WRITING WITH MOTION

CINEMATOGRAPHY CLASS 2

The term *cinematography* is from the Greek roots meaning "writing with motion."

It is the process of taking

ideas, words, actions, emotional subtext, tone, and all other forms of nonverbal communication and *rendering them in visual terms.*

As we will use the term here, "*cinematic technique*" is the entire range of methods and techniques that we use to add layers of meaning and subtext to the "content" of the film — the dialog and action.

The tools of cinematic technique are used by both the director and DP, either working together or in doing their individual jobs. As mentioned, cinematography is far more than just “photographing” what is in front of the camera

BUILDING A VISUAL WORLD

When we create a film project, one of our primary tasks is to create a visual world for the characters to inhabit. This visual world is an important part of how the audience will perceive the story; how they will understand the characters and their motivations.

BLADE RUNNER (1973)

Let's look at this sequence from early in *Blade Runner.*

Without a single line of dialog, we know it is a high- tech, futuristic world; giant electric signs and flying cars tell us this

Visual elements carry the story in this early scene from *Blade Runner,* but they also supply important visual cues about the subtext and tone of the narrative. This is the essence of visual storytelling: to convey meaning to the viewer in ways other than words

If cinema is a language, then we must ask:

What is the structure of that language?

What is vocabulary, what are the rules of grammar, the structure of this cinematic language?

What are the *tools* of cinematography and filmmaking - the essential techniques, methods, and elements that we can use to tell our story visually?

THE [CONCEPTUAL] TOOLS OF CINEMATOGRAPHY

What are the conceptual tools of visual story- telling that we employ in all forms of visual storytelling?

There are many, but we can roughly classify them into some general categories.

THE FRAME

Selecting the frame is the fundamental act of filmmaking; as filmmakers we must direct the audience's attention.

Choosing the frame is a matter of conveying the story, but it is also a question of composition, rhythm, and perspective.

PUNCH DRUNK LOVE

Take this opening frame from *Punch Drunk Love*. It gives us a great deal of information about the situation and the main character. Instantly, we know he is isolated, cut o from most of the world. The wide and distant shot emphasizes his isolation and loneliness reinforced by the color scheme and the lack of wall decoration.

THE LENS

This is a powerful tool of visual storytelling

- the ability of optics to alter our perception of a physical world
- Every lens has a “personality”
- There are many factors involved: contrast and sharpness , for example.

THE FOCAL LENGTH

Aspect of a lens is the focal length: how *wide* or *long* it is.

A short focal length lens has a wide field of view,

and a long focal length lens is like a telescope or binoculars; it has a narrow field of view.

More importantly, a long lens *compresses* space and a wide lens *expands* and distorts space.

The compression of space created by a very long lens establishes the visual impression of a trap, a spider's web in the final scene of *Seven*

An extremely wide lens creates distortion for comic e ect in *City of Lost Children*.

LIGHT AND COLOR

Light and color are some of the most powerful tools in the cinematographers arsenal.

Lighting and controlling color are what takes up most of the director of photographer's time on most sets and for good reason.

Visual tools that add additional layers of meaning to the content of the story.

Apocalypse Now

Lighting is not only a strong compositional element in *Apocalypse Now*, it also conveys a great deal of emotional tone and tells us something about the mental state of the character.

TEXTURE

we add some visual *texture* to it; this is not to be confused with the surface texture of objects. There are many devices we use to accomplish this: changing the color and contrast of the picture, desaturating the color of the image, filters, fog and smoke effects, rain, using unusual film stocks, various printing techniques, and of course the whole range of image manipulation that can be accomplished with digital images on the computer.

- O Brother, Where Art Thou - Desaturated sepia-toned color is the key texture element in O *Brother, Where Art Thou*.

- Come To Daddy (Aphex Twin) - Color and shadows in addition to makeup e ects are central to this music video *Come To Daddy* (Aphex Twin) by Chris Cunningham.

MOVEMENT

Movement is a powerful tool of filmmaking; in fact, movies are one of the few art forms that employ motion and time.

ESTABLISHING

Establishes is some point of information that the filmmaker needs the audience to know about place and background story.

POINT-OF-VIEW

Point-of-view (POV) is a key tool of visual storytelling. We use the term in many different ways on a film set, but the most often used meaning is to have the camera see something in much the same way as one of the characters would see it.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

HOMEWORK

Choose the films for analyze the conceptual tools of visual storytelling including :

- The Frame
- Light & Color
- The Lens
- Movement
- Texture
- Establishing
- Pov