Visual Literacy and Cineliteracy : An Overview of Messaris and Gianetti

Visual Literacy and Cineliteracy: An Overview of Messaris and Gianetti

David John WOOD

1.1 Visual Literacy: Messaris (1994) asserts that visual literacy can build both aesthetic appreciation and a heightened awareness of manipulation in film. Compared to speech and writing, pictorial comprehension uses already existing information processing skills, distinguishing it from other communication modes. Recent art historians like Gombrich (1960) point out that art is a convention not a direct representation, and thus as arbitrary a system as language. It can also be argued that as many visual conventions are based on reality (like high and low angle shots) they are not arbitrary.

Potential obstacles to understanding visual images for someone not visually literate include a lack of color, depth and detail. Cognitively, details of shade and color are not focal in mental pictorial perception. Instead, we perceive depth via binocular disparity, motion parallax, texture gradient and occlusion. In still pictures, depth perception is the only obstacle. Lack of detail is countered by a skill of normal perception as, according to the light source intensity, we scan outlines and match the result against a kind of mental dictionary as it were of object structures.

This is also largely true for our perception of film. The complexity of moving as opposed to still pictures involves the ability to comprehend editing, time shifts and place shifts. The creation of coherency via cumulative partial views is now standard, but early film makers cautiously upheld such rules as the use of establishing shots, a 180 degree viewpoint and off-screen glances cutting directly to the target object or figure. As these are based on visual experience, they can be understood without specific visual education.

The presentation of emotion via close up or context is okay when the context is visual, but narration is common otherwise. The juxtaposition of face, and the cause and context are nevertheless social skills, so again provide no obstacles. In the same way, varying emotional tone via camera position, so central to a director's control over a viewer's level of involvement, is again analogous to real life intimacy proximities.

Time and place shifting are not real life as our reality is continuous (except for sleep, a comparatively less explored area in film). In nonfiction, shifts are nearly always explained verbally. Fiction film has shed all the transitional devices that were common in early cinema (such as calendars shedding their pages to represent the days passing) but like other forms of communication (literature and so on) intelligibility is always possible through code and context interaction. Communication advances to such shifts, redundancy increasing with film and language evolution.

The cognitive consequences are limited. Visual literacy is no cognitive tool as it is dependent on prior experience not education. For analysis versus description, language has conventions but pictures are limited to concrete objects and items in the same category. It is therefore impossible to approach visual literacy as a language. Spatial intelligence is a conceivable consequence. Viewers with training in depth conceptualization should better understand still picture representations, as well as real life depth and partial view comprehension. However, this relies equally on physical or tactile intelligence, and pictures cannot offer the former.

Awareness of artistry and visual manipulation remain the most likely benefits of visual education as a knowledge of conventions enables the viewer to understand which are being followed or broken by the creator. Visual manipulation categories include: the paraproxemic principle (namely that camerawork derives its effectiveness from real world analogies) whereby camera position affects a viewer's reaction to a subject, for example via close ups and subjective shots; false continuity, when two or more shots are edited together, so that a viewer sees them as temporally and spatially coherent (especially manipulative in nonfiction and films exposing nonfiction manipulation in fictive contexts); and, associational juxtaposition such as when an advertisement places a product and popular personality together to attach a positive feeling to an otherwise neutral object.

1.2 Film: Some editing techniques may appear potentially confusing to the inexperienced viewer, such as reversal of camera angle, transitions to subjective shots, instant replays and flashbacks. In the case of children, this may be caused by general cognitive development. The conclusions made about still pictures are relevant to film too, especially in unedited sequences, while the addition of motion parallax brings depth perception more into play.

Even when the visual field moves independently of bodily movement (for example in the case of camera panning) older inexperienced viewers have no interpretational problems providing that the content is sufficiently familiar. Camera movement resembles editing because of the disembodied shifts in viewpoint, but editing still remains distinct from real world visual experience. Therefore editing requires close analysis.

Point of view editing means editing that does not disrupt the continuity of location, time or reality. Sequences are edited in such a way as to maintain a continuum from a series of fragmentary images. Is there a sort of grammar, as it were. or set of principles involved? For example, editing conventions usually include editing actions so that one shot picks up from exactly where the previous action broke off. Not following this principle is called jump cutting. Another common convention is to follow a character's off-screen glances with a shot of what the character is looking at. But what happens when such conventions are broken? Does meaning break down? Not necessarily.

Rather than any formal set of conventions or code of devices, viewers seek meaning from narrative

context by cross-referencing all possible interpretations against the broader context of the story itself. Viewers are in a continual state of interpretive interaction with the elements of the film that are presented to them. Even jump cuts can pose different interpretational possibilities, as for example when a viewer has to judge whether a scene represents a continuous action or representative fragments of a larger process. Take for example Oliver Stone's JFK, a tour de force of cutting and editing. Ambiguity may arise if a viewer lacks contextual knowledge or familiarity. Narrative context precedes code at least in mainstream film.

Nonetheless, a kind of code still exists, at least for point of view editing. The underlying principle of this code is to keep the viewer consistently on one side of an unfolding action or interaction. This principle is composed of the two conventions mentioned previously as well such other rules, as it were, like the one side of action rule (incorporating the 180 degree principle) whereby the camera only shows angles within the 180 degree eye line swing of the character who is the center of the action.

Conventions like off-screen glances are not arbitrary and do not require that any cinematic literacy be pre-learnt before we can hope to follow them. The same applies to avoiding jump cuts as maintaining coherence in this way avoids the need for any alternative arbitrary code to convey the meaning.

As for the one side of the action shooting principle, one problem has to be addressed. While film makers like Griffith (who pioneered point of view editing as in For Love of Gold in 1908) and Huston firmly attest that it is simply an extension of real life perception, they overlook something: " Looking at real things, the human vision fastens itself upon a quick succession of small comprehensible incidents, and we form our eventual impressions, like a mosaic, out of such details ... The director counterfeits the operation of the eye in his lens", (Griffith, 1926) and" All the things we have laboriously learned to do with film were already part of the physiological and psychological experience of man before film was invented ... In a film you would use the cut ... Once you know the distance between two objects, you blink instinctively. That's a cut ... In the same way, almost all the devices of film have a physiological counterpart" (Huston, 1965).

Both omit to mention, however, the limitations of our viewpoint. The way we see is closest to a still camera at best, if not a continually moving hand held one. This is not the case in film, however, where stationary camera scenes are almost non-existent. The visual mobility of film camerawork, even though it may be adhering to the 180 degree law, cannot be achieved by the individual. Nonetheless, empirical evidence (such as Hobbs, 1988) gained from testing inexperienced viewers' ability to understand unedited as opposed to point of view edited versions of the same narrative strongly suggests they have no problem understanding both with equal facility. Similarly, tests with children's ability to comprehend reverse angle editing (Comunitzis-Page, 1991) also found no problem. In fact, Griffith's early use of the technique encountered no negative feedback. It should be noted that, while

his audiences' familiarity with similar cutting techniques in literature cannot be assumed, the director himself attested to them as another model.

Editing as an indicator of thought and emotion can be achieved via the juxtaposition of a person thinking with the object connected plus close ups to heighten dramatic effect. How does this editing convey thoughts and emotions? Kuleshov, an early Russian director, initiated the technique and feedback indicated that viewers read into an actor's actually expressionless face subtle and powerful emotions as a result of the editing, when obviously there were none. This phenomenon was termed the Kuleshov effect. Similarly, juxtaposing someone with some object (for example, sports items) led viewers (wrongly) to assume that the person was a great sportsman. Related techniques include showing listener reaction, another powerful deceiver, and used along with the former to persuade people in advertising and propaganda just as powerfully today.

Though there is no exact real life parallel, research into non-verbal communication (e.g., Birdwhistell, 1970) attests to the real life tendency to read meaning into situations on the basis of someone's facial expression and behavior in the context of objects or situations to which they are connected, as often as not with equally erroneous results. Again, then, editing would seem to hold as a derivative of a real world phenomenon.

Modulation of emphasis and viewer involvement are often achieved by tightening close ups, as well as shot duration (e.g., speeding up a scene or using slow motion) and transitional mechanisms such as straight cuts, fades and dissolves. These can all be used to change the intensity of the action, especially at a scene's climax. Each device approximates some feature of real world experience. So, the closer we are to a person, the faster we see something happening or when there is a transition in what we are looking at, the greater the potential for intensity fluctuation. Thus film codes are not arbitrary like literary codes.

Although point of view editing can comprise as much as 90% of editing on average, it is also important to consider other forms of editing here. When images are edited together from different times or places, they generally fall into two categories. Firstly, this editing may connect the narrative via flashbacks or simple plot progression. Secondly, it may be to indicate an analogy or contrast, to make a generalization and so on. A classic example of the latter is Stanley Kubrick's movie, 2001.

Beginning with the first category, this can be broken down further into at least four types. Firstly, there can be a change in both location and time frame. Scene changes in movies have become increasingly abrupt since their advent, so that what once may have taken several seconds is now almost instantaneous. This may be in part to satisfy an intensity seeking audience nurtured on high-speed commercials, as well as a director's aim of achieving invisible editing. While long and heavily demarcated transitions were a hallmark of early cinema because film makers wanted to avoid audience confusion, research (such as Hobbs and Frost, 1989) challenges the assumption by indicating that even

inexperienced viewers can follow rapid editing transitions as long as the content is familiar.

When there are changes in location only, as with the first type just mentioned, narrative logic, often contained within a film's dialog, is enough to make the transition comprehensible to an audience. A third type of transition, involving changes in time frame only, concerns forward changes rather than flashbacks, as the latter overlap with changes in reality due to the nature of flashbacks. Forward time movements, however, are relatively rare, and are mainly expressed in one of the following three ways, or some combination of them. Firstly, dissolves, fades or some other comparatively slow transitional device can be used. Next, the same point of view can be maintained on either side of the cut. And finally, an explicit before-and-after contrast can be employed.

The final subcategory for narrative-connecting editing involves changes in the type of reality. Flashbacks historically share with hallucinations blurred or warped transitional image devices, plus close ups of the character's face. While this device has some basis in real life experience, it needs the support of narrative context, too. Blurring and warping have fallen out of fashion and given way to editing that stands alone on the strength of story line.

In the case of editing that makes analogies and so on, as some kind of comment is involved, they may be referred to as propositional editing since they propose some inference. Put simply, such editing brings together two or more images to imply a comment about them. There may be no literal connection between them in time, place or whatever, and they are very common in advertising and propaganda. At least four possible meanings are suggested by propositional editing: comparison or analogy, contrast, causality, and generalization. While the final meaning presented here may be distinct, the others are not. The linkage is ultimately as much if not more conceptual than visual.

2.1 Cineliteracy: Is a cinematic literacy necessary for film comprehension? Some such as Greenfield (1984) maintain that it is:" Learning to decode the symbols of film and television is something like learning to read." Even directors like Pasolini sometimes allude to the same thing (1962) when he asserts that off-screen glances are equivalent to language formulas like" He/she said ..." But such views again suggest that film information cues are as arbitrary as language by equating filmic codes in the same terms as the structure of verbal narration. However, in the latter example, real life visual experience is a more plausible origin of such a construction, as we naturally tend to follow the glance of another when it strikes us as likely to lead to something we too want to see.

Just as we may speak of a visual literacy it is also possible to refer to an active and critical capacity to view movies as cineliteracy (Gianetti, 1996). To construct a basic framework to understand movies, we can begin by asserting three styles of photography and cinema. Firstly, there is realism, exemplified by documentary. At the opposite extreme is formalism, best represented by the avant-garde. The earliest equivalents of movies at the end of the nineteenth century were polarized along

these lines by the Lumieres who captured on film such real life events as trains in motion on the one hand, and Melies who used trick photography to make an early form of science fiction.

While the majority of film is made up of real life in the form of physical reality, it is the way a film's raw material is used that determines its style. Most films of course fall somewhere between these two extremes in the realm of classicism or the standard fiction film. Nevertheless, the extremes are a useful measure as they allow us to ascribe a film with minimal directorial manipulation of its materials and objective selectivity thereof to the realistic school, while more formalist (or expressionistic) films make no pretense of their subjective manipulation. Thus, while the art of the realist is the very concealment of that art, the formalist strives for art by altering reality in some new and striking way, or put more simply, one stresses form, the other content.

To understand movies, we can begin by looking at the basics. Firstly, there are basically six kinds of shot determining the amount of subject matter included in the frame of the screen. Thus we can speak of the extreme long shot, the long shot (both of which include the deep focus or wide angle shot), the full shot, the medium shot, the close up and the extreme close up. While all these, like the preceding and following categories, are at best relative terms, they are still useful to overview cinema.

There are five basic angles, the bird's eye view, the high angle, the eye level shot, the low angle and the oblique (or tilted camera) angle. Light and darkness styles (which are complex and can be a powerful manipulative tool) basically include high key, high contrast and low key. Other aspects include backlighting and overexposure. Color has had a shorter history, not becoming commercially widespread until just before mid-century, and has experienced many technical problems for years afterwards. While colors are viewed more passively than contour and outline, they exert an emotional presence, as for example in the crudest distinction of warm versus cool colors. Black and white is also used in color films for special meaning, but the subtlety of low contrast is often preferable.

While realists choose normal lenses to minimize distortion, the formalist uses lenses and filters to intensify or suppress elements of a picture to achieve the desired effects. The three main types of lens are the standard, the telephoto and the wide angle. Various artistic effects can be achieved by blurring a foreground or background figure, or adjusting the focal distance during shooting to guide the viewer's eye, called rack focusing. Depth perception can be flattened using long lenses, while wide-angle lenses exaggerate the distance between figures and create various kinds of distortion to faces and frame edges. Filters highlight certain colors, while the two basic kinds of film stock, fast and slow, can respectively be used outdoors with no special lighting, or to capture colors better because they suppress illumination.

All these variations comprise the components of a director's control over how and what viewers see, so that the more manipulative photographic elements tend to be exploited by the formalist and

avoided by the realist. In this context, the optical printer can also be mentioned as it allows for re-photographing of frames, creating such effects as double and multiple exposure. The digital age has brought a new template to film which can of course also revamp pre-digital movies by remastering them digitally.

2.2 Staging a Movie: The presentation of the visual elements of a film is referred to as mise en scene. It shares both conventions of live theater and of painting, as a scene is temporal and begins in three dimensions, but once filmed, it is framed (albeit inflexibly) in two dimensions and becomes equally a spatial entity. Most films are of course in a wider frame (an aspect ratio of about two and a third to one) than TV (one and a third to one) and subsequent televising can sometimes omit important parts. Masking the sides or top and bottom of the frame can compensate when depicting tall or wide shapes. The frame isolates, unifying the contents, enabling the director to emphasize whatever elements he selects. Placement within the frame can further emphasize any element with the center tending to be the most emphasized point, while the top suggests power, etc. At the same time, omitted elements (including both behind and in front of the camera, as with a closed door) can emphasize their mysteriousness and so on.

Directors can compose somehow visually unbalanced shots to evoke a character's psychological state. The director can emphasize any element by the use of dominant contrast As we scan the picture, subsidiary contrasts also become important. Such contrasts may be color, light, movement, left versus right or whatever. As the eye can only take in a certain number of visual elements at any one time, exceeding ten in a shot can create (usually deliberately) confusion. A visual rhythm can also be created by including similar or repeated elements as the eye tends to scan and connect them. Shapes alone can suggest movement, especially diagonals, while two-shots, triadics and circles all carry visual suggestions.

Space in film is one aspect of communication. There are basically three areas, fore, back and middle ground, and the interaction of elements in these areas delivers messages about one or all of them, just as with the amount or volume of space each takes up. Changing the setup by camerawork can express the development of the psychological environment. Similarly, as the viewer identifies with the camera's lens, the five basic positions in which someone can be shown (full front, quarter turn, profile, half turn and back) can determine our reactions to a character. Open space and the distance between characters (especially as the camera can capture extreme close ups as easily as long shots) can also evoke different reactions, such as coldness, intimacy and confinement.

Mise en scene considerations can be roughly summarized in the following fifteen points: Dominance, Lighting, Shot and Camera Proxemics, Angle, Color, Lens/Filter/Stock, Subsidiary Contrast, Density, Composition, Form, Framing, Depth, Character Placement, Staging Positions and Character Proxemics.

2.3 Movement: Movement in film like acting can be literal or highly stylized (e.g. Chaplain). Movement direction may create certain feelings - upwards may be freedom or aspiration, downwards sadness or weakness and so on. Left to right movement mirrors eye scanning and can therefore seem more natural than right to left. Depth movement (towards and away from the camera) again creates various meanings, towards can mean strength or danger, away, weakness or the ending of the story. Lateral movements on the other hand emphasize activity. Classical movements will edit depth movement and favor diagonally dynamic motion. Camera angle and distance comprise another reaction control factor, close, low angles increasing speed and intensity and vice versa. All these points may not seem worth the mention, but in fact constitute a critical aspect of movie communication whose impact should not be subordinated to the overall action or story. In fact, the psychological impact of a close up face shot can create more action and reaction than the grandest epic action film. In whatever case, the fresher and more unique the presentation, the more keenly it will be received by an audience, so that preconceived notions of what makes a movie work merely devolve into hackneyed obscurity. Thus kinetic symbolism whereby the central action is implied originally by subsidiary action is the mark of an innovative film. On the other hand, the skillful director can also understate action by stasis, making even the slightest movement the more dynamic by contrast. The mirror dimension to the movement in front of the camera is the movement of the camera itself which has developed dramatically from its early days opening up many new avenues of possible meaning and control.

2.4 Editing: Mechanically, editing (or montage) means eliminating what is unnecessary to a film from its raw materials. Since the early 20th century, filmmakers have cut to continuity to preserve the flow of an event without showing it all. Scenes are connected through the association of ideas. Action must be kept logical, with same-direction action, no confusing breaks (jump cuts), clearly shown cause and effect relationships, establishing shots to be returned to as necessary, and so on. Griffith was central in first developing these basics of editing into a more sophisticated classical cutting style for dramatic intensity and emotional emphasis. Previously, the camera range was mainly the same as that of a stage play audience, but classical cutting established the use of the close up for psychological impact. It increased the control over an audience's reactions by splitting the action into a series of fragmentary shots increasing the sense of detail. It shifts the viewer's point of view through a wide range of shots connected through their implicit association of ideas, not separated by real time or space, creating emotional not literal action and subjective not actual time, perhaps like a novel.

To create enough raw material, a master shot (a long, uninterrupted take of an entire scene) was first made and then the scene was re-shot repeatedly (or shot with multiple cameras) in medium and close up shots. One problem this created was that, while directors could make the first cut, producers

could often change a scene's entire integrity through a final cut because of so much raw material. Techniques include matching action, parallel editing (or, more sophisticatedly, thematic montage), the 180 degree rule and eyeline matching that shows cause and effect by cutting from off-screen glances to whatever it is that is being looked at.

Although film time is completely flexible, it is necessary to cut at the content curve (or point in a shot where the audience has gotten most of the necessary information there). Directors often control or at least take part in the editing and it is one of the most important skills in filmmaking. Time can be molded into unlimited shapes and variations through flashbacks, flashforwards and cutaways to fantasies. As Alfred Hitchcock put 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."

Gianetti in reference to the theories of formalist Russian director, Sergei Eisenstein (who wanted movies to be as flexible as literature to make figurative comparisons without respect to time or place via images that only need justifying thematically and metaphorically) describes cinema's genius as follows:" Potentially, at least, the cinema is the most comprehensive of the arts because it can incorporate the visual conflicts of painting and photography, the kinetic conflicts of dance, the tonal conflicts of music, the verbal conflicts of language, and the character conflicts of fiction and drama."

2.5 Sound: Sound in film got off to a slow start in 1927, and as it was synchronous with the action, prevented meaningful editing beyond scene changes, so that most of the meaning had to center on the dialog. Equipment developed quickly, however, to allow for movement of the camera, and different microphones on separate channels, plus booms to follow actors, began to allow for development. The formalist Eisenstein resisted sound, and certainly sound required more literal continuity than many directors wanted. Hitchcock pointed out that the most cinematic scenes are usually silent. French musical director Clair first tried dubbing sound after filming and his films gained more freedom than many of his contemporaries. Indeed, this approach later became a fundamental of sound production. In America, Lubitsch pioneered dubbing for ironic contrast, another later major feature of movies. The advent of sound also relieved actors of having to compensate visually, ushering in a more natural style of acting. Orson Welles, with a background in radio, was important in developing sound montage which allowed different actors' words to overlap each other with great and often lyrical effect.

In addition to dialog, there are sound effects and of course many kinds of music in film. These can strongly affect our reaction to what we see. Sounds can be high or low pitched, high or low volume, fast or slow and so on, each determining our reaction to the visuals. Off-screen sound extends the dimension of film further, and plays a major part in almost every movie we see. The musical score can create motifs as a form of characterization, for example. Sound can act on us

subconsciously, predicting some future action in a film, or serve symbolic functions. While directors once compensated for a microphone's tendency to take in every sound by editing them out, many films now keep even extraneous noise to increase the sense of reality. Sound is also capable of representing or evoking psychological states to great effect. Silence too can play a part by lulling us before some storm of action.

Music by itself can be completely ambiguous, but coupled with lyrics, dialog or visuals, it tends to become quite specific in its emotional impact on us, although this may of course also be a quite subjective reaction, depending on each individual.

The spoken language of a film can vary in its significance from the many highly successful literary adaptations that exist, to films which use language as an equal or lesser component of the whole. Indeed, more than written language, spoken language can be very complex because of the great range of the human voice in expressing emotion and so on. An actor can create a superb interpretation of a dialog, including its punctuation, pauses and so on, that may be impossible for a normal reader. More than literature, film can explore the extensive artistry of dialect, a dimension historically relegated in writing. Movies may also be better at creating subtexts, that is meaning below the surface of the language. Again, film can actually enrich suggestive meaning by suppressing spoken language.

While live theater may share many of these advantages over written literature (whose roots anyway are in the oral and pictorial traditions of long ago) film can go further by extension of language's meanings through contrastive juxtaposition of word and image. Such simultaneity also embraces music and sound effects, including deliberate mechanical sound distortion.

In addition to dialog, there is narration (or interview, for example) the principle of which is not to duplicate what's already on screen. This creates a sense of objectivity, and, with flashbacks, predestination, for example, shifting the interest from what happened to how and why. Another extension is interior monologue to show a character's thoughts. Theater is more word bound because of visual limitations, so that the same device can be much more intense in film. Ultimately, the picture carries most meaning so dialog can be as scant as real life, but the sound can free up the picture to concentrate on other aspects when a lot of information can be quickly conveyed.

2.6 Acting: Acting is the work of extras, nonprofessionals, professionals and stars but all are finally tools of the director. While in a stage play an actor can dominate once a play begins, this is unusual in a movie. The stage actor is firstly a voice and secondly a small figure trying to be seen, while a film actor need only be a face because of the camera. Stage actors don't need to be photogenic or any particular age, but do need good body control as they are nearly always seen in full. Their movements must be stylized, and they cannot easily be substituted for some scenes like a film actor

can. They work in real time, and usually build up slowly to a climax, so must pace themselves differently. Mistakes are virtually irreversible.

Great stage actors don't automatically possess the interest quality necessary for film, where too much stage technique may be out of place. Stage actors fare better in realistic films which use full body shots and lengthy takes. Formalistic directors like Hitchcock on the other hand don't require the same skills and the actor is just another raw material, hence the not unusual employment of the non-professional actor or actress. Voices can be mechanically altered and can become mere sound or even dubbed. Similarly, physical stature and movement can be controlled in many ways. Film actors do not need to sustain intensity continuously for a couple of hours, as shots can be made at any time and repeated again and again. Spontaneity may be achieved by a minimum of rehearsal, and sometimes film actors can just read their prompts and first meet their fellow actors on set!

Film stars have been around almost since the beginning. They have huge budgets and influence on their public. In their heyday up to mid-century, the five biggest companies commanded 80% of the world's screens. The early talkies featured stars with personality voices. After being tried out in several character types, they were forever locked into the one that was the biggest hit, and are still regarded as the only insurance for an investor's money. The more successful they became, the more allowances and approval rights they got. The fact that some die young merely cements their romantic appeal.

Acting roughly falls into two styles, those actors who always play themselves or the same part, adapting the role given them accordingly, and those who build their part from the outside, adjusting to the role. The latter developed further through method acting whereby an actor has to go in-character, exploring his own psyche for similarities with the role given, living the part via fusing his own character with that of the projected character. This psychoanalytic method crystallized great intensity of emotion. Actors also learn to improvise action, dialog and so on to feel the part they are taking, analyzing every aspect of a scene's rationale.

Casting can also make or break a film. Originally, actors were strongly typecast when films presented types rather than stressing unique characterization. While some stars can take on any role, for others, acting outside their known repertoire can prove to be disastrous. Some directors prefer non-professionals or unknowns, while others seek the guarantee of stardom so much so that we often tend to think of and refer to characters by their actor's name rather than the part name. Stars usually play out the entire film (or leave the audience feeling cheated) and some directors don't really finalize the script or how it is to be played until they know exactly who is to be cast in which role. Thus acting is a kind of language system as the stars cast preempt the message a movie may give.

2.7 Drama: While drama is live and movies are recorded, both use action as their form of communica-

tion, with movies having a wider range of techniques. The representation of time and place is more flexible in movies through techniques like flashbacks, location changes, viewpoint shifts, close ups and so on. Identifying with the lens, the movie viewer is fully mobile beyond normal physical limits. On the other hand, film is only a two-dimensional representation of reality, and lacks live contact with its viewers compared to the stage, accounting for the greater reality, nudity, violence and so on in movies. Each stage performance can be reworked, while a movie is forever fixed. Theater is verbally saturated and actor-centered, while movies are more visually saturated and centered on photography. In plays, the script writer tends to dominate (title and writer receiving prime billing and the script being unchangeable) while in movies it is more often the director and producer (few films putting the scriptwriter's name in the most prominent position, and the script completely at their mercy). Films are at best usually only based on the work of a famous writer.

Sets are important in both plays and films, taking on symbolic significance, but because of visibility, logistical and other limitations, the former may be fewer, less flexible, much less detailed and unable to use various locations compared to the latter. Set design is limited only by the imagination of the director, and there are too many to categorize, but most need to confront the following considerations: exterior or interior; style; studio or location; period; class; size; decoration; and, symbolic function.

In a similar way, costume and make up design can exert a psychological impact, from color and texture through to shape and size. A perfect example is Chaplain's tramp costume showing the dream and reality of his character. Basic considerations affecting costume include: period; class; sex; age; fabric; accessories; color; body exposure; function; and, image. Because of camera close ups, movie make up can be much more subtle than that used in stage plays.

2.8 Story: Stories, according to Gianetti, are the raw materials of a dramatic action in chronological sequence, while plots involve the storyteller's method of superimposing a structural pattern over them. Plots are shaped by an implied author's viewpoint in creating a cause and effect structure to the sequence of events. Stories are usually divided into those that show, as in theater, and those that tell, as in literature. As movies span both, they can be a more complex medium with more narrative techniques. One approach, modern narratology, concerns itself with the rhetoric or forms of communication. Cinema's complexity is in part caused by the question of authorship, as this tends to be multiple. Voice over narration (similar to first person narration in a novel) can further increase a film authorship's complexity.

The viewer is constantly involved in a kind of dialog with the plot, reacting to all of a film's elements (Bordwell, 1985). We carry a set of expectations, partly determined by the genre, director, actors, title and so on, which we must adjust when a movie acts out of character. The opening scenes, music and credits, often foreshadowing as they do a movie's outcome, shape our expectations further.

The plot gives incomplete information to the viewer, posing problems for us to try to solve in advance of the film's conclusion.

Most movies are based on the classical model whereby a protagonist initiates an action which an antagonist resists, with the action centered on how the former achieves the goal via a series of linear cause and effect scenes (sometimes including a mirror subplot) each implying a link to subsequent scenes, building to an escalating climax (usually intensified by some deadline) where protagonist and antagonist clash directly, with a final subsidence and philosophical closing shot, or Setup　Confrontation　Resolution. Action dominates characterization rather than language. Definitive of classical film is formalist plot with realist execution.

Realistic narratives, which of course constitute as much a style as other kinds, are typified by: an objective implied author; use of the unique, concrete and specific; shocking revelations; anti-sentimentalism; undramatic understatement; scientific causality and motivation; and, plain presentation. Formalistic narratives are unashamedly artificial, often with an intrusive author, and lyrical digressions. Non-fictional films like documentaries, may not even have a plot as such, their "story" simply the exploration of some theme. Nonetheless they are inevitably shaped by the director's selection and unavoidable emphasis or mode of presentation of certain points above others. Direct cinema, which started in the 1960s, used portable equipment to capture incidents live, sometimes even dispensing with narration completely.

The genre film is often targeted at specific audiences, like the coming of age movie which caters to younger audiences. Their weakness is that their repeatability can lead to staleness. Their merit is, when successfully reinterpreted via a true artist's unique vision, exploiting the broad outlines of a pre-established form without having to restate all that has preceded it within that genre, they save screen time for better things. Their cycle is defined as Primitive　Classical　Revisionist　Parodic. They are often expressive of a culture's underlying psychological concerns, giving them a quasi-mythic quality.

2.9 Literature: The screenwriter's impact on a film varies greatly case-by-case. In most cases, the director is involved in scriptwriting, and in some cases, he may write the entire script or have others help him do so. In general, multiple authorship is the norm, but film credits rarely indicate all of those involved. While some scripts are excellent in themselves, the original written story in many cases doesn't matter so much as how it is translated into visual action, and many great movies have come from undistinguished stories. While stage play scripts achieve more because of more complete detail, especially in terms of staging, staging a film is almost always at the discretion of the director. Choice of shots is probably the most crucial element of any film, transcending plot, because the original story can be turned into multiple possibilities according to directorial treatment.

Actors too may make or break a script with their interpretation, and they may modify the original greatly, especially with top stars, who often have their parts specially written for them (as a vehicle for their career, for example) over and above the story. Screenplays rarely get published because they were never meant to be, and they are thus written simply and unrhetorically.

Allusions, as in literature implicitly referring to something, are also part of movies. They sometimes become homages in movies, paying tribute to colleagues or masters. Fictional view point is usually divided into four kinds, the first person, the omniscient, the third person, and the objective. In movies, viewpoint tends towards the omniscient. First person viewpoint varies in its reliability and an author usually gives us clues when such a narrator is unreliable. Movies tend to use first person narration intermittently. Because the narrator of a novel is its voice and that of a film is the eye of the camera lens, there is a fundamental difference in that the reader feels like he is listening to someone, often a friend, while the viewer will tend to identify more strongly with the lens. Thus a film's first person narrator would almost inevitably make us the protagonist. But exclusive use of the first person camera can pose major logistical problems, and just as the interest in a literary narrator is formed by our growing knowledge of him or her, the less we see of the first person film narrator, the more disinterested we may become.

Type two, the omniscient narrator, became popular in 19th century novels. Such a narrator is not usually a participant in the action, may span numerous periods and locations, can enter the consciousness of different characters, and may be detached, taking on a distinct personality of their own. Thus film narration, which naturally spans time and place and has the ultimate view of every action, is predominantly omniscient. The third person narrator tells the story from a single character's viewpoint, and can enter the character completely or not at all, leaving us to guess what that character feels. Third person narration in movies is not common, and tends to be limited to documentary, where an anonymous narrator tells us about a central character. Finally, the objective narrator, a variation of the omniscient but detached to the point of not entering the consciousness of any character, may be found in realistic movies, where commentary and distortion are avoided.

Literary adaptations can be controversial. Purists may object to any change to a novel, but as film's form is distinct, change is inevitable. Furthermore, once a story has been perfected in one medium, transferring it to another may only lead to a lesser result. Certainly some of the best movies have come from undistinguished originals, and few great novels have achieved the same greatness on screen. Literal adaptations are usually impossible because the forms govern the content in quite different ways. Therefore adaptations tend to be loose (using only an idea or one element from the original) or faithful (trying to retain the spirit but streamlining the original, as most novels would take more than a movie's two hours to tell) but rarely literal.

Literal adaptations tend to be limited then to stage plays as they both share the same modes of

action and dialogue.   The problems for the adapter tend to be less linguistic and more spatiotemporal. Movies can add extra dimensions to plays through such means as close-ups and edited juxtapositions, which are not naturally part of a play's form, and thus defy purely literal adaptation even of plays. Even retaining the original dialogue, however, tends to have a different impact on an audience. Continuity in a play is fragmented in a film, rendering the effect of such dialogue quite distinct. Moreover a movie's visual edge will always make its verbal elements occupy a different dimension to that of a play, which tends to be more literary.

Sources and References

Birdwhistell, R. 1970.   Kinesics and Context. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bordwell, D. 1985.   Narration in the Fiction Film. Wisconsin: Wisconsin University.

Communtzis-Page, G. 1991.   Perspective-Taking Theory. Colorado: 5th Visual Communication Conference.

Gianetti, L. 1996.   Understanding Movies. New Jersey: Simon & Schuster.

Gombrich, E. 1960.   Art and Illusion. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Greenfield, P. 1984.   Mind and Media. Cambridge, Mass.,: Harvard University Press.

Hobbs, R., and Frost, R. 1989.   Comprehending Transitional Editing Conventions. Philadelphia: 7th Culture and Communication Conference.

Huston and Pasolini interviews reprinted in Sarris, A. 1967, Interviews with Directors. New York: Avon Books.

Jesionowski, J. 1987.   Thinking in Pictures: Dramatic Structure in Griffith's Films. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kuleshov, L. 1974.   On Film. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Messaris, P. 1994.   Visual Literacy. Oxford: Westview Press.