

Lecture 5: World-Building in Film

Time, Place, and Memory

Ch. 4 The Shot: Mise-en-Scene,

Ch. 5 The Shot: Cinematography

COMM 103F Dr. Collins

Class Logistics

- Quiz #1
 - Grades ranged from 7 to 12
 - Average score: 9.42
 - Lineage → descent in a line from a common progenitor
- Quiz #2 Study Guide Posted
- Posting Presentation Slides
- Film Change

Paper Proposal

- DUE Thursday 8/22 by 11:59 pm to Canvas
- 1 - 2 Pages, should include: (Submit with headings!)
 - a. **Name of Film**
 - b. **Synopsis:** Brief summary of the film
 - c. **Context:** Historical, cinematic, and cultural context (who made it, when, part of a broader movement or influenced by one, any notable historical issues as the time, audience reception, creative/technical/business elements of note?)
 - d. **Argument:** What are you trying to say about this film? You should be making a distinct argument about its broader themes, meanings, relevance, importance, innovations, etc. This should be said in 1-2 clear and succinct sentences.
 - e. **Film Concept Supports:** List, and briefly explain, three film concepts that can help support your argument.

Sorry to Bother You Paper Proposal Example

- **Film Name:** *Sorry to Bother You*
- **Synopsis:** In an alternate present-day version of Oakland, telemarketer Cassius Green discovers a magical key to professional success, propelling him into a universe of greed.
- **Context:** Released in 2018, this contemporary independent film marks the writing and directing feature debut of musician Boots Riley. Though only grossing \$17 million at the domestic box office, the film opened to critical success and was praised for both its unique cinematic techniques and its timely social satire.
- **Argument:** STBY acts as a particular kind of morality tale claiming that a society in which human worth is measured by capitalism is not only unethical, but is in many ways absurd. Adding dimension to this absurdist satire, however, is the film's simultaneous presentation of the all too real complexities of life within such a society.
- **Film Concepts:** Monomyth & Hero's Journey (morality tale), Mise-en-scene (color and costumes as metaphors for labor/freedom/[non]conformity), Genre (the use of absurdism and magical realism to speak to issues of false consciousness and perceived reality)

Final Paper Due

Saturday Sept. 07 2:30 pm

Via Canvas

7-10 pages

APA, MLA, Chicago style citations accepted

More details to follow...

Turning to Specific Stylistic Techniques

- Intro to Film Art
- History of Film
- Film Form & Meaning Making
- A Turn to Style...
 - In conversation with broader cultural theories regarding Time, Place, and (Cultural) Memory

Style

“The repeated and salient uses of film techniques characteristic of a single film or group of films (e.g. a filmmaker’s work or a national movement).”

A pattern of technical choices that create a movie’s “look and feel.”

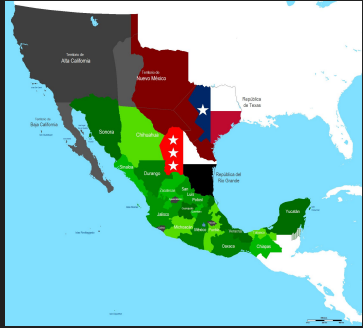
(Bordwell et al., glossary & p. 111)



Time

“The indefinite continued progress of existence and events in the past, present, and future regarded as a whole.” (Oxford Dictionary)

What does it mean to ‘experience’ time metaphysically? What elements shape these experiences (e.g. order, change, technological advancements)? What are the political, social, and economic impacts of temporal experience (e.g. ‘leisure time,’ ‘time is money,’ etc.) (Pöppel, 1978; Nowotny, 2018; Schivelbusch, 2014)?

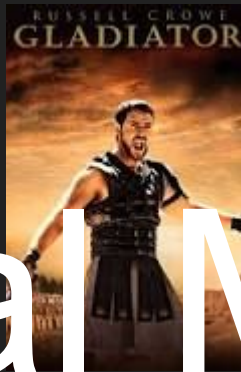


Place



“A particular position or point in space.” (Oxford Dictionary)

Notions of spatiality previously held as natural or fixed. ‘Spatial turn’ in scholarship within postmodern thought that rejected ‘clean’ definitions of space and place to instead position space as a dynamic social production, often manipulated by institutions of power or conceptualized through conflict (Anderson, 2006; Blomley, 2003; Braverman, 2009; Fields, 2010).



Cultural Memory

What does it mean for a culture to 'remember'?

Memory previously held only as a biological and individual endeavor. 20th Century a 'memory boom' in scholarship that begins to interrogate 'collective' memory, its cultural and social production, and its politics (Sturken, 1997; Nora, 1989; Confino, 1997; Assmann, 2011)

Collective memory is not a phenomena in which the past imposes itself on the present; instead collective memory is the process by which present conditions influence what is remembered and how (Halbwachs 1992 [1925], Novick, 2000).

Discussion Question

How can a film's "style" influence notions of Time, Place, and Cultural Memory and vice-versa? Describe an instance in which you were aware of a film's world-building capacity.

Stylizing A World: Unpacking the Frame



Frame: A single image on the strip of film. When a series of them is projected onto a screen in quick succession, an illusion of movement is created.





Mise-en-scene



Mise-en-scene Components

- Roots in theatre
- In original French means “putting into the scene”
- Cinematic meaning → signifies the director’s control over what appears in the film frame...all of the elements **in front of the camera** to be photographed
 - Setting
 - Costumes & Makeup
 - Lighting
 - Staging (including acting and movement in the shot)

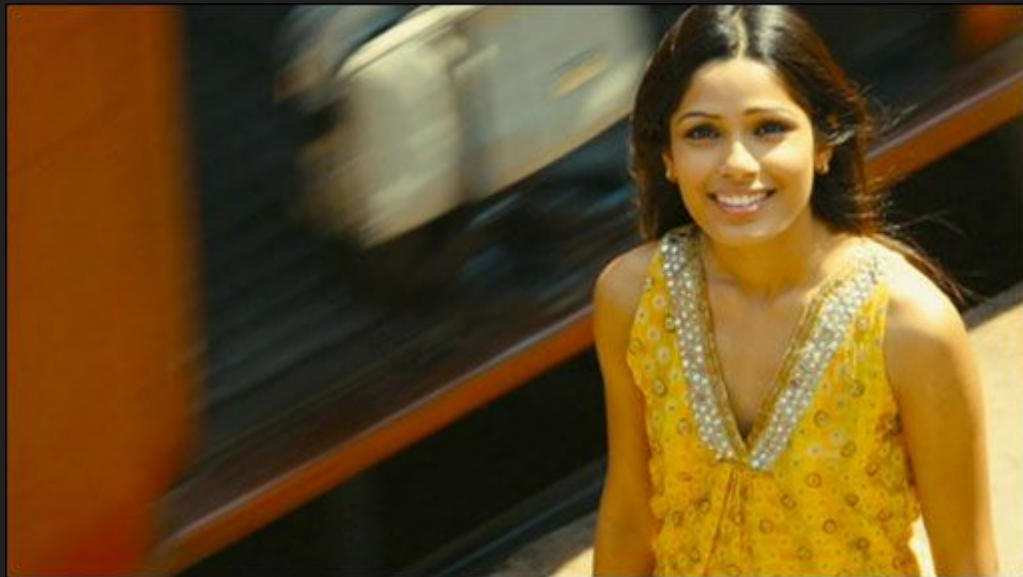
Setting



Costumes & Makeup



Lighting



Staging: Movement & Performance



Space

- Screen space
- Composition
- Props
 - Vulnerability
 - Power
 - Anchored
 - Value



Dimension



Cinematography

“A general term for all the manipulations of the film strip by the camera in the shooting phase and by the laboratory in the developing phase.”

Bordwell et al.

Cinematography Elements

- Contrast, Exposure
- Speed of motion
- Perspective
- Special Effects
- Framing
 - Aspect Ratios
- Camera Position
 - Angle, Level, Height
- Mobile Framing
 - Tracking/dolly shot



Key Takeaways

- There is a relationship between visual culture and notions of time, place, and memory (as understood as social constructs)
- Films can help us perceive these organizing principles in particular manners
- A film's STYLE is the pattern of technical choices that create its "look and feel"
 - Filmmakers, movements, traditions, and genres can also have trademark styles
- Two major elements of style that relate to the actual shot are:
 - **Mise-en-scene** → all the creative choices that fill the frame in FRONT of the camera
 - **Cinematography** → the techniques utilized WITH the camera to effect what the viewer sees within the frame
- These elements of style are important cinematic devices for filmmakers and can be used to represent identity on screen in meaningful, including problematic, ways.



- Black Mirror (2011 -)
- 2016, Netflix
- Drama, Sci-Fi, Thriller
- 1 hr 1 min
- Written by: Charlie Brooker (*Black Mirror* Creator)
- Directed by: Owen Harris (*Troy: Fall of a City*)
- Starring: Gugu Mbatha-Raw (*Belle*), Mackenzie Davis (*Blade Runner 2049*)
- Budget: N/A
- In a seaside town in 1987, a shy young woman and an outgoing party girl strike up a powerful bond that seems to defy the laws of space and time.

Questions to Consider...

- How does the film's mise-en-scene influence the viewing experience (e.g. what draws the eye, how does what fills the frame drive the narrative and build and/or break expectations)? [setting, costume/makeup, lighting, and staging]
- What cinematographic elements (camera work, angles, contrast/exposure, movement) add to a sense of relatability, humor, voyeurism, etc.?
- What broader ideological issues does the film address? How does the episode treat themes of time, place, and memory?
- What stylistic genre tropes does the film maintain and/or break--how do these choices impact the viewing experience?