

Film Appreciation
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Lecture -16
The Language of Cinema

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Good morning. Today's lecture is the language of cinema. As you might be aware of that like any other work, for example, like any other text or literature, cinema too has its language, a distinct language, a distinct grammar and idiom of its own. Now, some of the basic foundations of this language are shots and we will also be talking about something called mise en scene. You know, that when I was discussing key concepts with you, I have already discussed the concept of mise en scene and what constitutes mise en scene, and so at some point you have been introduced to the idea of mise en scene. We will be talking at length about it also to date it and that also makes up for the distinct language of cinema.

We will be also talking about, I have already told you shots, then lights, camera, positions, angles, etcetera. So, this is something that is more related to the technical aspect of cinema.

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Camera angles and shots

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwbsYgZ7d-8>

And to begin with, I just want to show you a very short film, very short feature, which will give you a good entry point into the world of the language of cinema. So, this is, this particular link I am giving to you and it is called, rather this is good to understand the concepts of camera angles and shots. So, please make a note of this particular link and then come back.

So, welcome back, I hope you have watched the link and benefited from the explanation giving there. So, we will be talking about cinematic images and shots now. So, cinematic images, as you know, these are image codes. They are best understood as the rules, which govern the construction of the moving image and how that image communicates. For example, we have the concepts of reverse angle shots in the construction of conversation between two people. Very often, you must have noticed, that in conventional kind of shot taking when two people talk to each other, you see the face of the first person and the back of the head of the second one and vice versa.

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Heat : Restaurant Scene

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oTNNjRuqbE>

So, here I would like to draw your attention to an excellently composed shot and reverse shot scene, which is taken from one of my all-time favorite film Heat, directed by Michael Mann and it is called the Restaurant scene, and here is the link. Please watch it and come back.

Welcome back. I hope you have enjoyed the scene and I hope you also noticed, that how the two legendary actors, Al Pacino and Robert De Niro were captured by camera in an excellently composed shot and reverse shot frame.

Now, the elements of signification of cinema, cinematic language are divided into the technical and the symbolic where the technical includes camera angles, camera movement, lighting, editing, sound, music, framing, etcetera. Here, we are talking about the language of cinema.

Please pay attention to this. While talking about camera shots we have to understand, that shots are the building blocks of a cinematic image. Just the way words build a literary text, similarly shots build cinematic image. Now, the close up is a shot on an actor's body part, for example, face, hand, foot, eyes. It can also be a shot of an object, for example, a gun, a cigar. In many western you must have seen a gun is an important part. Watch for example, Sergio Leone's films and the way he captures guns and body parts in extreme close ups. For example, in The Good, The Bad, The Ugly, look at the way he sort of, you know, positions the camera and focus and give and gives us an extreme close up shot of people's or the actor's hands, specially their guns, alright.

In Once Upon A Time In The West, for example, you have the scenes where there are extreme close up shots of people's guns, shoes, as well as, their hats. Again, in his another great film, Once Upon A Time In America, you have the extreme close up shots of the protagonist faces as well as their eyes. So, directors use close up shots, as well as extreme close up shots in order to highlight emotions and drama.

Objects are also used in order to create a kind of tension in the film. For example, in Prakash Mehra's Zanjeer, starring Amitabh Bachchan, you have close up shot, an extreme close up shot of a chain on somebody's wrist, a hand holding a gun and the child who is hiding inside the wardrobe. He watches the hand, the gun and this chain hanging from the killer's, the assassin's wrist. So, those are extremely important sequences or shots. They signify, the significance of that image emphasize it and lead us into the narrative.

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Taxi Driver opening scene

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbvWoruvf5c>

At this point, I would like you to watch the opening shot of Taxi Driver. Here is the link, please watch it and notice how extreme close of shots are utilized. Welcome back, I hope you have enjoyed the scene. In Taxi Driver, this is a 1970s movie, directed by Martin Scorsese, starring Robert De Niro and you find extreme close up shots of Robert De Niro, who plays the character called Travis Bickle here. And what is the significance of the extreme close up shots of his eyes? We understand something is going on in the mind of the protagonist. So, the workings of the mind of a, of the hero, so close up shots of an eye. Because you see, in cinema unlike in books, it is very difficult to give descriptions unless you use voiceover technique and if you do not want to use the voiceover

technique, how to explain the extreme of consciousness of the protagonist, the kinds of turmoil, emotional feelings and turmoil the character is going through. The only way is to show the extreme close up shot of that character, any particular body part, for example, eyes here.

Now, from here we move on to symbolic elements that include color, costume, props, objects, stars, sets, locations, etcetera and in this context we should understand that apart from close up shots and extreme close up shot we also have something called the long shot, which is often used to situate person in or in his or her particular environment. So, for example, think of the monument valley shots in cinema of John Ford. So, it is important, that extreme long shots are taken in order to situate the hero or the protagonist in a particular locale.

Now, from here we will move on. So, from here we will move on to camera angle. Camera angle is the placement in relation to the object of a person on view. Angle can be used for both aesthetic and psychological purposes. For example, low angle is positioned where the camera is placed before, sorry, below eye level and looks up at the subject to suggest power and domination. This is something very common to build up the heroic image of Indian film actors. For example, let us consider, many a times you know, you might have noticed the opening shot, the introductory shots of superstars such as Rajinikanth or Amitabh Bachchan, where the camera is placed before or below eye level and looks up at the hero. So, this is done in order to create a larger than life kind of a, of an image. Orson Welles also did it several times in his *Citizen Kane*.

Now, high angle is where the camera looks down on its subjects, making them look powerless and insignificant. So, this is completely opposite to low angle shot. Filmmakers also make use of lenses. So, we have something like the wide angle lens, which is most commonly used on the long shot since it provides a large focus range. We also have a zoom lens, which allows the camera man to change the range of the shot from telephoto to close up without stopping the camera. The effect is to direct audience's attention to any number of objects or people within a shot. A tracking shot or a dolly shot allows fast moving action to be followed, either close in or at a distance. Dolly shot may also be used to intensify or distance the emotions of a character by physically moving in for close or drawing away, or drawing away to a long shot.

The lighting, as I told you, is an integral part of cinema and it has its own language. It is

one of the most important elements of producing realistic or non-real images. The most common lighting style is the three point lighting. The key lighting is one of the brightest of the three and highlights details on the face by casting shadow on the portion that is not lit. The fill light is softer and less bright and less is the effect of shadowing on the face. The backlight is located behind the subject. The backlight gives the subject the appearance of depth. Lighting can be high or low key depending upon the emotional effect that the director and cinematographer look for. You have to understand how lights are used particularly in film Noah. The interplay of light and shadows and the lights are used in order to create a certain kind of an impact.

Let us talk about camera movement. Now you have to remember, that in the early days of cinema, we have been talking about the cinema George Melies and Lumiere brothers. So, in those days. the camera would remain still or static. However, it started to move during the silent film era, but with the advent of sound, filmmakers started using bulky camera, camera again became static and still. However, once hand-held cameras became popular, directors had more freedom to suggest realistic image of space with long takes. So, the lighter the camera equipment, the freer a director would become and then camera started moving much more.

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Cinematic techniques

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3EnnBDgMww>

So, here is another link, You Tube link that I would like to draw your attention to. Please watch it and it will give you a very good analysis of various cinematic techniques. Please watch it.

So, from camera movement we will move on to another area that interests us, that is, mise en scene. Mise en scene literally means putting on stage. It is a French term and the term originates from theater where it designates everything that appears on stage. For example, sets, colors, lighting, character movement. Mise en scene includes element of visual style and is designed to create the narrative space and help progress the story.

You are already familiar with the French new wave and the ((Refer Time: 13:59)) director. So, the ((Refer Time: 14:01)) directors and critics noted a discernible style in the works of certain Hollywood directors who staged the shots to illustrate a certain style. The French director, Jacques Rivette, also explained, he took, went to great lengths to explain the term ((Refer Time: 14:22)) cinema and the way Hollywood directors would use mise en scene as their signature style.

According to Suzan Hayward in Key Concepts, mise en scene is the expressive tool at the filmmaker's disposal, which a critic can read to determine the specificity of the cinematographic work, that is, the critic can identify the particular style of a specific filmmaker and thereby point to it as an authorial sign. Some of the features of mise en scene are, it is concerned with the look of the film.

It includes production design that is, sets, props, objects, costumes, color, lighting. It also includes framing that includes position, which is depth of field aspect ratio, height and angle. It also includes actor's performance. So, therefore how an actor is cast, his or her makeup, movement, gestures, voice, all these things are important, and then sound. So, sound that emanates from the scene, which is diegetic and that does not emanate from the scene is non-diegetic.

Mise en scene is also, as we have already discussed, it is about production design. So, what is production design? And it includes elements of sets, props and costumes, and they play a specific function in the total film. For example, if you watch ((Refer Time: 15:57)), which is a 1964 movie and try to understand how the rocking chair assumes a particular significance by itself. It may not mean anything, but if you watch the sequence, various sequences, various times and positions of the rocking chair, you will understand there is certain meaning associated with it and it lends itself to the progression of the story. The mise en scene can be true to life or symbolic.

From here, let us move on to talk about costumes. Costumes are significant because they are used to convert time and place and also to provide personality traits to the character.

Think for example, how Stanley Kubrick uses the period costumes in his *Barry Lyndon*, which is based on a novel by Thackeray. So, costumes are integral part of any film. Very often, we find characters dressed to look the character. So, there personality traits are also explained through the, through costumes.

Clothes speak, the characters speak through the clothes. Now, you also know, there are such iconographic clothes. For example, Marilyn Monroe in her *Seven Year Itch* avatar and Audrey Hepburn in her *Breakfast at Tiffany*. So, clothes are symbolic of characters; they suggest something. Clothes also lend themselves to create the iconography of characters. For example, in the western or super hero or gangster films you know what clothes and costumes would, these characters appear in, in order to create meaning.

Color is important part of mise en scene. Colors suggest class. For instance, in Martin Scorsese's 2002 film, *Gangs Of New York*, the poor immigrant, the Irish immigrants are in monochromatic colors, whereas the natives are in more flamboyant colors. Colors can be symbolic of characters and emotions in Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*. You have to watch the colors in order to understand how he uses the motif of roses, the yellow roses in order to suggest the growing passion between the two lead characters. So, colors suggest emotions also. Colors are also used to distinguish characters and settings. For example, in Steven Soderbergh's film *Traffic*, which was released in 2000, the director uses a three color palette to denote settings and characters.

Performers, performance are another, yet another integral part of mise en scene. Stars are associated with particular genres and style of acting. For example, Marlon Brando is associated with method acting and Elizabeth Taylor and Audrey Hepburn are associated with high glamour. So, audiences come with certain expectations when they come to watch these actors or stars perform. An actor's performance is best understood by his or her appearance and also is informed by their gestures, style, voice, physique and body language. So, all these things constitute their performance thing. Actors like Schwarzenegger and Stallone, who speak through their muscular bodies.

From here we move on to sound. As I have already told you, sound can be diegetic or non-diegetic. The diegetic sound emanates from the scene such as the sound effects, dialog and the background sound in a scene. Non-diegetic sounds are those that do not emanate from the scene. We are watching, for example, music or a voiceover. Music can be diegetic since it could be part of the drama. Music plays a telling role as it helps to

highlight the mood of the audience. It also determines the pace of the screen action and also lends musical motive to the action. For example, think Jaws and its famous soundtrack. Also, the James Bond introductory music. So, he is associated with a certain kind of a theme music. Setting is another part of our aspect of Mise en scene, which establishes the time and place of the story. Specific genres are tied to specific settings. For example, gangster films are often set in cities and the western in the Wild West.

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Mise en scene: Agneepath (1990)

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOj-8ow_T9A

Now, at this point I would like to show you this clipping from Agneepath and see how every aspect of or how every element of mise en scene is perfectly blended in this. Agneepath was directed by Mukul Anand and in this scene, this particular scene that I am showing you, it stars Amitabh Bachchan and Danny. Please watch the scene and make a note of mise en scene.

Welcome back. So, I am sure, that you understood how the actor's performance, the gesture, the body language, the style, the costume, the setting, the music, everything played a vital role in adding a certain dimension to this wonderful scene. So, this is how we read a film. Mise en scene is extremely important in order to appreciate films.

So, from here I would like to draw your attention to suggested readings and here are two important books that you should be familiar with. One is Film Art, An Introduction by David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson, and then Suzan Hayward's Key Concepts in Cinema Studies.

So, thank you very much and we will move, we will meet for our next class.