging of drama and characterisation may argue that editing destroys the emotional intensity of such a scene, while a long take combined with deep focus photography would enhance it. Similarly, the proponents of editing would also argue that “through the changes in view point implied by the change of shot, the director can fully involve the spectator in the action” (Buckland, p.17).

### 3.4 Film Sound

Film sound also offers another important set of stylistic options and choices made by filmmakers. Film is made up of two tracks - image track and the sound track. A crucial term which is usually applied in the discussion of sound is *diegesis*, which in Film Studies relates to the story (or narrative) world of the film. The first term of classification is *diegetic sound* “which refers to sound whose origin is to be located in the story world.” In this respect, “diegetic sound includes the voices of the characters and the sounds of objects that exist in the story world.” This definitely “includes music made by instruments that form part of the story world (for convenience, we can refer to this type of music as ‘screen music’)”

(Buckland, p.20). There is also need to distinguish between external diegetic sound and internal diegetic sound. External diegetic sounds relate to the dialogue of characters and sounds of objects within the story world of the film such as the honking of car horns, factory sounds, thunder, etc, while internal diegetic sound relates to subjective sounds like the rendition of a character's thought or imagined sounds.

These sounds are still diegetic because they derive from the story world but they are internal because they cannot be heard by other characters in the story world of the film. In contrast to diegetic sound, non-diegetic sound is a sound whose origin lies outside the story world of the film. A good example of non-diegetic sound is the music sound track of a film. In documentary, films, the Voice-of-God commentary is also considered to be non-diegetic sound because in most cases, the narrator does not appear in the story world of the film.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

A film is nothing more than an illusion and Editors are magicians. Continuity errors are unavoidable, so the job of the Editor is to get the viewer engrossed in the story so they are not bored enough to spot the errors. If an audience is emotionally engaged, they would not even notice. It truly is sleight of hand.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that Continuity editing is not a style or technique. Continuity editing is a part of filmmaking and editorial grammar; and just like any other grammatical rules, they can be thrown out the window. The 180 Rule is what helps the viewer know where the Actors are in the two-dimensional space of the screen. It helps clarify where the Actors are in relation to each other. Though the Editor must pay attention to this, it really needs to be shot this way. In the cinema, editing breaks a scene down into multitude of shots You have equally learnt that film is made up of two tracks - image track and the sound track. A crucial term which is usually applied in the discussion of sound is *diegesis*, which in Film Studies relates to the story (or narrative) world of the film.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is continuity editing?
2. Highlight at least five (5) of the techniques for achieving the maintenance of the principle of 180° axis of action line
3. Explain the use of colour in film production.

#### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Ajibade, B. (2013). Nigerian videos and their imagined Western audience: The limits of Nollywood's transnationality. In Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (Eds). *Global Nollywood: The transnational dimensions of an African video film industry*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 264-284.
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## **MODULE 2                      APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF THE CINEMA**

In this Module, we shall be considering the approaches to the study of the cinema. These include the Charles Altman's ten critical approaches to the study of the cinema, the textual analysis of a film as well as the theories of realism, which are discussed under three units as below:

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Unit 1 | Charles Altman's Approaches and The Theories of Realism |
| Unit 2 | The Principle Mise-en-scene and Mise-en-shot            |
| Unit 3 | Other Major Approaches                                  |

## UNIT 1      CHARLES ALTMAN'S APPROACHES AND THE THEORIES OF REALISM

### CONTENTS

- 1.0    Introduction
- 2.0    Objectives
- 3.0    Main Content
  - 3.1    Charles Altman's Approaches
  - 3.2    Theories of Realism
- 4.0    Conclusion
- 5.0    Summary
- 6.0    Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0    References/Further Reading

### 1.0    INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall be considering the approaches to the study of the cinema. These include the Charles Altman's ten critical approaches to the study of the cinema, the textual analysis of a film as well as the theories of realism.

### 2.0    OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- analyse Charles Altman critical approaches to the study of the cinema
- account for the theory of realism in the approach to cinema and film studies.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Charles Altman's Approaches

Charles Altman has proposed ten critical approaches to the study of the cinema. They include *the technological approach*, *the historical approach*, *the stardom approach* (studio moguls, stars, directors, etc.), *the relational approach* (examining the relation between film and other art forms), *the canonical approach* (providing a chronological history of classical or important films), *auteur approach*, *a study of Hollywood Studios* (including economic history), *a study of genres*, *a study of film and social context* (society), and *a study of the regulations* (censorship and anti-trust laws) of the film industry (as cited in Buckland, 2010, p.2).

In Film Studies, a textual analysis of a film is usually undertaken through a critical and analytical discussion of the technical choices available to filmmakers. The first of such technical choices involve concern with the set design or what in Film Studies is referred to as *mise-en-scene*. The second is *mise-en-shot* – the way the *mise-en-scene* is represented. The *mise-en-shot* is further divided into a *long take*, *deep focus photography*, *continuity editing*, *editing*, *film sound*, and *montage*.

#### 3.2 Theories of Realism

Theories of realism derive from the practice of realism in film production. The practice is steeped in the aesthetic choices made by the director at the point of shooting the film. The aesthetic choices relate to how the director handles his *mise-en-scene*, the *mise-en-shot*, his use of long takes and deep focus photography, continuity editing, colour, sound, etc.

According to Louis Giannetti, "most theories of realism emphasise the documentary aspects of film art" (Giannetti, 1987, p.364). In this respect, films are evaluated majorly in terms of

how accurately they reflect external reality. Realist filmmakers regard the camera as essentially a recording mechanism rather than an expressive medium. The subject matter is treated with some level of sanctity in the cinema of realism, while technique is discretely applied. Realist theoreticians like Andre Bazin believed that “photography, television, and cinema, unlike the traditional arts produce images of reality automatically, with minimum human interference.” And that this “technological objectivity connects the moving image with the observable physical world” (Giannetti, p.137). For instance, a novelist or a painter would be required to represent reality by re-presenting it in another medium – either through language or colour pigments. The filmmaker’s image, in contrast, is essentially an objective recording of what actually exists.

Of course, Bazin’s aesthetic prescriptions had a moral as well as technological bias. He was influenced by the philosophical movement called *personalism* which emphasised the individualistic and pluralistic nature of truth. Bazin, like the personalists, believed that there are many truths, and that in the cinema, there are many ways of portraying the real; and that the essence of reality lies in its ambiguity. Bazin believes that reality can be interpreted in opposing and equally valid ways, depending on the sensitivities of the artist. He believed that to capture the ambiguity of reality, the filmmaker must be modest and self-effacing, must be a patient observer, and must be willing to follow where reality leads. Bazin also believed that the distortions involved in using formalist techniques such as thematic editing (montage) often violated the complexities of reality. He believed that “montage superimposes a simplistic ideology over the infinite variability of actual life” (Giannetti, p.137). Bazin even viewed classical cutting as potentially corrupting because it breaks down a unified scene into a certain number of closer shots that correspond implicitly to a mental process. Usually this technique encourages us to follow the shot sequence without our being conscious of its arbitrariness, but Bazin argues that “The editor who cuts for us makes in our stead the choice which we would make in real life” (as cited in Giannetti, p.137).

Other realist theorists like Cesare Zavattini and Siegfried Kracauer believe that the “cinema is essentially an extension of photography and share with it a pronounced affinity for recording the visible world around us” (Giannetti, p.364). According to Giannetti, Roberto Rossellini’s film *Open City* (1945) inaugurated the Italian neorealism, one of the key pillars of the cinema of realism. The film deals with the collaboration between Catholics and Communists in fighting the Nazi occupation of Rome before the American army liberated the city. According to Giannetti, the film is technically crude because good quality film stock was impossible to obtain, as a result, Rossellini had to use inferior newsreel stock.

However, the technical flaws and resultant grainy images convey a sense of journalistic immediacy and authenticity (Giannetti, p.364). Coincidentally, many neorealists began their careers as journalists, and Rossellini also began his career as a documentarist. In the neorealist tradition, virtually all the movie is shot in actual locations, and there are many exterior shots in which no additional lights are used. In addition, with the exception of the principal players, the actors are usually nonprofessionals. The structure of the neorealist film is mostly episodic, with a series of vignettes, as shown in *Open City* where we are presented the reactions of Roman citizens to the German occupation. According to Giannetti, *Open City* is saturated with a sense of unrelenting honesty: “This is the way things are,” Rossellini is said to have declared after the film premiered. This statement became the motto of the neorealist movement. The film provided a rallying point for an entire generation of Italian filmmakers who dealt with the repressive experience of life under the Fascist regime of the prewar years. The major filmmakers of the neorealist movement were Roberto Rossellini,

Luchino Visconti, and Vittorio De Sica, with Cesare Zavattini serving as De Sica's principal screenwriter.

According to Giannetti, the main ideological characteristics of the neorealist movement include the followings:

- a) a new democratic spirit, with emphasis on the value of ordinary people like labourers, peasants, and factory workers;
- b) a compassionate point of view and a refusal to make facile moral judgements;
- c) a preoccupation with Italy's Fascist past and its aftermath of wartime devastation, poverty, unemployment, prostitution, and the black market;
- d) a blending of Christian and Marxist humanism;
- e) an emphasis on emotions rather than abstract idea.

The stylistic features also include the followings:

- a) an avoidance of neatly plotted stories in favour of loose, episodic structures that involved organizing from the situations of the characters;
- b) a documentary visual style;
- c) the use of actual locations – usually exteriors – rather than studio sets;
- d) the use of nonprofessional actors, sometimes even for principal roles;
- e) an avoidance of literary dialogue in favour of conversational speech, including dialects; and
- f) an avoidance of artifice in the editing, camerawork and lighting in favour of a simple “styles” style (Giannetti, pp.366-367).

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that in Film Studies, a textual analysis of a film is usually undertaken through a critical and analytical discussion of the technical choices available to filmmakers.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt about the following:

- Charles Altman's Approaches
- Theories of Realism

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Vividly explain the Charles Altman's critical approaches to the study of the cinema.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Ajibade, B. (2013). Nigerian videos and their imagined Western audience: The limits of Nollywood's transnationality. In Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (Eds). *Global Nollywood: The transnational dimensions of an African video film industry*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 264-284.

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## **UNIT 2        THE PRINCIPLE OF MISE-EN-SCENE AND MISE-EN-SHOT**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0    Introduction
- 2.0    Objectives
- 3.0    Main Content
  - 3.1    The principle of Mise-en-scene
  - 3.2    The principle of Mise-en-shot
- 4.0    Conclusion
- 5.0    Summary
- 6.0    Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0    References/Further Reading

### **1.0    INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, we focused on Charles Altman's Approaches to film analysis and the theory of realism. In this unit, we shall be considering the principle of Mise-en-scene and Mise-en-shot.

### **2.0    OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- account for the following concepts as relate to aesthetic choice in film production:
  - mise-en-scene,
  - the mise-en-shot,

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1    Mise-en-Scene**

Mise-en-scene was originally a French word derived from theatrical practice with the literal meaning, "putting in the scene," or "putting on stage," or simply "staging." Mise-en-scene is the principle that deals with the modification of plastic space. It is the principle that deals with the composition and placement of actors within the staging area. This staging area is an approximation of the proscenium arch which encloses the staging area in a picture frame. In the theatre, the staging area is a three dimensional space that has depth, height and width. In the theatre the fourth wall is the auditorium where the viewers are seated. Unlike in the theatre, in film, the concept of mise-en-scene is much more complicated. This is because even though the film director composes and places his actors in a three dimensional space, unlike a theatre director, once the mise-en-scene is framed and canned, the three dimensional space is converted into a two dimensional world because the space of the "world" of the film is no longer a continuum with the auditorium of the theatre space previously occupied by the theatre audience. The film viewer is like a spectator viewing a hanging painting work in an art gallery. In film production, mise-en-scene is used in a broad sense to represent the physical setting for film production and how that physical setting is composed in terms of how objects are placed in space, and how subjects relates to those objects and space, and relates to other subjects in space, as perceived by the viewers.

In terms of film analysis, mise-en-scene is a complex term with four distinct formal elements:

1. the staging of the action;
2. the physical setting and décor;
3. the manner in which the materials are framed;
4. the manner in which they are photographed (Giannetti, 1987, p.35).

The practice of respect for the mise-en-scene belongs to the province of realism because it requires the filmmaker to frame all the materials in the staging area, both objects and subjects of interest which will contribute to the advancement of the narrative action and those which will not, are framed with equal integrity. The viewer is placed in a privileged position to judge what is important in what is being staged before him as he watches the film. He is constantly making judgment over what is important and what is not so important in the unfolding action. The integrity of the scene is maintained in terms of time and space. The filmmaker's interest is in showing things the way they are without using editing to dramatise the space.

### 3.2 Mise-en-shot

While mise-en-scene relates to the setting for film production, mise-en-shot relates to how the filmed event is photographed. In terms of film analysis, five parameters are considered when analysing mise-en-shot: (1) the camera position; (2) camera movement; (3) shot scale; (4) the duration of the shot; and (5) the pace of editing. For instance, a low-angle camera positioning implies a position of power and authority while a high-angled camera positioning implies a position of subordination. Likewise, the closer we move a camera fixed on tripod and rollers toward an actor, the more we are likely to empathise with the character that the actor is playing due to proximity which can enable us undertake a closer psychological study of the character that the actor is playing. The opposite is usually the case if a distance is established between the viewer and the character being played by the actor.

The shot scale relates to aspects of the ratio of the frame's horizontal and vertical dimensions, usually referred to as *aspect ratio*. Thus an aspect ratio of 4:3 means that the image is wider than it is tall by a factor of 4 to 3. Tracing the history of aspects ratio, Philips (1999) has stated as follows:

Throughout film history the screen has nearly always been rectangular, but at different times the projected image has been wider than at other times. From 1910 to the early 1950s, most films were shown in the *standard aspect ratio*: approximately 4:3 or 1:33:1. Since the 1950s, wider formats have dominated in theatrical showings (pp. 37-38).

The most prominent aspect ratios include the 1.66:1 used for mostly European theatrical showings; the 1.85:1 used for mostly U.S. theatrical showings since the 1960s, the 2.4:1 aspect ratio of current anamorphic (wide screen) showings and the 2.75:1 aspect ratio of ultra-Panavision. The anamorphic aspect ratio requires the fixture of an anamorphic lens on the camera when shooting so that the image can be compressed and made fitting for television broadcast. During projection, a projector of similar anamorphic lens is required to expand the image on screen.

The duration of the shot relates to how long the shot is held during production. If the take is held for long then we are dealing with a *long take*. In terms of film production aesthetics, a long take belongs to the province of realism in film practice. On the other hand, editing refers to the pace of cutting within a scene. If the pace is slow or sparing, then we are dealing with a realist practice but if the pace of editing is fast, then the filmmaker most likely belongs to the formalist school. Buckland has pointed out that there are three options film directors have in photographing a scene: (1) through using a long take; (2) through using deep focus photography; and (3) through using continuity editing.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that in Film Studies, a textual analysis of a film is usually undertaken through a critical and analytical discussion of the technical choices available to filmmakers.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt about the following:

- Mise-en-Scene
- Mise-en-shot

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the following as relate to aesthetic choice in film production:
  - mise-en-scene,
  - the mise-en-shot,

#### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Ajibade, B. (2013). Nigerian videos and their imagined Western audience: The limits of Nollywood's transnationality. In Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (Eds). *Global Nollywood: The transnational dimensions of an African video film industry*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 264-284.
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## UNIT 3      OTHER APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF FILM AND CINEMA

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Film Set
  - 3.2 The Long Take
  - 3.3 Deep Focus Photography
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, we focused on the principle of Mise-en-scene and Mise-en-shot.. In this unit, we shall be considering some other approaches to the study of films and cinema which includes Film Set, The Long Take and Deep Focus photography.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- account for the following concepts as relate to aesthetic choice in film production:
  - Film Set,
  - The Long Take, and
  - Deep Focus photography.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Film Set

In film production, the film set is usually designed by the art director whose job is to design and build a set for the production. The film set serves as a scenographic background against which narrative action is staged and photographed. In the hey days of the studio system, between the 1920s and 1950s, art directors were required to build giant studio sets for film production. In contemporary times, art directors have become production designers who supervise the entire visual look of the film. Usually, they are required to develop a visual concept around which set, props, lighting, and costumes are designed to function. The production designer is very important in the production of genres such as science fiction and epic movies where they are required to conceptualise the image of the future or that of the remote past. In Nollywood, the work of the art director is particularly of great importance in epic and ritual genres in which they are required to build elaborate sets for film production.

Film sets can sometimes provide rich sources of materials for critical analysis. A typical example is the Warner Brothers films of the 1930s which were low-budget films which had contemporary themes since their stories were largely inspired by newspaper stories of crime and criminality of American society under the Great Depression. Warner Brothers made a number of gangster films such as *Public Enemy* (William Wellman, 1931) and *Little Caesar* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1932). As a result of Warner Brother's low-budget policy, little amount of money was spent on set design. Many of these low-budget films had simple bare set made up of damp rooms or back streets. This economic factor largely determined the visual style of their films in the 1930s.

As a result of the financial policy of Warner Brothers, their directors made do with what they had and frequently resorted to usage of medium shots so that the actors would take up most of the frame. The studio also used low-keyed lighting in order to conceal the cheapness of the set and its small size. This meant that most of the set shrouded in darkness. The popular saying that necessity is the mother of invention was a truism in the experimentation that grew out of the tight financial policies of Warner Brothers. The studio became the trail-blazer in the invention and usage of fog generating machines which served to hide the low quality sets and provided perfect setting for film noir movies. This is not surprising bearing in mind that most the gangster movies were set in impoverished backgrounds inhabited by criminals. The gangster movies were also based on newspaper criminal headlines. Richard Griffith's story of the origins of the gangster movies is quite instructive:

In 1930, Darryl Zanuck, then the newly-appointed production head at Warner Brothers, had announced that films produced by his studio would henceforth be based so far as possible on spot news. This policy, inspired by the success of the gangster film in dramatizing headlines to popular taste, produced the *topical film*, for many years Warners speciality and imitated by the other major studios (Griffith, 1976, p. 116).

In contrast to the low-budget productions of Warner Brothers, Metro-Goldwyne-Meyer (MGM) spent a lot of money on set design and construction for their movies. MGM art directors created elaborate sets which were showcased through the usage of full and high-key lighting that produced very bright images with little shadows. Their colour films were usually colour saturated and this created its own problems because the elaborate sets, costumes and properties which were bathed in bright lights and saturated colours tended to occasionally overwhelm and dominate the actions and stars of the movies. This can be seen in MGM films such as *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939) and *Gone With the Winds* (Victor Fleming, 1939). Both films with their glamorous outlooks were however rewarded by Academy Awards (Hunter, 1991, pp. 133 & 368).

### **3.2 The Long Take**

The long take is usually the name given to a shot of a long duration. A shot is usually held for a long duration in a scene while the actors are being staged within the scene. Barry Salt has calculated the average length of shots in Hollywood films for decades. His findings include the fact that in the 1940s, the average duration of a shot in Hollywood films was 9 seconds. In this respect, any shot in a Hollywood film of the 1940s that lasts longer than 9 seconds is considered to be a long take (Buckland, p.8). Though such a wholesale elaborate study has not been carried out on Nollywood films, there is a general assumption that Nigerian video films usually adopt a slower pacing, combined with long takes (Ajibade, 2013, pp.264-284). The point needs to be emphasized also that the tradition of long takes belongs to the practice of realism.

Directors who favour this aesthetic tradition help to advance the profession of acting in the sense that it enables actors the opportunity to explore the full range of characterization as they interpret their roles. Those directors who favour the tradition of rapid cutting (editing) within a scene place little emphasis on the performance of the actor. As we shall find out in the tradition of formalism, directors of formalist school place very little emphasis on character interpretation. To them meaning is generated from conceptual juxtaposition of shots.

### 3.3 Deep Focus Photography

In the realistic tradition of filmmaking, the long take is usually combined with deep focus photography. In deep focus photography, several planes of the shot are kept in focus at the same time in respect of pictorial composition. This means that the foreground, middle-ground and background of screen geography must remain in clear focus during the pictorial composition of the scene. The term deep focus photography is usually used interchangeably with the term, *depth of field*, which refers to a cinematographic practice, whereas *deep focus* “is both a technique and a film style with theoretical and ideological implications (Hayward, 2001, pp.81-82). Depth of field relates to the focal length that any particular lens can provide. To achieve a greater depth of field, one needs a wide-angled lens to be able to achieve deep focus. When composing in depth, all planes within the lens’s focus are in sharp focus – from background to the foreground. The technique is only possible when one uses a combination of fast wide-angle lenses and fast film stock to preserve the depth of field. According to Susan Hayward, there is controversy over who first used the technique.

While some critics credit the French filmmaker, Jean Renoir, with this type of compositional practice, others give the credit to the American filmmaker, Orson Welles, specifically as deployed in his film, *Citizen Kane* (1941). Renoir first used this type of focus so that he could make use of long takes without having to edit to create movement. In this case, movement occurs within the frame. Since deep focus requires a small aperture and fast film stock, both of which were not available until the late 1930s, the likelihood of Jean Renoir being the originator of the practice of deep focus appears remote. What he did was to create the illusion of deep focus by creating depth of space through staging in depth by adjusting the focus according to object or actor (character) of interest within the scene.

According to Hayward, the tradition of staging in depth as a perspectival strategy had been in practice in the 1910s. It is a practice whereby the illusion of depth is created by having characters move to the foreground or by having the *mise-en-scene* privilege the background or middle-ground of the composition. Another technique was to shoot characters located in the background in a medium close-up shot and then pull back to reveal the remaining middle-ground and foreground planes of the composition (Hayward, pp.81-82).

The theoretical and ideological debate over the superiority of deep focus over montage was launched by Andre Bazin in the 1950s. Bazin based his argument on drawing distinction between the two types of films, the pre-sound film which was highly fascinated with the image and so invested much in the practice of montage, and the sound film which invested much more in advancing the tradition of realism. His argument was not intended *per se* to dismiss montage as a cinematic practice appropriate only to the silent era, but to state that in the practice of deep focus, the space and time of the scene remain whole and continuous. The scene is not fragmented into several shots (i.e. into several fragments of space and time).

In other words, when the long take is combined with deep focus composition, *the practice ensures the dramatic unities of space and time*. One of the consequences of observing the dramatic unities of space and time is that it emphasizes the actor’s performance. Rather than cutting a performance into many shots to control the emotions of the viewer, the actor’s performance is used to anchor the viewer’s emotional interest.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that in Film Studies, a textual analysis of a film is usually undertaken through a critical and analytical discussion of the technical choices available to filmmakers.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt about the following:

- Film Set
- The Long Take
- Deep Focus Photography

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the following as relate to aesthetic choice in film production:
  - use of long takes and
  - deep focus photography.

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**Module 3      MASTERING FILM PRODUCTION AESTHETICS FOR CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

In this Module, students are exposed to film production aesthetics in the cinema, especially of the formalist school. It is discussed under two major units:

- Unit 1              Formalist Film Production Aesthetics**
- Unit 2              Constructivism Approaches**
- Unit 3              Eisenstein's Aesthetics Theories**

## UNIT 1

## FORMALIST FILM PRODUCTION AESTHETICS

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Charles Altman's Approaches
  - 3.2 Theories of Realism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall be considering the approaches to the study of the cinema. These include the Charles Altman's ten critical approaches to the study of the cinema, the textual analysis of a film as well as the theories of realism.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- analyse Charles Altman critical approaches to the study of the cinema
- account for the theory of realism in the approach to cinema and film studies.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### Formalist Film Production Aesthetics

Formalism as an aesthetic practice in the cinema owe its roots to the foundational work of the American filmmaker, D.W. Griffith. Griffith is often called the Father of Film by scholars such as Louis Giannetti (1987) and Ken Dancyger (2019) because of his contributions in experimenting and consolidating some of the key narrative techniques that are currently applied worldwide by directors in film production. They include, the variation of shots for close psychological study of characters and for dramatic impact. These shot includes:

- ❖ the extreme long shot,
- ❖ the close-up, the cutaway,
- ❖ the tracking shot,
- ❖ parallel editing and
- ❖ variation in pacing of editing rhythm.

Even though Edwin S. Porter was the first filmmaker to apply film as a medium for storytelling, D.W. Griffith experimented and perfected how to tell stories in the film medium through the mechanism of editing.

D.W. Griffith was a typical showman of the movies. His press agents romanticised his birth place to be the "Old Kentucky Home," to evoke an image of the South even though he was actually born in a little farm near Indiana, in 1875, which is more Midwestern, than Southern. His father died when Griffith was ten years old. Later in life, he moved to Louisville where he worked in a book store and participated in public literary readings with poets like James Whitcomb Riley. These literary soirees helped to sharpen Griffith's interest in literary activities even though he had a shortlived formal education in his childhood. He later took vocal and acting lessons which enabled him to join the travelling theatre company "Twilight Revellers" which enabled him to gain acting exposures in New York, Chicago and San

Francisco. When he became extremely indigent in New York, Griffith sustained himself by occasionally playing minor roles in films. According to John Fell (1979, p.57), Griffith appeared in Edwin S. Porter's *Rescued from an Eagle's Nest* (Edison, 1907) and in several Biograph Company films of the early 1908, such as *At the French Ball* (1908) and *A Calamitous Elopement* (1908). He equally started selling "story ideas" at \$5 per story. In June, 1908, Griffith became an assistant director. Subsequently, he directed his first film, *The Adventures of Dollie* (1908) which he shot for two days. Between 1908 and 1913 Griffith was responsible for the production of approximately one hundred Biograph films per year, most of which were one or two-reelers of eleven to sixteen minutes in duration. As a failed playwright, initially Griffith was ashamed to be identified with the popular medium so he used the pseudonym, "Lawrence Griffith" in his early productions. But as his productions became increasingly successful, he assembled a group of regular actors into a kind of repertory group which he featured regularly in his films:

(Mark Sennet was the principal slapstick figure), some refined to fit Griffith's Victorian-Southern sensibility. Blanch Sweet, Mae Marsh and the Gish sisters were imperiled and usually plucky heroines; Bobby Harron, Harry B. Walthall and Frank Grandin played heroes. Griffith was quick to recognise and to nurture the talents of Mary Pickford and Florence Lawrence and his later productions became training grounds for directors Erich Von Stroheim and Raoul Walsh (Fell, 1979, p.57).

It is interesting to note that Griffith shot many of his one or two-reelers in an average time of two days. This should be comforting news to some Nollywood directors that were disparaged for cranking out "quickies" within two weeks. Griffith was very conscious of the need to cultivate his film audience. In fact, most of the editing experimentations he undertook were aimed at attracting and arresting the viewer's attention. Fell (1979) has noted that Griffith's attention to structure grew out of his pragmatic sense of audience reception when he was trying to master how to transfer and translate narrative in film. The problems he was trying to deal with included those related to: (i) the passage of time; (ii) how to pace his stories; (iii) how to arrest the viewer's emotion in the absence of histrionics and sound; (iv) how to maximise the advantage of location and set; (v) how to control the perception of the viewer; and (vi) how to resolve the conflicts that drive his drama. The form which he adopted as narrative technique was a combination of epic and melodrama. He was also favourably disposed towards adaptations of popular novels and plays into films.

Griffith's experimentations with narrative techniques started becoming very obvious in 1908 when he moved the camera closer to the action in the film, *The Greaser's Gauntlet* (1908), when he cuts from a long shot of a hanging tree to a medium close up of a black man thanking a white woman who has just saved him from being lynched. By using the technique of match-cutting, the viewer is brought into the scene with heightened emotional impact. This experimentation is carried even further in another film, *After Many Years* (1908), in which he moved the camera even closer by using a medium close up for emphatic emotional impact. In the film, a woman awaits the arrival of her husband who has long been away from home, and so Griffith cuts from a long shot to a close-up shot of the woman's brooding face. In apply this narrative technique, he demonstrated that a scene could be fragmented into long shots, medium shots and close-up shots to allow the viewer undertake a close psychological study of the major characters in the scene. Through this narrative technique, he was also engaging the viewer emotionally without the aid of histrionics or sound. In the midst of this spatial and temporal continuum, Griffith had shown in this film that editing can be used to emphasise dramatic impact. As with most of Griffith's innovations, the use of the close-up for emotional rather than physical reasons were immediately adopted for use by other filmmakers. It was

also in *After Many Years* that Griffith first experimented with the technique of parallel action as a narrative technique for building up suspense for dramatic impact. In this film, he cut from a shot of the wife to a shot of her husband in a faraway land. In this scene, the yearning on the woman's brooding face is made manifest visually by Griffith's cut to her husband. Even though the two scenes are far apart, the woman's brooding face is used to establish an emotional link with where her husband is. This is followed by a series of intercut shots of the wife and her husband to further reinforce the running of parallel actions. In doing so, Griffith demonstrated that viewers can understand the meaning in a scene even after he had fragmented both spatial and temporal continuum. The point need to be emphasised that as at the time Griffith was carrying out these experiments, they were ground breaking narrative techniques in what was then an emergent new medium without codified narrative techniques.

The experiment of parallel action was further consciously improved upon in the film, *The Lonely Villa* (1909), which is a typical melodramatic tale involving the rescue of a family being besieged by burglars while the husband is away from home. In this film, Griffith employed parallel editing not to show parallel action for its own sake but to use it to build up suspense as he intercuts between the burglars breaking into the family house while the husband is racing to the rescue of his family. By deliberately using the technique of shorter and shorter takes, he heightened the element of suspense in the sequence to a cathartic climax for dramatic effect. His employment of rapid intercutting had demonstrated that a director can make meaning by dispensing with realism in favour of conceptual relationship. These early experiments of Griffith became the building blocks of formalism as we shall soon find out. In these innovations, Griffith began the tradition of replacing real time with dramatic time.

All through the years that Griffith was experimenting with the one or two-reelers, he was perfecting the language of editing. According to Giannetti, the narrative techniques attributed to him were: (1) *cutting to continuity*; (2) *classical cutting*; and (3) *thematic cutting* (montage). In the technique of *cutting to continuity*, Griffith used the principle of the association of ideas in the concept of editing. In this technique, he tries to preserve the fluidity of an action without showing it all. For instance, a man leaving his office to go to a bank to make withdrawals might be shown in seven brief consecutive shots, each of which is linked by association to the next: (1) he enters the corridor as he closes his office's door; (2) he leaves the office building; (3) he enters his car and starts it; (4) he drives out of his office's car park into the highway; (5) he turns into a side-street and drives to where his bank is located; (6) he parks his car in front of his bank and walk's towards an ATM pay outlet and joins a queue; (7) it gets to his turn, he withdraws his money, walks towards his car, enters, turns and re-enters the highway and drives home. In order to achieve cutting to continuity, the action must be continuous without a break in an edited sequence of this nature. All the movements in the sequence must be carried out in the same direction on the screen. For instance, if he is going to drive into the screen through screen left and exit through screen right, this must be maintained to achieve visual coherence. In the practice of cutting to continuity, the fragmentation of space and time is carried out as unobtrusively as possible so as not to disorient the viewer. In the technique called *classical cutting*, the principle of cutting is taken several steps further by editing for dramatic intensity and emotional emphasis rather than for purely physical reasons. Through the use of close-up within the scene, Griffith managed to achieve a dramatic impact unprecedented in its time. Though close-ups had been used earlier in the cinema, Griffith was the first director to use them for psychological study of characters rather than for physical reasons. By cutting to close-up shots, Griffith exercised far greater control over the viewer's reaction on the unfolding actions. He also used the



narrative technique of selecting and shifting between long, medium, and close-up shots, to control the viewer's point of view within the scene.

Also, the spatial and temporal continuity was radically altered. It replaced objective continuity with subjective continuity through the association of ideas implicit in the connected shots. Classical cutting presents a series of shots that represents a kind of psychological cause-effect justified on the basis of dramatic rather than literal necessity. Thematic cutting (montage) is a narrative technique that stresses the association of ideas irrespective of continuity of time and space. Griffith experimented with thematic cutting extensively in both *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916) (Giannett, 1987, pp.112-113).

In another film, *The Lonedale Operator* (1911), Griffith mounted a camera on a moving train which is rapidly intercut with Blanche Sweet who is the isolated railroad operator held captive, awaiting rescue by the rail men. What is on display here as in *After Many Years* (1908) and *the Lonely Villa* (1909) is his gradual expanding experimentations with the narrative technique of parallel editing to show simultaneity of parallel actions. Here, time and space is fragmented but the technique of association of ideas is used to link both actions. After he had perfected these experiments with one or two-reelers, Griffith felt confident enough to embark on a full length film entitled, *Judith of Bethulia* (1914) which dealt with a complex biblical story which contained epic battle scenes and the personal dramas that he would expand upon in his monumental works such as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916).

Griffith and his cinematographer Billy Bitzer carried out many experiments to show passage of time. They experimented with the fade, which was achieved by controlling the lense aperture in the course of filming. This experiment is often credited to Bitzer. Subsequently, this effect was equally achieved easily during laboratory processing and printing. Giffith and Bitzer used fades to provide a sense of conclusion to final scenes and within the sequences of films to show passage of time as demonstrated in the film, *The Battle of Elderberry Gulch* (1913) where two orphans being sent from their home on a cart used this method. Griffith's obsession with the control of audience perceptions determined his camera positioning, lighting, focus, iris and tempos of his films. These experimentations were intended to control what the viewers see and how they should see it. As Griffith increased his camera set-ups, he equally allowed a greater variety in their angles of views and in their movements. Griffith also experimented with tracking shots as he moved his camera between shots or to follow an action as applied in the film, *The Girl and Her Trust* (1912) which was a remake of *The Lonedale Operator*. The tracking shot was achieved by mounting a camera on an automobile that drove parallel to a speeding car in order to track its actions. Griffith and Bitzer also used matte-box mask in films such as *The Redman and the Child* (1908) to stimulate a subjective point of view by using a surveyor's transit scope to mask the picture into a circle. This technique is further developed by the use of an external iris to substitute the aperture so as to enable the cinematographer to diminish the field of vision on the screen from its rectangle to a circle of various sizes located anywhere on the screen. All these experiments defamiliarises the space of narrative action as Griffith moved more and more toward conceptual association of space and time in his films.

Most of these experiments which he perfected in his years of producing one or two-reelers became fully exploited when he left Biograph Film Production Company because the policies of the Trust and the conservative financial policies of the company became a hindrance to his

aesthetic desire to experiment with higher numbers of film reels which will allow him to produce full length films. These disagreements made Griffith to join Mutual Film Production Company owned by Harry Aitkins, a Midwest film distributor who had broken ranks with the Trust and who gave Griffith free hand to experiment with four or five reel features. When Griffith left Biograph, he equally relocated his troupe of actors to Mutual and produced films such as *The Escape* (1914), *The Battle of the Sexes* (1914), *The Avenging Conscience* (1914), *Home Sweet Home* (1914) and his magnum opus, *The Clansman* (1915) an adaptation of Thomas Dixon's novel of the same title which opened in February 15 in Los Angeles with the novel's title and then opened in New York with a new title, *The Birth of a Nation* (Fell, 1979, pp. 54-79). Aitkins who knew the picture would be a huge success used a road show to promote the film first in the major cities before leasing it on a territorial basis to state distributors who paid a percentage for the rights. Aitkins however underestimated state audiences and lost millions of dollars from under-reported revenues from the states. For instance, Louis B. Meyer who had been managing nickelodeons in Massachusetts was reputed to have made his first million from under-reporting of revenues from *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). According to Fell, "overall grosses on showings of *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915 and later ran from eighteen to twenty million" (p.64). The film which fanned the embers of racism across America also attracted civil group protests and race riots against its exhibition.

Griffith's classic film, *The Birth of a Nation*, combines documentary re-enactment of historical materials such as General Sherman's march to the sea and President Lincoln's assassination with the fictitious story of two families' experiences during the American Civil War. The story of *The Birth of a Nation* is in two parts. The first part covers the Southern family, the Camerons, who play host to their Northern friends from Pennsylvania, the Stonemans. The outbreak of the American Civil War separates both families. The Camerons who belonged to the slaves owning families of the South fight on the side of the Confederates, while the Stonemans who belonged to the abolitionist movement from the North fight on the side of the Federalists. The son of Cameron, Ben Cameron, who is popularly called Little Colonel (Henry B. Walthall) is wounded in battle beside Phil Stoneman (Elmer Clifton) and he is nursed by Elsie Stoneman (Lilian Gish) whom he loves. Following the defeat of the Confederate forces, Ben Cameron had to return to the family home in Piedmont. Subsequently, President Lincoln is assassinated.

In the second part of the story, the senior Stoneman, who is a Senator, pays visit to Piedmont with his black mistress and his mulatto protégé, Silas Lynch, who is the Lieutenant Governor. Lynch falls in love with Elsie Stoneman immediately he beholds her. In the post-war years, the blacks win the legislative elections and dominate the government of the town. The legislature is caricatured as a house indulging in spontaneous drunkenness. A renegade black soldier, Gus (Walter Long), chases the youngest daughter of the Camerons, Flora (Mae Marsh), to a cliff where she chooses to commit suicide rather than be raped by Gus. To avenge the defeated Confederate forces, Ben Cameron forms the Ku Klux Klan which becomes an instrument for terrorizing the blacks. Members of the Klan catch Gus and tries and executes him. When Elsie Stoneman discovers that Ben Cameron belongs to the Ku Klux Klan, she rejects his love proposal while Margaret Cameron also turns down the love advances of Phil Stoneman because of the bitter memories of the war. Silas Lynch is angered by the activities of the Klan and arrests the elder Cameron and also institutes a suit against Elsie for turning down his proposal. Senator Stoneman the supposed liberal abolitionist from the North is himself scandalised when he finds out that it was his daughter that Lynch proposes to marry. Lynch imprisons Elsie and the black mob attacks Cameron, Phil Stoneman, Margaret

Cameron and the faithful servants of the Camerons. The Klan men counter attack the rioting black mobs, subdue them and free Elsie. The film ends with the marriage of Phil Stoneman and Margaret Cameron, and Ben Cameron and Elsie Stoneman. With respect to the negative tropes used in the representation of blacks in *The Birth of a Nation*, Kenneth W. Leish has observed that

The film's depiction of leering, bestial blacks created a furore throughout the country, and much to Griffith's surprise and dismay the movie was roundly condemned by many fair-minded Americans. But although Griffith's view of history and race relation was deplorable, his artistry was undeniable (Leish, 1974, p.24).

The story of *Intolerance* (1916) grew out of a shorter story entitled, *The Mother and the Law* which Griffith began developing as a response to what he saw as the growing intolerance of the American society to the subject matter which he treated in his film, *The Birth of a Nation*. At first he wrote and published a pamphlet entitled *The Rise and Fall of Free Speech in America*, in which he argued for the freedom of expression for filmmakers by defending his version of American history of the Civil War. Four stories are told in the film, *Intolerance*: separated by space and time; the story of the fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Great, in 538 AD; the story of Jesus Christ; and the story of Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in France in 1572; are grafted to a modern day American crime story. All the stories are linked together by the recurrent image of a woman (Lilian Gish) rocking a cradle to signify the continuity of life in the midst change and pain. The film exploits the familiar Griffith formula of grafting a personal crime story to important historical materials.

Of the four stories, two stories, the of Jesus Christ and that of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in France are the least developed. All the stories deal with the betrayal of innocence. Three episodes of the story of Jesus Christ which culminates in his crucifixion and that of how Catherine de Medici persuaded her effeminate son, Charles IX, the King of France, to issue a decree authorizing the slaughter of a Huguenot family whose eldest daughter, Brown Eyes, is loved by Prosper Latour. Latour is shot with Brown Eyes in his arms. Both least developed stories are sandwiched by the story of the fall of Babylon and the crime story. The story of the fall of Babylon started on a note of tolerance when King Nabonidus, in a gesture of tolerance allows the introduction of worship of Ishtar, a rival goddess to the City but the High Priest of Bel mounts a stiff opposition to this gesture. Prince Balshazzar, the son of Nabonides, is in love with the Princess Beloved, but Balshazzar is passionately loved by the Mountain Girl, who is herself loved by the Rhapsode, who works for the High Priest. When Cyrus the Great attacks the city and his forces are repulsed at the great wall, the High Priest, driven by religious intolerance, open Babylon's gate of Igur-Bel. As a result of the betrayal by the High Priest of Bel, Babylon is occupied despite the spirited efforts by the Mountain Girl to warn Balshazzar. The Prince and Princess commit suicide and the Mountain Girl dies gallantly at the battlefield. The modern story, set in contemporary America, was originally titled *The Mother and the Law*. The story centres around the inhabitants of a tenement building made up of the Boy, the Dear One and the Friendless One.

The story revolves around the Boy who loses his father in a violent strike and is forced to take to gangsterism by working for the Musketeer of the Slums whose mistress is the Friendless One. The Dear One also loses her father and she marries the Boy. The Musketeer however incriminates the Boy by bearing false witness against him and he is sentenced to imprisonment for a crime he did not commit. The Do-gooders financed by the Jenkins Foundation funded by the Mill where the Boy's father died during a violent strike, forcefully

adopts the baby of the Boy, claiming that his wife, the Dear One, is incapable of looking after the baby. Finally, the Boy returns from prison only to find that the Musketeer is trying to force himself on his wife, the Dear One. His jealous lover, the Friendless One, shoot the Musketeer through an open window and flees. For the second time, the crime is pinned on the Boy and he is condemned to death by hanging. However, just before his execution, a policeman secures the confession of the Friendless One and the Boy is set free.

The four stories are adroitly paced by Griffith in such a manner that they seem to climax at the same time through his intercutting of parallel situations. For instance, as the Huguenots barricade themselves from their attackers, Jesus Christ is condemned to death. Just then, a taxi rushes to give information to the Governor that the Friendless One has confessed to the crime of the murder of the Musketeer, so that he can grant the Boy reprieve from the gallows. As this is being done, the Mountain Girl rides her chariot to warn Babylon, pursued by Cyrus' troops. Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre is completed as the Boy's onward march to the gallows is intercut with the crosses on the hill of Calvary. Just when the Boy is about to join the list of casualties in the film, he is granted reprieve by the Governor.

Arguably, *Intolerance* was intended by Griffith to be his artistic response to what he felt was the intolerance of American society to his racist interpretation of the history of the American Civil War in his film, *The Birth of a Nation*. He intended it to be a protest work in pursuit of freedom of expression in the American film industry. In pursuit of his objective to portray the theme of intolerance through the ages, he spared no effort in ensuring that the project was well funded. Fell estimates that over \$2,000,000 was spent in funding the production of *Intolerance* (1979, p. 69). Most of the cost of production was expended on elaborate set of the city of Babylon. If Griffith thought he would rake in the millions as he did with his magnus opus, *The Birth of a Nation*, he would have been disappointed because for all its artistic virtuosity, the film was received with missed reaction. Many trade papers of the period complained of the incomprehensibility of the structure of the film (Fell, p. 70).

Though *Intolerance* was not as successful as *The Birth of a Nation*, it however had a tremendous impact on Soviet montage cinema through the work of one of its great pioneers, Lev Vladimirovich Kuleshov. Kuleshov graduated from the Moscow Fine Arts School in 1916 and started his professional career as a set designer for the film director, Yevgeni Bauer, at the young age of 17 years. When the famous director died from a fall on production location in the Crimea when directing his film, *After Happiness* (1917), Kuleshov had to complete the directing of the film. He subsequently worked as a camera man for "agit trains" and was involved in setting up the State Film School in Moscow. Soon he distinguished himself as both a film practitioner and theoretician, but when his superiors at the Film School saw that many of his theories were contradicting what they were teaching in the State Film School, they encouraged him to set up an independent study group which became known as the "Kuleshov Workshop."

To fully understand the foundation of the practice of montage in Soviet era, one need to understand that the practice was a product of necessity. During the Bolshevik revolution, the owners of the film studios, laboratories and cinemas in Moscow were Tsarist apologists who looted their studios and laboratories before they fled to France. As a result, the young republic lacked film stock. In fact, the first experimental film produced by the Kuleshov workshop, *On the Red Front*, which dealt with the Polish exploits on the Western Front, was shot on positive film stock because of lack of negative raw stock. It was this lack of negative raw stock that necessitated the experiments of restructuring existing films in what later

developed into montage practice. In undertaking these experiments, Griffith's thematic editing style was a great source of inspiration. Writing on the influence of *Intolerance* on the film, *On the Red Front*, Fairservice (2001) has observed that

This film was inspired by D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* which had, in terms of its form and content, a tremendous impact on young Soviet filmmakers... The absence of raw film stock compelled the film students toward experiment with the restructuring of existing films, and it was within the context of this kind of experimentation that emphasis was given to the idea that became the basis of montage theory: that when two pieces of film imagery are presented joined together, an audience will attempt to establish a meaningful relationship in the conjunction (p. 181).

To gain a full understanding of the roots of montage, one must examine the influence of Constructivism as an artistic movement in the Soviet era. According to Thompson and Bordwell (2010), Constructivism had its roots in pre-revolutionary artistic movements which were influenced by French Cubism and Italian Futurism which manifested in a movement referred to in Russia as Cubo-Futurism, a movement that built its reputation on attacks on traditional art forms. This movement affiliated with another movement, Suprematism, a spiritual and abstract movement championed by Kasimir Malevich which emphasised simple geometric shapes and composition. In the pre-revolutionary years, both movements established a political alliance through a robust criticism of traditional artistic styles. But the movement fell short of adopting a radical posture of seeing art as tool for socio-political change. All of this however changed after the Bolshevik Revolution. After the 1917 Revolution, the Constructivist Movement took on a political outlook. It saw itself playing a major cultural role in the ongoing social reconstruction of the Soviet society. In their Manifestos of the 1920s, they encouraged artists to apply the abstract styles of their artistic works to a useful service of the Soviet society. The Constructivist does not perceive the artist to be an inspired visionary, rather he sees the role of the artist to be that of a skilled artisan applying the materials of the medium he working with to create an art work. They often compared the work of an artist to that of an engineer who uses tool and a scientific method to create things. No wonder people like Sergie Eisenstein who initially trained as engineers found a comfortable home in the Constructivist movement.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that in Film Studies, a textual analysis of a film is usually undertaken through a critical and analytical discussion of the technical choices available to filmmakers.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt about the following:

- Film Set
- The Long Take
- Deep Focus Photography

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

2. Explain the following as relate to aesthetic choice in film production:
  - use of long takes and
  - deep focus photography.

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## UNIT 2 CONSTRUCTIVISM APPROACHES

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Constructivism Approach
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall be considering the constructivism approaches to the study of the cinema. Sample of films in which constructivism approaches are dominant will also form part of the discussion.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- analyse various constructivism approaches to the study of the cinema.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### Constructivism Approaches

The Constructivists compared art to a machine. While traditional conception of art applied biological imagery of the art work being analogous to a plant with an organic unity and growth, the Constructivists perceived art as emerging out of a process of assemblage from the medium that the artist is working with. They referred to this process of assemblage as *montage* from the French process of assembling machine parts for the production of an equipment. This analogy between art and machines gained currency because the Constructivists saw their art studios as factories for the production of art works. Through the works of established artists such as the theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold and the pioneer montage film director, Lev Kuleshov, the Constructivist ideas of artistic production found its way into film production through the works of Sergie Eisenstein who was mentored by Meyerhold and Vsevolod Pudovkin who was mentored by Kuleshov. These experiments in the thematic conjunction of cinematic imagery became popularly known as “Kuleshov effects.” Kuleshov’s best known student, Vsevolod Pudovkin spent two years at the State Film School in Moscow, mostly at the Kuleshov Workshop while Sergie Mikhailovich Eisenstein was there for only three months, in the winter of 1922-23.

Mark Joyce (2001) has also submitted that the innovative use of the montage technique in film by the Soviet filmmakers had its roots in art forms such as painting, literature and music of pre-revolutionary Russia. He notes for instance that by 1910, a group of Russian painters had already experimented extensively with montage. The Russian Futurists had declared in their manifestoes that conventional art must be destroyed for a new art appropriate to the machine age to emerge. The Futurists took their subject matters from modern life and exploited a technique of shocking juxtapositions. The Russian poet, Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky (1893-1930) was also experimenting with “shattering words and reassembling them into brutal images” (as cited Joyce, p.422). It took a lot more time for montage to be transferred to film because of the cost of sponsoring cinematic productions. Experimentations along the line of what had already been happening in other art forms started in the cinema

with the experiments of Lev Kuleshov, a young Soviet filmmaker which led to what became known as “Kuleshov effect.” In a lecture he gave to the London Film Society in February 1929, Vsevolod Pudovkin outlined the Kuleshov effect thus:

Kuleshov and I made an interesting experiment. We chose close-ups which were static and which did not express any feeling at all-quiet close-ups. We joined these close-ups, which were all similar, with other bits of film in three different combinations. In the first combination the close-up of Mosjukhin was immediately followed by a shot of a plate of soup standing on a table. It was obvious and certain that Mosjukhin was looking at this soup. In the second combination the face of Mosjukhin was joined to shots showing a coffin in which lay a dead woman. In the third the close-up was followed by a shot of a little girl playing with a funny toy bear. When we showed the three combinations to an audience which had not been let into the secret the result was terrific. The public raved about the acting of the artist. They pointed out the heavy pensiveness of his mood over the forgotten soup, were touched and moved by the deep sorrow with which he looked on the dead woman, and admired the light, happy smile with which he surveyed the girl at play (as cited in Joyce, pp.422-423).

V.I. Pudovkin who was a mentee of Lev Kuleshov, wrote the first important theoretical treatise on what he called constructive editing, in which he made several distinctions between his experiments and those of Griffith. He claimed that Griffith’s use of the close-up is too limited, and that Griffith was using the close-up merely to serve as an interruption of the long shot, offering no meaning of its own. It was a typical case of the son trying to put down the father in order to foreground his own voice. Rather than experiment along the line of Griffith, Pudovkin insisted that each shot should make a new point through the process of juxtaposition as they experimented with the actor Mosjukhin. He felt that it is through the juxtaposition of shot that new meanings can be created. Taken from this notion, meanings are made through the juxtaposition of shots, not through a single shot.

In the Mosjukhin experiment cited above, the emotion is produced not by the actor’s performance, but by the associations brought about by the juxtapositions. In Pudovkin’s constructive editing, the viewer creates the emotional meanings once the appropriate objects have been linked together by the filmmaker. In essence, Soviet montage practice constructed meaning in the same way we juxtaposed different words to construct meaning. By using more close-ups than Griffith, Pudovkin built up a scene from many separate shots, all juxtaposed for a unified effects. The environment of the scene is unimportant. Long shots are rarely used. Instead, a barrage of close-ups of objects provides the viewer with the necessary associations to link together the meaning.

Pudovkin’s film, *Mother* (1926) is an adaptation of Maxim Gorky’s novel of the same title, but in his adaptation he reconstructs the story in such a way that the central character, the mother played by Vera Baranovskaya, a Moscow Arts Theatre actress trained on the Stanislavskian Method acting, is made to develop political consciousness during the course of the 1905 revolution. Her husband, a drunken strike breaker is killed in his encounter with workers. Her son Pavel (Nikolai Batalov), also a Moscow Arts Theatre Method actor is arrested by the Police for taking part in the strike. Apparently because the police promised to release her son if he cooperates with them, she betrays her son by revealing to the police that her son participated in the strike. Based on this information, her son is tried and jailed. This betrayal by the police brings about political consciousness. She is now determined to be part of the workers movement. She participates in the May Day celebration and helps to organise



her son's escape from the prison to join the workers parade where he is shot and killed by the police. This story appears simple but in its editing, Pudovkin showcases his talent through thematic editing, especially in those scenes in which Pavel has been passed a note telling him of the impending plot by the workers to free him on May Day. The problem which Pudovkin confronted was how to express joy through thematic imagery. Rather than show the joy of the impending release through histrionics, he cuts from his nervous hands holding the note to the corners of his smiling face to nature's expression of freedom – a shot of a stream swollen with the rapid current of spring to a play of sunlight on the water, to cuts to birds splashing in the village's stream, and finally to a child laughing. When these imagery are conjoined with that of the smiling face of Pavel, the feeling of joy of his impending freedom is fully captured and experienced by the viewer.

Dziga Vertov, born as Denis Kaufman in 1896 but took the name Dziga Vertov, as an alias slang expression which means a “spinning top” to affirm his love for the cranking sound of the camera hand. He started out as an experimental poet before volunteering at the age of twenty to join the revolution as an editor on the first agit-train in 1918. The agit-trains were Soviet propaganda platforms for entertaining troops and for propagating Soviet government policies at the grassroots. They were equipped with a theatre troupe, a printing press, journalists and a film unit. In 1918, Vertov was appointed supervisor of Kinonedelia, the Soviet newsreel platform. From his work on Soviet newsreels, he formulated the concept of “Kino Pravda” – a Russian equivalent of cinema-verite. He began Kino Pravda in 1922 as motion picture series produced very much like network television reportage. These newsreel journals reported developments around the country, highlighted national problems and published government policies. A total of twenty-three newsreels were produced on this format. In order to accomplish this task, he commissioned cameramen-reporters and equipped them with portable cameras and raw stocks which he personally edited at the basement of his headquarter. Vertov's work was highly influenced by the literary and artistic Russian avant-garde movement such as cubism and futurism. Literary futurism had proposed the abandonment of word's meaning in poetry in favour of the texture of sound and the melody of intonation in Russian songs and poetry. The futurists were also greatly fascinated with modern machinery, the symbol of the evolving Soviet power. The Cubo-Futurist movement transisted to Constructivism, a Soviet artistic movement which revolted against traditional artistic mode of pre-revolutionary Russia while worshipping modern machinery and architecture.

With the abundance of newsreel footages, Vertov began to experiment with the juxtaposition of past and current film footages acquired from the across the country. These experiments attempted to turn documentary footages to fictional materials through his editing techniques. Earlier on, in 1919, he had produced feature-length films such as *Anniversary of the Revolution* (1920), *Instructional Steamer Red Star* (1920), *Agit-Train of the Central Committee* (1921), *Trial of Revolutionaries* (1921) and *Department Store* (1921). The experience gained from the production of the above feature-length films, his work in the production of Soviet newsreels and the influence of the Constructivist artistic movement are important signposts for understanding the editing techniques which help to define his films.

The Soviet leader, V.I. Lenin, seemed to have preferred documentary and realist films because in 1922, he issued a decree that set a ratio of feature films to documentaries in Soviet cinema theatres. Vertov's works were quite provocative. He complemented his film production with the publication of manifestos to support his works. He established a “Council of Three” which he used to launch attacks on narrative films. This group was later renamed

the Kino Eye group in 1922 in his endeavour to push for a national film movement. His first major experimental feature length documentary *Kino Eye* (1924), told its story by contrasting the new and the old, the city and the countryside, health and disease, laziness and hardwork, etc. Vertov usually uses intertitles and a furious editing pace as techniques of narration in his documentaries. He believes that the mechanical eye (Kino eye) can see much more efficiently than the human eye. His film, *The Man With a Movie Camera* (1928) is a typical demonstration of the virtuosity of the mechanical eye of the camera. The film begins with preparations for a film screening in a village hall. The people arrive and we begin the screening of a film which turns out to be, *The Man With a Movie Camera*. The film tells the story of the production process of the film: a camera man's exploration of his city and how he responds to ongoing daily activities by recording them. The story is presented in a burst of images which pixilated the camera man towering over a metropolitan crowd. The film celebrates the energy and multiplicity of city life activities as recorded by the camera man.

The hairdresser's activity, sew machines, type writers, and other industrial machines are subjected to a celebratory social documentation by the mechanical eye of the camera lens. Finally, the pixilated dancing camera man bows before the audience in the village hall and the film ends. As the audience leaves the hall, their departure is represented. The film goes back and forth as it captures the entire gamut of the film production process in a self-reflective manner. The film shows that the camera eye is a mimicry of the human eye but that this innovative mechanical eye is more efficient than the human eye and human perception. Ironically, a film which is about city life is viewed by a rural audience in a structure of multiple frames of narrative that merge the audience of the film's narrative with those of us viewing the film which deals with the subject matter of city life. Evidently, the film poses serious challenges as material for critical analysis. It is only by constantly referring to the inspirational sources of the ideology driving the editing techniques of Vertov that we come to understand that what he is doing is making a fiction out of factual daily modern social activities that blurs the boundary between reality and fiction. Vertov was one of the most radical filmmakers of the Soviet era. Thompson and Bordwell characterise the persona of Vertov within Soviet montage as follows:

A committed Constructivist, he emphasised the social utility of documentary film. Vertov saw the fiction films of his contemporaries as "cine nicotine," a drug that dulled the viewer's awareness of social and political reality. For him, "life caught unawares" would be the basis of a cinema of fact. Montage was less a single technique than the entire production process: choosing a subject, shooting footage, and assembling the film all involved selection and combination of "cine fact." As for editing, Vertov emphasised that the filmmaker should calculate the differences between shots – light versus dark, slow motion versus fast motion, and so on. These differences, or "intervals," would be the basis of the film's effect on the audience (p. 115).

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that in Film Studies, a textual analysis of a film is usually undertaken through a critical and analytical discussion of the technical choices available to filmmakers.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt about the following:

- Documentary and realist films
- Film adaptation

- The use of the montage technique in film

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

3. Explain the following as relate to aesthetic choice in film production:
  - The use of the montage technique in film
  - Film adaptation

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## UNIT 2 EISENSTEIN'S AESTHETICS THEORIES

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Eisenstein's Aesthetics Theories
  - 3.2 Elements of Eisenstein's Theory of Editing
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall be considering the Eisenstein's Aesthetics Theories. The focus shall also be on elements of Eisenstein's theory of editing as well as his many instances where divergences exist between the camera's image of reality and what the human eye sees.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- analyse Eisenstein's Aesthetics Theories
- account for the Elements of Eisenstein's Theory of Editing
- identify the divergences that exist between the camera's image of reality and what the human eye sees.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### Eisenstein's Aesthetics Theories

Sergie Mikhailovich Eisenstein was born in 1898 into an upper middle family. His parents made their wealth through shipbuilding. Eisenstein studied architecture and engineering possibly with an eye to taking over the parents' business. When the Civil War started he had to abandon his studies and joined the Red Army as a volunteer. He served for a while as an engineer helping to build the defences of the city of Petrograd before he was sent to the war front. His skills as a designer and painter made him to work as a poster artist on the agit-trains. When he was demobilised in the autumn of 1920, he found work painting scenery for the Moscow Proletkult. Theatre which was dedicated to the promotion of avant-garde and experimental ideas considered to be the culture of the proletariat. In 1921, Eisenstein, and his friend, Sergie Yurkevich, who later became a montage director like Eisenstein, joined a theatre workshop run by Vsevolod Meyerhold, whom Eisenstein considered to be his mentor, and who exposed Eisenstein to a wide range of original theatre designs. In 1923, Eisenstein directed his first play, *Enough Simplicity in Every Man*. Although the play was a nineteenth century farce by Alexander Ostrovsky, he staged it as a circus production in which actors dress as clowns performed in acrobatic styles while delivery their lines. In this production he also intermixed film with the action and also used it as an epilogue. He characterised his peculiar mixed media and style of production as *Montage of Attraction* and published his manifesto in *Lef*, a radical journal. His production of the Ostrovsky drama in an experimental theatre style betrayed his interest in the non-naturalistic, Constructivist revolt against Method acting, in preference to popular entertainment of music hall and circus which employ eccentric acting style. As Fell has noted,

With these techniques, which implied breaking down the aesthetic distance between audience and performance, Eisenstein's montage of attractions argued that the spectator himself should be revolutionary theatre's focus, that stylized, new skills well outside naturalist tradition could best serve a worker's theatre devoted to making socialist principles understood. *Ostrovsky* was rewritten to include novelty acts, a tightrope, popular songs, and a mockery of original bourgeois values (Fell, p. 188).

Eisenstein next work, *The Mexican*, which he adapted from Jack London, was staged like a sporting event in a ring before audience. But the play that throttled his artistic endeavour towards film was *Gas Masks* (1924) a play by S.M. Tretyakov, which he set in an actual chemical factory in Moscow. But the irony was that the more he moved into realistic settings, the more he applied non-realistic, eccentric performance to contradict the natural *mise-en-scene*. Soon he was drawn to the cinema with the production of a short film titled, *Glumov's Diary*, which was shown on screen on the stage. Even though he directed the short film before *Gas Masks*, he confesses while directing the play that "the contrast between the reality of the setting and the artifice of the drama was too great" (Thompson and Bordwell, p. 113). No wonder after the production of the *Gas Masks*, Eisenstein gained some experience as a film editor, working alongside Esfir Shub (who later became an renowned compilation documentarist), and he re-edited Fritz Lang's work, *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler* for Soviet cinemas. In this reworked version, the final battle between Mabuse and Wenk was converted through editing and intertitles into a street rebellion.

Eisenstein first film, *Strike* (1924) was a re-enactment of pre-1917 revolutionary struggles in Russia. In his development of the story, the characterisation of police men, workers and criminals was stereotyped to avoid individuation. In contrast to Lev Kuleshov who preferred particularised psychologically underlined performances, or Dziga Vertov who produced "films to please the eye but to make a point (as cited in Fell, p. 188)," Eisenstein recreated the history of a collective action of workers which was defeated by a combination of both police brutality and starvation. The climax of the film is the sequence where he intercuts the police massacre of the workers with the slaughtering of oxens. It was a pure case of thematic editing taken to extreme metaphorical proportions. Though the film was not warmly received in Russia, it won a prize at a Paris Expo and gave Eisenstein instant international recognition. As a result, he was commissioned to produce the film version of the 1905 rebellion against the Czar, to be titled, *The Year 1905*, which was scripted by the screenwriter, Nina Agadzhanva. The story he set out to recreate was the sailors mutiny on the *Potemkin* in Odessa. His film version of the mutiny was later retitled, *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925).

Historically, the mutiny was provoked when the sailors were served rotten meat which they refused to eat. The sailors are court marshaled to the upper deck and about twenty ring leaders were covered with tarpaulin and their colleagues are ordered to execute them to serve as a deterrent to acts of mutiny. When fellow sailors cry: "Brothers! Who are you going to shoot?" a rebellion is triggered. The leader of the rebellion, Vakoulintchouk is shot and killed and the rebellious sailors carry his body into Odessa where the people revolt in sympathy with the sailors. The people of Odessa donate food and sail in little boats to reprovision the *Potemkin*. Citizen who gathered on the steps to the Winter Palace of the Czar are attacked by his troop and those fleeing are cut off by Cossack warriors on horseback wielding sabres. The *Potemkin's* guns blow up the gate of the Odessa Theatre where Czarist authorities are holding a conference and nearby apartments are damaged. A tense situation arises when the battleship is confronted by admiralty ships that threaten a shootout, but in solidarity with the mutinous sailors, the sailors of the admiralty ship refuse to engage their comrades at arms. The film

was an instant hit abroad and was equally very successful in Russia. The climax is of course the famous Odessa step sequence where the massacre is well choreographed with the child's trolley precariously rolling down the steps in the midst of carefully orchestrated violence. In the midst of this crowded chaos, Eisenstein manages to typify individuals: a young mother shot and separated from his child's trolley, a malicious priest, a courageous man, a bewildered student, a wicked captain, etc. What was showcased so effectively by Eisenstein in this film was one of the series of rebellions which led to the overthrow of the Czar, Alexander II. Here, the editing skills he learnt in re-editing the work of Fritz Lang for Russian release are fully exploited. Violence is carefully, and deliberately frame by frame, orchestrated to portray the atrocities of Czarist Russia.

Eisenstein is next commissioned to produce a film on the October 1917 revolution. The film was inspired by the work of the American writer, John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World*. The events that preceded the October revolution were condensed by Eisenstein and his collaborator, Gregory Alexandrov, his assistant, who he also worked with in the Ostrovsky play, to what happened in Petrograd between February and October 1917. By the time Eisenstein handled the production, he was already a famous Russian filmmaker and so the project was well funded and enjoyed official support. City resources were put at the disposal of Eisenstein and his team. They had at their disposal thousands of extras that helped to solidify the epic proportions of the project. The film's events cover the rebellion against the Imperial army in a senseless war in which the working class and the peasants were bearing the brunt of the massacres at the battle front. During the course of the rebellion, Alexander II abdicates and his government is replaced by the provisional government which was intended to slow down the revolutionary momentum but when the head of the government, Alexander Kerensky, decided to continue the unpopular war policies of the Czar, the Russian and German soldiers leave their trenches and began to fraternise. V.I. Lenin returns from exile to provide leadership to the rebellion. Peaceful workers protest is suppressed with brute force by Kerensky's government which symbolically relocates to the palace of the Czar in what looked like Kerensky pretending to be the Czar. The Bolsheviks repel an attack by Kerensky's troops and their Tartar fighters fraternised with Bolsheviks, and Kerensky flees and the provisional government is replaced by the Congress of Soviets who refused the peace entreaties of the Mensheviks who were allies of Kerensky. The Bolsheviks invade the palace and arrest all the ministers of the provisional government and Lenin declares victory. In this film, Eisenstein demonstrates a great fidelity to historical events. As in *The Battleship Potemkin*, characterisation followed archetypal typifications, in which only Lenin stood out as the hero.

Eisenstein's editing theories were derived from Hegelian and Marxist theory of dialectical materialism in which the shot formed the nucleus of the sources of collision of opposite elements that mimics the dialectical method. In applying the idea to film, he proposed the concept that when two shots collide, a completely new meaning is produced. For example, he proposed that when shot A collides with shot B, what is produced is not the synthesis AB but C. The formulation followed the classic dialectical theory of thesis + antithesis = synthesis which may structurally split again into a thesis plus antithesis resulting in another set of synthesis. Eisenstein's formulations were in total contrast to those of Kuleshov and his protegee, Pudovkin, who likened shots to bricks which can be used as the building blocks of a scene, Eisenstein wanted films to be totally free of literal continuity and context. Even as his characters were realistically typified, the structure of the tale was rendered through the mechanism of editing worked through metaphorical imagery. The narrative with its realistic settings and typified characterisation is structured around the montage of attractions in which

acting is based on eccentricities rather than Stanislavskian naturalistic acting. Eisenstein's theory of editing was built around five elements:

### Elements of Eisenstein's Theory of Editing

- (i) *metric montage* organised in terms of its length;
- (ii) *Rhythmic montage* which is based on interior rhythms (which is credited to Vertov);
- (iii) *Tonal montage* which is based on denotation of images;
- (iv) *Overtonal montage* which is based on broader connotations; and
- (v) *Intellectual montage* in which the meanings of shots derive from thought processes (Fell, p. 191). Generally speaking, the montage directors usually used rapid rhythmic editing style containing many shots with overlapping actions. Thompson and Bordwell have argued that *October* makes extensive use of intellectual montage.

At one point Kerenesky is compared to Napoleon. The film's most complex use of intellectual montage comes when a leader calls upon soldiers to fight "For God and country." There follows a lengthy series of nondiegetic shots of statues of gods and churches from widely differing cultures and then the shots of military medals. Intellectual montage creates contrasts through conflicts; by juxtaposing shots that have no apparent connection, the filmmaker leads the audience to create general concepts that link them (pp. 120-121).

One of the key proponents of the formalist movement to emerge outside the Soviet Union, is Rudolf Arnheim, a gestalt psychologist who put forth some of the key theories of the movement in his book, *Film as Art*, which was originally published in German in 1933. According to Giannetti, Arnheim's book is primarily concerned with the perception of experience, with his theory based on the different modes of perception of the camera in contrast to that of the human eye. His work which can be considered to have anticipated some of the theories of the communication guru, Marshall McLuhan, argued that the camera's image of a bowl of fruits is fundamentally different from our perception of a bowl of fruits in actual life. McLuhan argues that the information we receive in each instance is determined by the form of its content. Formalist theoreticians usually celebrate these differences, believing that what makes photography fall short of perfect reproduction is also what makes cinema an art form, not just a species of xerography. They have pointed out many instances where divergences exist between the camera's image of reality and what the human eye sees. Among these instances are:

1. Film directors usually choose from which viewpoint to photograph a scene. While in real life we perceive objects in depth and scrutinise the space that surrounds most things, in film, space is an illusion because it has only two dimensions through which the director can manipulate objects in perspectives within the *mise-en-scene*. For instance, important objects can be manipulated by being placed in the foreground while unimportant objects can be placed in the background.
2. Also in real life, space and time are usually experienced as a continuous phenomenon, but in film, through the technique of editing, filmmakers can manipulate space and time and rearrange them to suit their purpose.
3. By juxtaposing the newly manipulated or created space and time fragments, the film director can create a continuity that does not exist in reality.
4. Though a scene can be photographed in literally different ways, the formalist director selects the camera set up that best captures its symbolic or psychological implications.

5. Formalist directors are always obsessed with patterns and methods of constructing reality into aesthetically and visually pleasurable patterns and designs. Giannetti has observed with regards to formalists that they believe that reality is random and unstructured, as such, it is the duty of the storyteller to superimpose “a unifying structure over this chaotic jumble of data” (Giannetti, p.372).
6. One of the greatest criticisms of formalism as a theoretical framework is that whereas this theory is very useful in the analysis of the works of formalist directors like D.W. Griffith, Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang, Ernest Labitsch, Buster Keaton, V.I. Pudovkin, Sergei Eisenstein, etc., it may not be very productive in the analysis of the work of realist directors like Jean Renoir, Roberto Rossellini, Vitorio De Sica or Cesare Zavattini.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that in Film Studies, a textual analysis of a film is usually undertaken through a critical and analytical discussion of the technical choices available to filmmakers as emphasised in Eisenstein’s analysis of image in relation to reality

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt about the following:

- The elements that make up Eisenstein’s theory of editing
- The instances that cause divergences in the camera’s image of reality and what the human eye sees

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

4. Explain the following as relate to aesthetic choice in film production:
  - The instances where divergences exist between the camera’s image of reality and what the human eye sees
  - The elements that make up Eisenstein’s theory of editing.

#### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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