How to understand film, tv, video - moving images with sound

by

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The traditional way of understanding film: Looking at the story, the actors, the scenery and the themes of the movie. What the film communicates (content).

My way: Looking at the work of the camera, the sound production and the editing (horizontal and vertical montage). How the film communicates (form).

Film is not just (to be understood as):

- Rays of light entering from an object into a camera, then reproduced and projected onto a screen from where rays of light enter the human eye and activates parts of the brain

- A row of photographs (stills)

- Signs in the semiotic sense (neither Saussure nor Pierce is of any help)

- Language (in the linguistic sense)

- Literature or Theater recorded

- Representation of reality

Reality and film

- A movie is not just an ordinary window
  - It is a "window frame" that can move and jump in space and time

- We "know" that we are watching a movie on the screen
  - at the same time we can be "immersed" or absorbed in the universe of the movie

- A movie communicates in several – verbal and non-verbal - ways
  - It offers many layers of experience, mood and action, and many "messages"

- A movie is strictly speaking **never** a re-presentation of reality

  But it is **always** a presentation of something in a specific way by someone for someone

The documentary confusion

- Stems from deeply rooted "positivism" and a "correspondence theory of truth " celebrating "facts" and quantitative, value-neutral approaches

- A rhetorical approach seeing film as a contribution to debate leaves much of the confusion behind

- A phenomenological approach likewise undercuts the trouble with "truth", "reality", and "subjectivity/objectivity": what do we actually experience thanks to the film?

Theory of moving images should today

- be inspired also by new media, augmented reality, virtual reality, and gaming theory

- by participatory culture and social media development

I draw on rhetoric and phenomenology and I look for communicative functions (Jakobson)

Several tracks and several communicative functions at the same time - everywhere

We see two persons shaking hands - (who is the implied viewer?)

saying something in a specific way - (distance, space, volume etc)

in an exotic cafe - (background props and action, lighting, noise)

with some music playing - (diegetic? Reinforcing or interpreting?)

the camera is moving in closer....(what does that tell us?)

we know one has a gun.... (so….?)

- cut to the face of the bartender… (meaning? Or was it just a mistake by the filmmaker?)

My analogy

Experiencing a movie is like being a baby: I am watching aspects of the wide, wide world as I am being carried around on the arm of an adult with magic powers – an adult that is able to jump in time and space, and to change sound and light and speed and perhaps everything for me as I am watching.

Now then: How to analyze a film?

- Focus not on things in front of the camera, but on *the work behind the camera* and the *work with the microphone*

- Explain the montage: the organization, the omissions, and the shaping of material – *the work in the editing room*

- talk about *mood* and style before story and characters

Content is only appearing to us in and through form

About the FORM or the phenomenology of *cinematographic* display

only film (film-like media) can "really" do this:

- **Camera movements**: following, pointing, or participating (sound movements also possible)
- **Cuts**: jumping and joining in the time-space orientation (continuity/discontinuity, association/contrast) of what we see and/or hear.
- **Vertical montage:** arranging the interplay of what we see and hear simultaneously - the complex mix of the moment: film, grafics, text, music, noise, dialogue, speak

The work of the camera

Camera setting:

- Format (16:9?)
- Framing
- Angle (direction)
- Width (degree)
- Light
- Depth of field
- Color balance, filters

Camera motion:

- Pan
- Tilt
- Travel
- Zoom
- Focus
- Iris (changing depth of field)

Tripod –steady / handheld - shaky

Camera movements

Can be transparent – unnoticed, well motivated:

- help us see and understand 3D location
- following the motion of a person/thing
- miming an interest (of the director/audience)
- marking beginning and end of scenes
- subjective view of character (person in the film)

Sound: 6 formal qualities
- to be distinguished by any sound

- Volume (how loud?)
- Pitch (tremble or bass?)
- Distance (how far away?)
- Timbre (tone "color", e.g. wood or brass?)
- Direction (from where?)
- Room echo (type of room or space?)

Some terminology

- A sound can be "on screen" or "off screen":

  Do we see the source of the sound within the frame or not?

- A sound can be "diegetic" or "non-diegetic":

  Is the sound part of the films universe or not? (e.g. is it heard by the hero and villain in the scene – or just added for the benefit of the audience: typically underscore music is "non-diegetic")
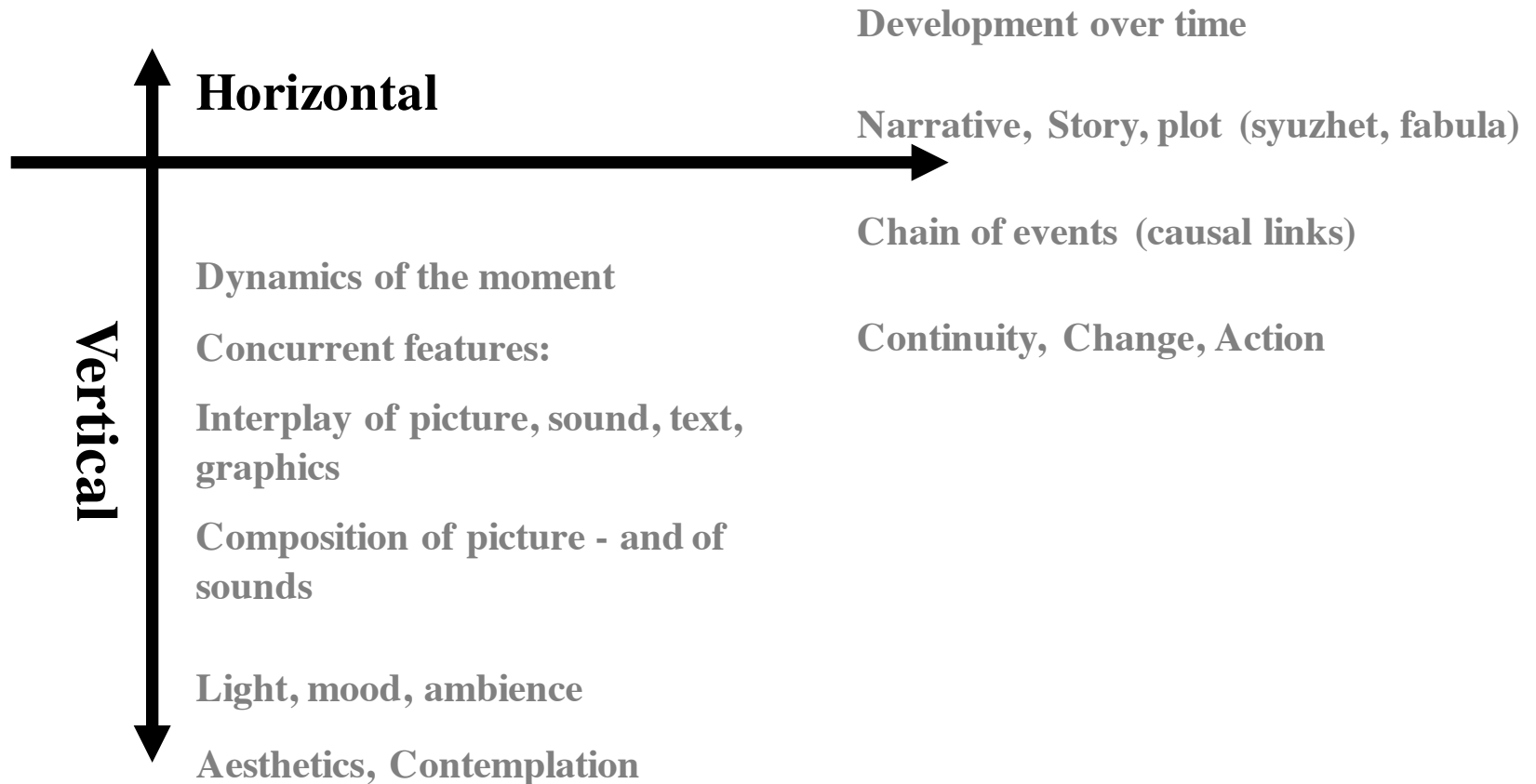
The two dimensions of montage: horizontal and vertical

- as known from video editing

Timeline   Shot by shot, clip by clip

Tracks

graphics (titles, logo etc)

Video 1
Video 2

Audio 1 (real sound)
Audio 2 (voice over)
Audio 3 (effects)
Audio 4 (music)

Two dimensions of analysis
two types of montage

Horizontal

Development over time

Narrative, Story, plot (syuzhet, fabula)

Chain of events (causal links)

Continuity, Change, Action

Vertical

Dynamics of the moment

Concurrent features:

Interplay of picture, sound, text, graphics

Composition of picture - and of sounds

Light, mood, ambience

Aesthetics, Contemplation

Presentation of politics/politicians:

Kennedy versus Nixon 1960 presidential election debate
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbrcRKqLSRw&t=2428s

 Bush versus Clinton in 1992 presidential election debate,
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ffbFvKlWqE

Nigel Farage - example of an attack on ethos
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBGKoB6TjBM

Hans Blix, March 7, 2003
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IImVN1dmGuY

Colin Powell, Feb. 5, 2003
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nt5RZ6ukbNc

Leni Riefenstahl (start 2:25) Triumph des Willens, 1935
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHs2coAzLJ8

Donald Trump versus Hillary Clinton second debate 2016
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyDSCKYz5sA

Same place and issue. And the same ethos?

Hans Blix, March 7, 2003
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IImVN1dmGuY

Colin Powell, Feb. 5, 2003
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nt5RZ6ukbNc

Weapons of mass destruction? The "framing" on tv/video may affect the ethos and trustworthiness.

myths

Train arrives

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dgLEDdFddk

Lemmings

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMZlr5Gf9yY

Read more

http://www.henrikjuel.dk/
Here you can find some of my essays, e.g:

Intellectual Video Filming

The Ethos and the Framing -a Study in the Rhetoric of the TV-camera

Seeing Culture in Watching Nature on the Screen

The Challenge of the Vertical Montage

Defining Documentary

In Danish – på dansk

Kommunikative funktioner og levende billedmedier

Den vertikale montage

Kamerabevægelsernes fænomenologi

Naturen er bedst på TV

Hvad er dokumentarfilm?

Om filmteori

Om at filme det ufattelige

Med mere….

"At filme er at se… mere!" Henrik Juel i
Kommunikationsfagets håndværk og teori
(red) Henrik Juel, Handelshøjskolens Forlag 2009

On short film production
- highly recommendable:

Richard Raskin: *Five Parameters for Story Design in the Short Fiction Film*

Richard Raskin:
The Art of Storytelling in the Short Fiction Film

(can be found on www, ready to read – pdf)