**Useful Terms for Analyzing Film:**

**1. Basic Terms:**

**Color:** the color of an object, composition, shot, or scene, can alter mood and meaning. Does the color or colors make you feel a certain way?

**Mise en Scène:**unlike montage, this is physically what is in a shot or scene and does not involve editing. It can involve camera movement and focus, lighting, scenery, placement of people or objects, and other elements a director can make happen on the set rather than later on in the editing process. The mise-en-scène is designed to evoke emotions that permeate the whole movie.

<https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/mise-en-scene/>

**Shot vs. Scene:** a**shot** is part of a film presented without any editing, as seen from a single camera’s perspective. A shot can include close-ups, panoramic shots, camera movement and other techniques. Put shots together and one has a **scene,**a series of connected shots that establish location and continuity. The scene ends by cutting (often using a visible **transition**) to another location, time, or person. A “car-chase scene” is a rather common example where several cameras follow the action from different perspectives. The footage later gets edited to make one long scene.

**Sound:** Music and added sounds can play an important role in understanding a shot or scene. Often the sound of a shot is meant to appear realistic and “natural” when it might be artificial. **Score**: Music composed for a film.

**Transition:** the type of editing technique used to connect shots. Sometimes there is no transition, and others can be quick and complicated. **Fading** to black is a popular transition, as are **wipes** and **dissolves**.

**2. All About Shots:**

**A. Camera Movement:** cameras can remain stationary or move

**• Pan:** side-to-side movement

**•** **Tracking shot**: movement along on a vehicle or set of tracks straight backward or forward (smooth)

**• Handheld shot:** wobbly camera movement. This technique may give a film a documentary feel and often used in horror or action scenes.

**• Stationary shot:** no movement

**• Fast Motion/Slow Motion**: motion in a scene happens faster or slower than it would take place in reality.

**B. Angles and Focus:**

**• Bird’s-eye View:** Most disorienting because it shows something from being filmed directly overhead. The subject matter becomes unrecognizable and abstract. The viewer becomes like an all-powerful god.

**• Deep Focus:** A cinematographic technique whereby objects in the immediate foreground and objects far away appear in equally sharp focus at the same time.

**• Depth of Field:** Distance between the nearest and furthest points at which the screen image is in reasonably sharp focus.

**• Extreme Long Shot/ Establishing Shot:**Is a shot taken from a great distance, serves as reference for the location and is often shown at the beginning of a sequence.

**• Eye-level Shots:** The normal angle in which camera shots are filmed.

• **High-angle Shots:** Less dramatic, reduces the height of the objects and the importance of the setting or environment is increased. A person seems harmless and insignificant when photographed from above; this technique may convey a character’s self-contempt.

• **Low-angle Shots:** Have the opposite effect of high-angle shots as they increase height and thus suggest verticality. They also heighten the importance of a subject. The figure looms threateningly over the spectator who is made to feel insecure and dominated. A person photographed from below inspires fear and awe.

**• Medium Shot:** Contains a figure from the knees or waist up.

**• Oblique Angle:** Lateral tilt of the camera, the horizon is skewed.

**• 180-degree Rule:** is a basic guideline (often broken) regarding the on-screen spatial relationship between a character and another character or object within a scene. An imaginary line called the **axis** connects the characters, and by keeping the camera on one side of this axis for every shot in the scene, the first character is always [frame right](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Screen_direction) of the second character, who is then always frame left of the first. The camera passing over the axis is called *jumping the line* or *crossing the line*; example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4wX_dmh8_g>

Helpful summary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvybQ5RpMkc>

**C. Lighting:**

**• Backlighting:** When it is as if an aura is around the characters, often done in romantic scenes.

**• High Contrast Light:** Often done for tragedies and melodramas with the harsh shafts of light and dramatic steaks of blackness.

**• Low Key:** Mysteries and thrillers use shadows and pools of light.

**D. Elements of Framing a Shot and possible meanings:**

**• Bottom of the Frame:**Vulnerability and powerlessness, objects placed in this area are in danger of slipping out of the frame completely.

**• Character with His or Her Back to the Camera:**Suggests a character’s alienation from the world, it is useful in conveying a sense of concealment.

**• Full-Front Position:**The most intimate, the character is looking in our direction, inviting out complicity. This allows the audience to be privileged and observe them with their defenses down, vulnerability exposed.

**• Left and Right Edges of the Frame:**Suggests insignificance because the characters are the farthest away from the center. Often are shot with darker light, suggesting the unknown.

**• Three-Quarter Turn:**Character seems unfriendly or anti-social, rejecting out interest. Sometimes suggests ideas dealing with power, dominance, authority and aspiration.

**• Quarter Turn:**Most commonly occurs when characters are lost in their own thoughts.

**• Upper Part of the Composition**: It is heavier than the lower, therefore objects likes sky scrapers seem more top heavy, so if the sky dominates and looks more heavy, it can make the inhabitants seem overwhelmed from above.

**3. Thematic Elements in Film:**

**• Anti-hero:**A central figure in a work that repels us by his or her actions or morality, yet who is not a villain. The Anti-hero accomplishes a useful purpose or even does heroic deeds. Max of *The Road Warrior* and many Clint Eastwood characters epitomize the 1970-80s anti-hero.

**• Black Comedy:** a subgenre of humor that uses cruelty or terrible situations to make the reader or viewer laugh, sometimes uncomfortably. Horror comedies such as *Scream* exemplify black comedy in film.

**• Hard-boiled**: a tone of writing for fiction and film often associated with American detective fiction by Raymond Chandler, Mickey Spillane, and Dashiell Hammett. Often**film noir** (which has several specific themes and even recurring images, such as spiral staircases and*femmes fatales*) adopts a hard-boiled tone. *Bladerunner* has elements of both hard-boiled and film noir.

**• MacGuffin:** Alfred Hitchcock coined this term; a plot device that makes the action happen without being important in and of itself. For instance, the act of two strangers sitting next to each other, and one finding and returning the other’s car keys might lead to a murder or a love affair. The keys are the MacGuffin. The Ark of the Covenant in*Raiders of the Lost Ark* and the briefcase in *Pulp Fiction* are famous MacGuffins.

**• Protagonist:** Central figure(s) in a text or film. An **Antagonist** acts as a foil to a protagonist.

**• Tension**: often called “dramatic tension.” In most texts and films we study, several tensions may exist. These are dramatic or even melodramatic elements of plot, setting, or character that serve to move things along. Unlike a MacGuffin, however, the tension is significant. A love triangle might not be the subject of a film, for instance, but it would certainly be one of the tensions.

Work Cited:

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