

FILM: AN ART FORM WORTHY OF STUDY

by

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Abstract

Film is an integral part of the everyday cultural experience of millions of Canadians (Ewoudou, 2005). Though we have enjoyed film as a society for close to a century, we have been reluctant to regard it as art. The literature on the use of film in education shows that it is predominantly employed as a pedagogical aid and not studied for its intrinsic aesthetic value. This paper will demonstrate that film is a legitimate art form that edifies students and thus merits serious study in the secondary school curriculum. It will discuss how film conveys meaning through a visual narrative. Fundamental cinematic techniques will be examined to show how they communicate ideas, create mood and evoke empathy in the viewer. It will demonstrate how film has evolved aesthetically by looking at the stylistic innovations of the French New Wave movement. An exemplar film from this artistic period, *The 400 Blows* (1959), will then be analyzed to illustrate the beauty of the medium and its power to express the essence of the human condition. The paper will conclude by advocating for the inclusion of film in the existing Ontario secondary school curriculum and giving recommendations for its study.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper will demonstrate that film is a legitimate art form worthy of serious study in the secondary school curriculum. Chapter one will discuss the origins of film and provide a review of literature discussing its range of use in high school. The literature review will show that, though film has positive effects on students, it is predominantly used as a pedagogical aid in the curriculum and not studied as a distinct art form. Chapter two will discuss the unique formal attributes and aesthetic elements of film. It will look at film's cultural significance and explain how film conveys meaning to the viewer in the form of a visual narrative. Chapter three will look directly at the cinematic techniques of mise en scène, lighting, camerawork and editing and explain how they shape the film viewer's aesthetic experience. Chapter four will demonstrate that film, like other art forms, evolves stylistically and will use as its exemplar the French New Wave. It will show how the technical and aesthetic innovations of this movement produced works of greater personal expression and social commentary. Chapter five will examine a masterpiece of the French New Wave movement, *The 400 Blows* (1959). The analysis of the film will reveal the art form's beauty, its ability to evoke empathy and its power to convey ideas and emotion. Chapter six will discuss the inclusion of film in the existing Ontario secondary curriculum and make recommendations for its study.

If all the serious lyrical poets, composers, painters and sculptors were forced by law to stop their activities, a rather small fraction of the general public would become aware of the fact and still a smaller fraction would seriously regret it. If the same thing were to happen with the movies the social consequences would be catastrophic. (Panofsky, 1947, p. 58)

These words written by the art historian Erwin Panofsky over half a century ago vividly describe film's deep roots in our society both as an art form and as popular entertainment. Film's iconic scenes, shots, and famous lines are indelibly etched in people's minds and are part of our collective cultural history. Though few doubt the beauty and power of its artistry it remains conspicuously absent from curricula as a legitimate area of study. This chapter will begin with a discussion of film's cultural significance and how its technological beginnings and evolution have shaped it as an art form. It will then review the relevant literature from various educational fields regarding its pedagogical use. The literature will demonstrate the range of how film can be utilized from merely an audiovisual tool to a more profound means of edification that develops empathy, critical awareness and aesthetic knowledge in students.

Film is a widely consumed art form in Canada. In a report for Statistics Canada entitled *Understanding Culture Consumption in Canada*, Ewoudou (2005) found that "six in ten adult Canadians were either occasional (28%) or frequent (32.4%) movie goers" (p. 12). Box office earnings in Canada and the United States were 10.6 billion US dollars and movie theatre attendance was more than all theme parks and pro sports combined (Motion Picture Association of America, 2010). These figures testify to film's immense popularity. Whether it is going to the cinema, watching movies on television or the Internet, or renting DVDs we have a long-standing and intimate relationship with this art form. Though Canadians have been enjoying

film since 1903, we have been slow to consider it a legitimate art form on a par with literature, drama or music (Graham, 1989). Though the aforementioned arts are studied in high school, film is often used as an educational tool to support lessons in other subjects or simply as a time-filler. Such a complex, imaginative, and visceral medium merits serious study and greater inclusion in secondary curricula.

Film's Origins

Film is a modern art. Unlike painting, sculpture or music which have been in existence for thousands of years, the experience of movie viewing was not possible before the scientific breakthroughs of the late nineteenth century. First and foremost, film is indebted to photography, which provides the mirror image of reality in a single frame. Daguerre produced the first photographs in 1839 by focusing light through an aperture with a lens onto light-sensitive celluloid film (Corrigan & White, 2004). What resulted was a permanent reproduction of what had stood in front of the camera. This scientific discovery was wedded with a theory of the human visual process proven by Peter Mark Roget in 1824 known as the “persistence of vision” (Corrigan & White, 2004). The theory showed that when viewing consecutive images at great speed (one twentieth to one fifth of a second) the brain is unable to process the next image before the imprint of the proceeding one disappears. Thus, even though we are witnessing a succession of static images, our minds believe we are seeing motion. This illusion is known as the phi phenomenon (Kawin & Mast, 2006). These physiological processes and scientific innovations combine to create the aesthetic experience of watching a movie.

In 1892, building on these discoveries Edison invented a single-person viewing device known as the Kinetoscope and the Lumiere brothers began to project films to small audiences in Paris in

1895 with a device known as a Cinematographe (Fell, 1979). Author Maxim Gorky had these words to say upon viewing one of these films in 1896,

The cinematographe gives you all these—cultivating the nerves on the one hand and dulling them on the other. The thirst for such strange, fantastic sensations as it gives will grow ever greater and we will be increasingly less able and less willing to gasp the everyday impressions of ordinary life. This thirst for the strange and the new can lead us far, very far. (Fell, 1979, p. 21)

Gorky envisioned a century ago how film's capacity for seamlessly creating an alternate reality can have beneficial as well as detrimental effects on the viewer. Through successive inventions, building on the work of Lee de Forest, the Photophone added sound to film to make the illusion of reality complete. The *Jazz Singer* debuted in 1927 (Mast and Kavin, 2006) as the first full-length feature with a sound narrative and this heralded the birth of film as we know it today. The first films shown in Canada were in Ottawa in 1896 by the Holland Brothers and Urban Films produced the first dramatic film in Canada, *Hiawatha* in 1903. The classic *Nanook of the North*, a documentary about the Inuit, was made in 1920 (Graham, 1989). These facts testify to long history of enjoyment and the aesthetic development of film in Canada.

Film is a social medium enjoyed by all members of society. Early films were viewed by ordinary people at cheap cinemas (Panofsky, 1947) or travelling shows such as John C. Green's, which toured through small Canadian communities (Graham, 1989). These films were not created for the church or the wealthy elite, as were arts such as painting or sculpture. They were a source of entertainment and did not originally have as their goals lofty aspirations of spiritual

enlightenment or beauty. A central goal in their development, however, was to create a secondary realistic world that the viewer could experience and inhabit. The key to this mimesis was seeing movement on film, which excited the viewer and enabled this mental transportation. The art historian Erwin Panofsky explains,

. . . the primordial basis for the enjoyment of moving pictures was not an objective interest in the formal presentation of subject matter, much less an aesthetic interest in the formal presentation of the subject matter, but the sheer delight in the fact that things seemed to move, no matter what things they were. (Panofsky, 1947, p. 57)

This description of the enjoyment of film seems archaic and naive from our present viewpoint, but it demonstrates how groundbreaking the medium was at its inception. Never before had a viewer of art been able to witness such a seamless representation of life. It is difficult for us to comprehend the impact of this phenomenon having grown up from infancy surrounded by the moving image. Film expert Richard Barsam describes early film,

Whether presenting a scene from everyday life as in Louis Lumiere's *Employees Leaving the Lumiere Factory* (1895), or showing a fantastical scenario as in Georges Melies's *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) motion pictures were recognized from the very beginning for their ability to create a feeling of being there, of seeing something that could actually happen . . . both the Lumieres and the Melies wanted to portray their onscreen worlds convincingly—to achieve verisimilitude in their work. (Barsam, 2007, p. 27)

Because the images being shown are life-like, the viewer believes that what they are seeing is true. After a mental agreement has been made to believe in the facade of the film, the brain is allowed to simply follow the events on screen as if they were real. With this one trick of the mind and eye, an endless world of imaginative scenarios was made possible.

Early movies were seen near the turn of the century by the middle and lower class that now had money and time to spend on entertainment (Corrigan & White, 2004). As such they began as an accessible medium for ordinary citizens and not an educated elite. Panofsky describes this quality of film:

. . . films first exhibited in “kinetoscopes,” viz., cinematographic peep shows, but projectable to a screen since as early as 1894—are, originally, a product of genuine folk art (whereas, as a rule, folk art derives from what is known as “higher art”) . . . produced by photographers who were anything but “producers” or “directors,” performed by people who were anything but actors, and enjoyed by people who would have been much offended had anyone called them “art lovers.” (Panofsky, 1947, p. 57)

The close connection of film as a form of entertainment and as a marketable product remains an essential element of the art form. Content and style are tied to the free market economy and although this keeps film vital and dynamic as it changes with society’s tastes, it can sometimes have a stultifying effect on creativity. This folk art/popular entertainment status combined with its technological basis may have led to its exclusion from legitimate study and omission from discussions of fine art.

Literature Review

The interactive and communicative properties of film were recognized early on in its development as an excellent *tool* for education. Not an entity for study in and of itself, film has long been used to facilitate understanding in other subjects. Thomas Edison was one of the first to notice film's applicability to instruction. He was quoted in 1913 in New York's *Dramatic Mirror* as saying,

Books will soon be obsolete in the schools. Scholars will soon be instructed through the eye. It is possible to teach every branch of human knowledge with the motion picture. Our school system will be completely changed in ten years. (Edison, 1913 as cited in Saettler, 1968, p. 98)

Edison correctly predicted that film would be used to teach a variety of disciplines, but nearly one hundred years later books are still the dominant form of instruction. Since the early twentieth century, film has gone through remarkable changes as an art form, but it has consistently played a supporting role in education. Costanzo (2004) states in a review of National Council of Teachers of English policy that film has gone in and out of favour in curriculum policy over the last century. Over the years it has been used as a means of teaching critical perspectives, as art appreciation and less positively a visual resource in the classroom (Costanzo, 2004).

Many educators believe that traditional educational practices are out of touch with today's students and that popular culture should be integrated into the classroom. Fain (2004) believes that any medium should be used including film, television, or music if it helps capture the

attention of students. He believes with these added stimuli students will “not only learn more, but they will retain more, and they will be better able to apply what they learn after they graduate from high school or college” (Fain, 2004, p. 590). Fain seems to work backwards from the students’ interest in pop culture to finding something in the curriculum to which they can relate. He says of a popular cartoon, “How can we use the fact that so many of our students are interested in South Park as a means to enhance some part of their education?” (Fain, 2004, p. 591). Not all culture has an edifying effect on students. Works of art must be chosen carefully to blend engagement with aesthetic substance. Fain believes that popular films should be used to explain concepts in other subjects such as using the film *The Matrix* to teach Descartes. *The Matrix* is a complex and visually paradigm-shifting film that should merit study in its own right. Film may be helpful in explaining concepts in other subjects, but it is much more valuable as a mirror to our human condition which promotes reflection on personal and social issues in students.

Film may be looked at as a visual text and is thus easily applied to the teaching of literature. Its structure is immediately visible and it is easy for students to draw parallels between written fiction and filmic narratives. Vetric (2004) makes the case for using film in English classes to increase literacy. Vetric states that film is misused as a visual aid or reward in class (Vetric, 2004). His solution is to teach a film like it is a work of literature. In his anecdotal experience, film viewing has increased literacy levels in his students through the interrelatedness of the viewing experience, critical thinking and writing (Vetric, 2004). Vetric chooses films with “which students have already built strong interconnected structures” (Vetric, 2004, p. 43). This leads to an increase in writing output and clearer expression.

Bousted and Ozturk (2004) conducted an empirical study examining whether film viewing influences literacy. In the study, a group of teacher candidates read the novel *Silas Marner* by George Eliot and then watched the BBC film version. They were surveyed to determine the relative strengths of each medium and the illuminative impact of one upon the other (Bousted & Ozturk, 2004). Students in the study stated, “Working with both film and printed text both focused our thoughts and improved our understanding of the author’s work” (Bousted and Ozturk, 2004, p. 55). Results of the study showed that utilizing different media in the classroom results in greater understanding of the work. Bousted and Ozturk state that,

. . . the contrast between a film and a written version of a narrative was shown to be an important pedagogical tool that the students felt should be more readily available in the repertoire of primary practice in the development of reading abilities. (Bousted and Ozturk, 2004, p. 56)

This study demonstrates once again that a film is a powerful and distinct art form that allows qualities of comprehension not possible in the written text. However, when used as simply as a tool to improve reading it is diminished as a unique artistic entity. Even though the study’s participants stated that the film version of *Silas Marner* (1985) had great aesthetic impact, it was still used only to better understand the novel.

Sweeney (2006) argues for the use of film to improve literacy in developmental education. The four major areas of benefit are (a) recontextualization, (b) structure, (c) intertextuality and (d) critical literacy (Sweeney, 2006). Recontextualization involves incorporating experience from students’ outside lives, including film, into their schoolwork. Students with learning

disabilities who may struggle with text are empowered to write by using stories they know well from movies (2006). Film elicits understanding of structure and intertextuality (the relationship between texts) because it is a visual text that draws upon other art forms such as literature and drama. Critical literacy is enhanced due to film's intimate connection to social issues. Sweeney states that after viewing movies students can "be led into critical discussion and reflection on roles in society and the effects of racism, sexism, and more" (Sweeney, 2006, p. 32). Sweeney sees film as a rich art form that invigorates student imagination, confidence and connectedness to social issues. This begs the question of why film does not merit its own field of study within secondary education.

Tognozzi (2010), working in the field of language learning, studied whether using film clips to teach language units would result in greater fluency and cultural knowledge in students. Tognozzi's creative unit had the students watch a short clip from an Italian film and then engage in various communicative and culture learning activities and projects. She found that,

When students are able to be creative with the text and transfer their learning from the original scene to a similar interaction, they become more involved. These interactions target actual communicative situations a learner might face and students will be able to transfer what they learned from rehearsed to unrehearsed scenes in real life—being both linguistically and culturally prepared. (Tognozzi, 2010, pp. 80–81)

Film brought to life the Italian language and culture in a way that a textbook, novel or language tape could not. Students were able to witness gestures, body language, and experience the way Italian is spoken and received by real Italians in an everyday situation.

Film allows the viewer to travel through space and time and identify with characters on screen in an intimate manner. This makes it a valuable resource for studying history. Marcus and Stoddard (2007) conducted a study of high school American history teachers in Connecticut and Wisconsin to determine the extent of film use in their courses. They reported extremely high use of film, with over 90 percent of teachers using at least a portion of a Hollywood film at least once a week (Marcus & Stoddard, 2007). The study found that teachers used film to bring history to life and to illuminate the studied time period. Marcus and Stoddard say,

Given the films' content and imagery, it is not surprising that the most common reason why teachers show these is to develop empathy/bring a time period to life. The violent scenes, human suffering, and powerful images provided the teachers with extensive opportunities to develop empathy with historical characters and to bring the past to life. (Marcus & Stoddard, 2007, p. 314)

In the romantic poet Coleridge's words a "suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge, 1934 version) enabled by the verisimilitude of film allows a student to inhabit a different world and vicariously experience a different life while seated at her desk.

Wonderly (2009) and Carr (2006) both believe that film can be used to teach morality. It accomplishes this goal by evoking the student's sense of empathy and by developing the capacity of moral reasoning (Wonderly, 2009). Carr feels "it might be asked whether the modern 'movie' might provide the most effective post-literary mode of access to 'narrative' human wisdom and insight" (Carr, 2006, p. 321). Both authors explain that students learn morality from watching it play out on the screen. Wonderly states that the value of narrative is not to have students follow

overt moral lessons stated in a particular work, but to have students identify with the character and learn from their actions. Carr echoes this idea stating that humans conceive of themselves as agents in a narrative and thus are able to identify with and learn from characters in films (Carr, 2006). He feels that young people watching movies today are learning moral lessons in the new incarnation of storytelling that is film. Wonderly is in agreement saying, “. . . intuitively, when children learn to have regard for others, their capacities for moral understanding and their inclinations toward virtuous action become heightened. Like literary artworks, film can help facilitate this growth through vivid, realistic portrayals of the human condition” (Wonderly, 2009, p. 7). Film’s dynamic visual form allows students to become invested emotionally in a story and thus learn its lessons all the more keenly.

Movies are a part of popular culture and as such they reflect the prevailing attitudes of society. Brown (2011) and Giroux (2001) see film as a means for students to engage in critical analysis of social issues. For Brown, film provides a way for students to identify with characters facing dilemmas and to empathetically put themselves in the character’s shoes (Brown, 2011). Though documentaries demonstrate what happened in periods of change and expose injustice in society, they may be too didactic and fail to engage the viewer on a visceral level. The dramatic genre of film allows students to learn from a character’s motives and actions in crucial situations. Brown explains,

Dramas present another’s life-like situations, and this process opens up questioning: Why did s/he do that? What are the conditions that provide the environment for this situation? How else might s/he have responded? What other options were there? The situation and the

choices to be made are not clear-cut and therefore neither are the possible ‘answers’. The viewer, like the character, needs to make choices. (Brown, 2011, p. 236)

Film enmeshes the viewer in the narrative engaging their imagination and enabling them to feel the power of a character’s dilemma. The qualities of empathy and critical analysis can then be applied by the students to their personal lives and to society as a whole. Giroux (2001) feels film can be used to open a discourse regarding power structures and engage students in political debate in the classroom. He feels that the medium is an excellent way to examine ideologies, stereotypes and questions of identity that are contained within the film text (Giroux, 2001).

Giroux explains,

The decline of public life demands that we use film as a way of raising questions that are increasingly lost to the forces of market relations, commercialization, and privatization. As the opportunities for civic education and public engagement begin to disappear, film may provide one of the few media left that enables conversations that connect politics, personal experiences, and public life to larger social issues. (Giroux, 2001, p. 588)

Giroux sees film as both a reflection of politics and culture and as a force that constructs societal attitudes. In the discussions and written work which follow viewing, students critically examine the ideas and politics of the film, but also their own preconceptions and investment in the narrative (Giroux, 2001).

Katz (1971) sees film as having a humanizing effect on students because of its capacity for interaction. The experience of interaction between viewer and film, in discussions with other

students and in particular amongst the individual's own ideas results in the transformation of the viewing experience into knowledge (Katz, 1971). Katz recognizes that film is valuable in and of itself and that

... an awareness of how the film's ideas and techniques affect each other, allows the viewer to move continually from the art object—the film—to the ideas and context (historical, cultural, social, economic, etc.) which surround it—and-back again to the art object.
(Katz, 1971, p. 119)

The study of film technique reveals the interplay between form and content to the student and leads to a greater interactive experience. The greater the experience provided by the medium the more growth can occur in the student.

Smith (1971) explains that film is an art form which students should be taught to appreciate. Film qualifies as art because it is (a) vivid and interesting to perception and (b) says something important in a special way about human existence (Smith, 1971). Smith believes that pedagogical trends which promote the “image of the child as a creative artist and an excessive devotion to the cultivation of his inner life foster a subjectivism that downgrades other important aspects of learning in the arts” (Smith, 1971, p. 273). He feels that aesthetic education should return to focusing more on content and an understanding of the discipline. Teachers should hone the ability of students to judge and process visual images for their own well-being and also to prevent censorship by those in power (Smith, 1971). Smith presciently realizes the importance of art as a humanizing agent in a society where people have become absorbed in technology. Though personal taste cannot be accounted for, Smith believes that teachers should want their

students to watch good films. To this end he believes that film exemplars should be used for instruction. Through open discussion and the defense of their opinions, students learn how to judge aesthetic value.

Though few would question film's mass appeal or its creative brilliance, many would question its inclusion in the regular curriculum. As shown in this chapter, film's origins are with the common people and it thrives and evolves because it is an entertainment commodity. In straining to find works of literature, drama or music that will engage the minds of students, educators often miss the art form that is right in front of them. The literature demonstrates that film is an extremely valuable resource though it is used primarily as a pedagogical aid. It engages students in subject matter, teaches morality, enlivens history, improves literacy, and facilitates language learning and student counseling. In these areas film is flexing its formal muscles over its predecessors, literature and drama. Its form allows it to convey meaning in more intimate and dynamic ways and this has led to its slow acceptance in schools. This situation seems however somewhat akin to holding open a window with *The Catcher in the Rye*—it will do the job, but that is not its intrinsic value. Film's worth lies in allowing students to develop empathy, increase critical awareness of their society and cultivate self-knowledge through aesthetic appreciation. All of these concepts can be learned from film when it is recognized and studied as a proper art form.

CHAPTER 2: FILM AND MEANING

Film is a recent phenomenon in the long and ongoing expression of beauty and the essence of the human condition through art. It is a product of our modern/post-modern era: mechanical, mass-consumed, placeless, dynamic and rich in culture and history. It is an art that is constructed by many people: actors, cinematographers, screenwriters, and most importantly the director. Once a viewer realizes that every shot in a film is there for a reason, it changes his conception of a movie. Each choice the director makes, be it camera angle, lighting, mise en scène (scene composition), or editing, is made with an intention to convey a certain meaning. As soon as the director conceives of a shot, he is having a dialogue with the future viewer. It is through these technical choices that the director tells a story, creates something beautiful and communicates meaning to the viewer. This chapter will examine the interplay between film and the viewer and discuss how meaning is made and understood in motion pictures.

Film seems camouflaged by its popularity. It is seen as entertainment when it is art. People consume it more than painting, photography and perhaps even prose, but its place as legitimate art is inversely proportionate to its public appeal. Why is this so? It would seem that because it is so life-like, so close in its approximation to reality that it is not considered an art object. It succeeds so seamlessly in transporting the viewer, that when the film has finished he may not feel an artistic experience has occurred. The film is not beheld and contemplated in the same manner as a painting or statue in a museum or gallery because we move along within it. John Berger says in *Ways of Seeing*,

The visual arts have always existed within a certain preserve; originally this preserve was magical or sacred. But it was also physical: it was the place, the cave, the building, in

which, or for which, the work was made. The experience of art, which was the experience of ritual, was set apart from the rest of life – precisely in order to be able to exercise power over it. Later the preserve of art became a social one. (Berger, 1972, p. 32)

In the past, the meaning of the work of art was tied to its physical location. People travelled to the church or shrine, then later to the museum to experience art. There is no “place” for film. It is free to be watched on a computer screen, in a theatre, on a television, or on an iPod. It is portable, and though its story may contain real places and real people it is unreal and without true origin. As it seems author-less it becomes even more a part of the public domain. Berger says in the preceding quotation that art became part of the social preserve. How true this is of film whose origin was that of a marketable commodity intended to be consumed by large groups of people. The early studio films were designed to appeal to the masses and today movie-going and movie nights at home are a time for people to socialize. Film, art’s modern manifestation, is embedded in the culture. Its privileged position, allows its practitioners- directors, screenwriters, cinematographers, and actors the opportunity to engage millions of people in an intimate dialogue. Paul Valery, the twentieth century French poet and philosopher says of the changing face of the arts in his work *Aesthetics*, “*The Conquest of Ubiquity*”,

In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which can no longer remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique

of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art. (Valery, 1964, p. 225)

Film is an example of such change. Its power, wrought from a combination of those arts that came before it- drama, the novel and photography, allow it to have unprecedented access to the mind of the viewer. Occupying such a central place in everyday life, film's power to convey ideas is immense. Thus, it is important to understand how the imagination is affected by film and how we are changed in the process.

Film is an art form that is created to be reproduced and marketed. A film can be shown to hundreds of people at a time, as often as desired, in any location. What effect does this have on the power of its artistic message? Walter Benjamin in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" believed that the work of art has an aura that is diminished through reproduction. The original work of art's authenticity creates this mystical "aura" which is perceived by the viewer. Copying an original "detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition" (Benjamin, 1936, p. 221) and lessens its value. Benjamin says of film,

By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced . . . Its social significance, particularly in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage. (Benjamin, 1936, p. 221)

Benjamin's criticism of reproduced art, and in particular film, rests upon this vague, undefinable notion of aura. If this aura affects the beholder and imprints the work of art in their memory, do not the *Mona Lisa* and the runway scene from *Casablanca* (1942) have the same effect? Film liberates art from place. Its impact is not lessened because it is not beheld in some sort of mystic ritual. The narrative or message imparted by a particular film is not diluted by reproduction. Its form is intended to be portable, re-viewable, and to bring the experience to the viewer and not vice-versa. Benjamin's contempt for film may arise more out of a need to defend old artistic media against modern forms. Umberto Eco discusses this idea in his essay, "From Internet to Gutenberg",

More than one thousand years later Victor Hugo in his *Notre Dame de Paris*, shows us a priest, Claude Frollo, pointing his finger first to a book, then to the towers and to the images of his beloved cathedral, and saying "ceci tuera cela", this will kill that. (The book will kill the cathedral, alphabet will kill images). (Eco, 1996, para. 5)

New forms arise in which art finds expression. There are no greater or lesser vehicles for artists. The director and the sculptor both seek to impart a message to the art-viewer. Film has no physical substance. Holding a film reel has no artistic value whatsoever, but as soon as the light hits the celluloid a direct link to the human psyche is established. It is not a masterpiece of canvas or stone that must be guarded and viewed by the elite in a specific location. It can be seen by anyone, anywhere. This accessibility does not divest it of power or artistic legitimacy. Its meaning and effect is intrinsic and its power to enthrall the viewer does not lie in an aura bestowed upon it by tradition or iconic status.

A Visual Narrative

Though painting, photography and sculpture may tell a visual story, it is not central to their essence. They have great impact as singular visual entities, which are studied and contemplated. Drama, literature and film are “moving” media in which the consumer is taken along on a journey through her imagination. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the Romantic poet, had this to say of the process in his *Biographia Literaria*,

. . . it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.

(Coleridge, 1817/1965, pp. 168–169)

Coleridge’s term “suspension of disbelief” illustrates the relationship between the film and the viewer. The viewer agrees to pretend, to participate in the narrative, and the meaning-making process becomes a two-way street. In participating, the viewer utilizes her own beliefs, ideas, memories and philosophy to create meaning in partnership with the filmmaker. There is an acceptance that goes along with watching, and the physical process of watching a film assumes this agreement. The viewer sits motionless and stares unflinchingly at the screen for two hours watching a story unfold on the screen and in her mind. There is great responsibility for the director in this tacit agreement. He has been given the trust of the viewer who watches and feels the story from shot to shot. Coleridge’s suspension of disbelief naturally involves caveats for the film-watcher, as political and social ideas, particularly hegemonic discourses, are present in most

films. It is of great importance, then, for young people to learn to see these sometimes-subtle ideas that lie behind the overt storyline. Critical analysis of technique and theme aids in understanding how certain feelings and attitudes are created in the mind of the viewer.

Film is a narrative that is told by a director harnessing the power of the camera to create effects and alter reality. Colin MacCabe in his essay “Realism in the Cinema” compares a film to the classic realist novel. Though two very different genres, their narrative structures are similar. He says,

In the classic realist novel the narrative prose functions as a metalanguage that can state all the truths in the object language – those words held in inverted commas – and can also explain the relation of this object language to the real. The metalanguage can thereby explain the relation of this object language to the world and the strange methods by which the object languages attempt to express truths which are straightforwardly conveyed in the metalanguage. (MacCabe, 1974, p. 36)

Though it would appear in the novel that the characters are telling the story through what they say in quotation marks (MacCabe’s inverted commas), the prose that surrounds their words is another discourse entirely. MacCabe refers to this as metalanguage. The metalanguage comments on the actions and statements of the characters, and though seemingly hidden, is the dominant discourse. MacCabe calls this a “hierarchy amongst the discourses” (McCabe, 1974, p. 37) in which the metalanguage is supreme due to its omniscience. This hierarchy of discourses can be applied to film. The metalanguage, which surrounds the words and actions of the characters, is the way the scene is shot by the camera. The angle, lighting, focus, shot length

and sequencing used by the director tell their own story. The director controls how the image is presented to the viewer, what information is revealed and how the events are narrated. Viewers unconsciously gain information from the calculated use of these visual elements. Just as in real life when body language, tone and gesture can alter the meaning of spoken words, or in the absence of words silently communicate intention, the director creates meaning through the artistry of cinematography. Thus, the story as revealed by the actors in the film is but one part of the greater narrative and the aesthetic experience of the viewer. Though the viewer brings his own experience and intelligence to bear upon understanding the story that unfolds on screen, his eye is ultimately that of the director.

Film's Unique Formal Qualities

The form of the film allows it to shape meaning in various ways. Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum 'the medium is the message' describes this situation perfectly. The medium, film, shot by a motion picture camera affects the way the viewer experiences a story. The film theorist Jan Peters talks of this process in his work, *Pictorial Signs and the Language of Film*,

The difference between the way in which we perceive the object-in-picture and the manner in which the real object is given to us constitutes the form of the picture. In other words: form is what makes us aware that we are not dealing with the real object . . . a change in form as from a long shot of a human person to a close up of his face does not alter the degree of likeness of both pictures with their respective objects, but it does make us look at these objects differently (Peters, 1981, p. 10)

This idea of being made to re-conceive objects and people because of the attitude of the camera is central to how the film creates meaning. Elaborating on Peters' example the long shot can make the character appear isolated or insignificant. Moving to an extreme close up shows tension and creates a mood of anxiety. The feelings that are created by the camera's position and the framing of the shot enhance the story being played out by the actors in the film.

The shot is the basic unit of the film. What the director chooses to do within the frame of the shot is the beginning point of her artistry. Film theorist Christian Metz speaks of this idea in his work *Film Language*,

Film, like verbal language, can be used merely as a vehicle, without any artistic intention, with designation (denotation) governing it alone. Consequently, the art of the cinema, like verbal art, is, so to speak, driven one notch upward. In the final analysis it is by the wealth of its connotations that Proust's great novel can be distinguished—in semiological terms—from a cookbook, or a film of Visconti's from a medical documentary. (Metz, 1974, p. 76)

The director could simply frame a scene, adequately light it, use medium focus and then allow the actors to move about and speak their lines as they would in theatre. This however would be less artistic for it would convey little beauty or meaning to the viewer. In fact, how the scene is composed is vitally important to how the viewer understands what she sees (Corrigan & White, 2004). As MacCabe says, the composition itself becomes narrative. Camera angle is a clear example of this idea. When the camera points down at a character, that character is diminished, whereas when the camera points up to a figure he is regarded as superior and dominant. The position of objects and characters within the frame, spacing, frame-size and lighting all articulate

meaning. Some of these techniques become widespread and go on to create entire genres of films. This is true of darkly lit street scenes evocative of human evil that became associated with film noir or the killer's point of view shot found in horror films.

Realism in Film

Film takes great steps to conceal the techniques that create realism. In art forms such as painting and sculpture, the frame and the art object are readily perceived. In terms of the imagination, film is more synonymous with the novel. The physical object, the book in one's hands or the screen one is seated before is quickly forgotten and the story is wholly participated in. Rene Magritte's famous surrealist painting entitled *The Treachery of Images* (Magritte, 1928-29) sheds light on how film uses visual imagery. The painting shows a picture of a smoking pipe with the words "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (This is not a pipe) written beneath. It is indeed not a pipe, but an image of a pipe. When looking at the painting, it is almost as if one's mind comes to a screeching halt when the words are understood. Magritte is right; it is not a pipe, but we imagine it to be one and instantly connect the image of the pipe with a real one. The painting is exposing our meaning-making process, and the jarring feeling we receive when we read the text shows us how rutted the pathway is from signifier to signified. The majority of films made today, unlike Magritte, do not confront the viewer with the fact that they are watching a work of art, on the contrary they try to hide it.

Mainstream movies follow a style of cutting and shooting that guides the viewer through the story and establishes realism. Because it allows for seamless transitions and the easy unfolding of the story, it is known as continuity editing. At the beginning of the 20th century, the legendary director D.W. Griffith was experimenting with this style of shooting in films such as *Birth of a Nation* (1915). The process has been perfected over time and is now referred to as the

classical Hollywood style (Kolker, 2006,). Shots are carefully arranged so as to minimize distraction and the viewer is able to concentrate on the story alone. The fragmentary structure of the film, made up of many shots, is rendered invisible. The following is an example of shot sequencing using continuity editing,

1. The woman looks up toward the door.
 2. Shot of the door opening as man enters.
 3. The woman looks up surprised.
 4. The man approaches and sits down at the table.
 5. Shot of the third person in the room, who raises his eyebrows.
 6. The man and the woman talk in two-shot (both are together in the frame).
 7. Cut to an over-the-shoulder from the woman to the man.
 8. Reverse shot over the shoulder from the man to the woman.
 9. Repeat this pattern, perhaps inserting a one-shot of each.
 10. Return to the two shot of the two people talking.
- (Kolker, 2006, p. 38)

The example shows how the viewer is made to feel as if they were really there. The camera looks, but they feel as though they are looking. Though the two shots of the woman looking and the door opening are separate, they are connected in the viewer's mind. In Hollywood style, shots are designed to prevent the viewer from noticing the artificiality of the filmic environment. Through this technique the viewer becomes involved with the narrative. Though she is watching a story unfold, she soon becomes part of it, in some ways taking on the identity of the characters in the film. This effect is referred to as "suturing". Rey Chow explains in her essay "Film and Cultural Identity",

As expressed through suture— literally a ‘sewing-up’ of gaps —cinematic identification is an eminently ideological process: subjectivity is imagined primarily as a lack, which is then exploited through its desire to know, by the visual field enunciated by the omnipotent filmic apparatus, which withholds more than it reveals (Chow, 1998, p. 170)

The director shows us where to look, then shows us what or who to look at and how to look at it. The viewer gradually becomes sewn into the fabric of the story and is thus able to more fully understand and empathize with the plight of characters.

From the opening shot the director controls our vision. He leads us from one place to another and manipulates our gaze so that we see what he wants us to, and how he wants us to see it. As we continue to look (at what the character is looking at) and then see (what the character sees), we naturally imagine ourselves to some degree to be the character. The film theorist Kaja Silverman says, “The operation of suture is successful at the moment that the viewing subject says, ‘Yes, that’s me,’ or ‘That’s what I see’”(Silverman, 1983, p. 205). Film is thus able to utilize the mind’s capacity for finding meaning. It involves the viewer in the story and allows them to imagine themselves as part of it.

Film is not limited to Hollywood in market or theory. The continuity editing of the classic Hollywood style is but one kind of filmic experience. There have been many opposing philosophies on the purpose of film and two stand out in history to date: French film theorist André Bazin who championed realism, and the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein, a proponent of montage. Bazin, a religious man and founder of the influential *Cahiers du Cinéma* believed that reality should be captured with as little human interference as possible. He advocated a

deep-focus, long-take style. This style would allow the viewer to see the world purely in a manner that would “reveal the face of God” (Lapsley & Westlake, 2006, p. 160). He felt that strong directorial presence and techniques such as montage went against realism. The film critic Peter Matthews describes Bazin’s ideology,

Bazin distrusted montage on the grounds that its dynamic juxtaposition of images hurtles the viewer along a predetermined path of attention, the aim being to construct a synthetic reality in support of a propagandist message. To Bazin this was a minor heresy - since it arrogated the power of God, who alone is entitled to confer meaning on the universe.

(Matthews, 1999, para. 11)

Bazin’s desire was not to control the viewer’s gaze and ideas through technique but to allow the viewer time to study the scene and therein find meaning.

Eisenstein, who worked in the 1920’s, created films in opposition to the Hollywood style and utilized the technique of montage to maximum advantage creating scenes of great visual conflict. As a Marxist, he believed that film should be used to instill revolutionary fervor in the viewer. He accomplished this task by editing shots in quick succession each full of meaning and visual power. The goal was to cause visual disharmony by juxtaposing shots of conflicting images (Kolker, 2006). Meaning arises not from the single shot but by the stringing of shots together. Eisenstein describes montage in his work, *Film Form*,

If montage is to be compared with something, then a phalanx of montage pieces, of shots, should be compared to the series of explosions of an internal combustion engine, driving forward its automobile or tractor: for, similarly, the dynamics of montage serve as impulses driving forward the total film. (Eisenstein, 1949, p. 38)

Eisenstein sought to challenge the viewer and force her to respond to the violent clash of images on-screen. For Eisenstein the essence of film was political, almost propagandist. Meaning was assembled by the director and then fired out at the audience in montage. His film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) is a seminal work of art and contains one of the most important scenes in film history. It is known as the 'Odessa Steps' sequence and depicts the Czarist army attacking innocent civilians. Eisenstein juxtaposes violent images of the army marching, and firing, with fleeing peasants' screaming faces.

Film is a meaning-rich medium. The mise en scène of the single frame, camera movement, editing and lighting all combine to transform a multitude of single shots into a cohesive narrative in the mind of the viewer. Film is capable of creating lasting aesthetic and ideological impressions. As a society we teach, learn, entertain and socialize using cinema. It is not rooted in a particular place or is it designed for a particular class and thus has great opportunity to disseminate ideas. It is an unreal visual re-presentation of real things in a narrative structure that is believed to be real for a time in the mind of the viewer. Though its artistic form may be complex, it achieves its simple, artistic goal, which is to beautifully explore the human condition and share these insights with the viewer.

CHAPTER 3: CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE VIEWER

It has been established in the preceding chapter that film creates an intimate visual connection with the viewer through which a story is told and meaning is conveyed. The ideas and emotions of this filmic narrative are expressed by the actors and the screenplay, but also by the cinematic techniques employed by the director and film crew. These techniques tell their own visual story by creating mood, expressing ideas and communicating the inner thoughts and emotions of characters. This chapter will examine (a) *mise en scène*, (b) lighting, (c) camerawork and (d) editing and demonstrate how these cinematic techniques shape the aesthetic experience of the viewer.

Mise en Scène

It may be said that even in our daily lives we see reality through a frame. Though we are free to look where we please, our field of vision is limited to the roughly 180 degrees of foreground we perceive. This field of vision is our frame. It constantly moves and brings certain objects or people into focus depending on their importance. We may pause at certain moments to behold a beautiful vista and contemplate it as we would a painting, unconsciously framing the scene. The screen is the physical frame which limits what we see when we watch a movie, but what appears on the screen has already been framed by the camera which recorded the action. This frame replaces our normal view of reality and we cede control of our vision to the director and look out through the eye of the camera. The fundamental difference between reality and a filmed narrative is of course that the scene on screen, and how the camera will shoot it, has been carefully thought out beforehand. The director controls how we see, by means of camera technique, and also what we see, by purposely placing everything within the frame to be shot. Setting, costuming, prop choices, the blocking of actors, the placement of objects within each shot and the relationship of

all elements to one another are elements of the filmic reality known as *mise en scène* (Sobchack & V. Sobchack, 1987).

The term *mise en scène* is originally a theatrical term (Casebier, 1976) that translates as “placed in a scene” (Corrigan & White, 2004). Its use in the cinematic world is understandable in that the director literally sets the stage for the film by deciding in advance what is to be shot. The director’s carefully constructed reality prior to shooting is known as the *profilmic world* (Fabe, 2004). Once the camera rolls, the director may change this real world dramatically with camera technique. Bobker (1969) discusses this formal difference of film,

The still photographer “composes” his *mise en scène* and freezes it, seeking only to capture a single moment . . . The filmmaker, however, creates his visual compositions in a flexible, ever-changing arena. He can, in effect, propel the audience about, enabling it to view a scene from a thousand positions—so close as to defy the intensity of a microscope, so far away as to reveal an entire city. (p. 69)

Mise en scène is both static and dynamic and is a central consideration of each shot. The *profilmic* composition of the scene and the initial significance of its composition are static, but the movement and focus of the camera and character action will often produce dramatic changes in meaning before its conclusion. The cliché of the director making a frame of his fingers to envision how a setting or potential shot will look once filmed bears a great deal of truth. He is planning the look of the shot in his mind and sees in a particular natural setting the elements that will convey narrative power.

The director's aims are to create a beautiful work of art, tell a story and express ideas and emotions. *Mise en scène* allows the director the opportunity to create a particular visual world reflecting specific themes or creating distinct moods. One can look at narrative as a vehicle for the director's overarching views of human nature or society. The director expresses himself through a multitude of vignettes each of which are enhanced by their own *mise en scène*. The storyline thus provides a structure in which many disparate scenes, many without actors, showing landscapes, cityscapes or more detailed shots of nature (a leaf blowing in the wind, a dog panting in the sun) are connected through their similarity of tone. In this sense, *mise en scène* has a deeper significance than merely as a staging ground for narrative action. In the hands of a talented director it becomes a means of communication of beauty and feeling to the viewer without the use of dialogue. Kolker (2011) says of the work of the Italian film director Michelangelo Antonioni,

Antonioni believed that the background—or, in his case, the character's environment—should be foregrounded, the characters constituting only one part of the *mise-en-scène*, which defined them by where they were, what was around them, and how they were observed by the camera. (para. 2)

If the character is constantly the dominant figure in the shot, and each shot simply follows the flow of the plot, the viewer is not given time to reflect on and digest the filmed world. In devoting time to shooting the environment the viewer is more able to imagine herself in that filmed reality. In discussing Antonioni's style, Kolker (2011) states, "the themes of his films were not reducible to plot but rather explore how the spaces inhabited by his characters explain

their predicaments—something they themselves cannot adequately do in words” (para. 3). Mise en scène is a silent expression of the characters’ frames of mind and their place within greater societal structures. The director may also use the various elements of the mise en scène in a godlike manner to present information and meaning to the viewer of which the character maybe unaware.

Mise en scène creates verisimilitude on screen and functions on a psychological level conveying meaning about the filmed world, the narrative, and the characters’ natures. When one looks at early films of the twentieth century, their artificiality is glaring and it is nearly impossible to suspend disbelief and follow the story. The iconic director D.W. Griffith was largely responsible for changing the face of the art form by exerting tight control of the look and feel of each scene. Fabe (2004) discusses this paradigm shift,

Griffith, more than other contemporary filmmakers, took the time to cast actors who looked the part and carefully rehearsed the players before shooting the scenes (a practice rare in early filmmaking). He also chose costumes, props, and settings with an eye to providing narrative information that would enhance the film’s dramatic effect. (p. 3)

This attention to detail infused the film with greater realism. It demonstrates how the director’s broad thematic vision is built up through a multitude of smaller stylistic choices.

The mise en scène of German expressionist films of the 1920s broke new ground by using hyper-stylized, nonrealistic settings to relate the mental states of characters. Robert Wiene’s seminal film of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) conveyed the fear and insanity of its characters through its wildly exaggerated and distorted sets (Barsam, 2007). The emphasis was

not on accomplishing a smooth representation of reality, but to create a fantastic, menacing world that externalized the horrors of Dr. Caligari's mind. Gianetti and Leach (1998) describe the expressionist *mise en scène*,

The declared aim of most German expressionists was to eliminate nature for a state of absolute abstraction. It is a style steeped in anxiety and terror. The sets are deliberately artificial: flat, obviously painted, with no attempt to preserve the conventions of perspective and scale. They are meant to represent a state of mind, not a place. (p. 281)

The sets seem like pictures of nightmares. They are dark, foreboding and off-balance with bent buildings and pointed, twisted trees. The lines and angles of streets and rooms create a claustrophobic and confused atmosphere. Costumes and objects are disproportionate in size and every effort is made to make the normal appear unnatural. In Wiene's film we see the extreme end of the *mise en scène* spectrum. The setting is the unrestrained, inside-out expression of Dr. Caligari's depraved mind into his environment.

Design

It is clear from the work of D. W. Griffith and Robert Wiene that the look of objects, places and actors within each shot creates a film's particular atmosphere. This aspect of *mise en scène* is known as design (Barsam, 2007) and involves setting, props and costumes. All elements contained within the shot can function on two levels: a) to create realism and b) to convey information about plot and characters. Whether the film is a historical drama or science fiction, it is important for the director to create a believable and logical world (Corrigan & White, 2004). The design personnel attend to the smallest details of setting and costuming to draw the viewer

into the story. A film with an inauthentic *mise en scène* appears artificial and prevents the audience from suspending their disbelief. Failure to maintain coherent design may also lead to glaring mistakes such as anachronisms or continuity errors. Anachronisms occur when an object, style of dress or expression is from the wrong time period, such as a Roman soldier wearing a wristwatch. Continuity errors are changes in props, sets or costumes that are not self-consistent often due to editing oversights. Examples of such mistakes may be an actor's shirt, wet from the rain appears suddenly dry or an untouched glass full of water in one shot becomes empty in the next. Stylistically, *mise en scène*'s that are overloaded and confusing or commonplace and boring may detract from the narrative and lose the interest of the viewer.

The design of the *mise en scène*, along with establishing authenticity, provides deeper symbolic information through setting, costumes and props. The setting enhances a film's overall theme as in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), and may convey changes in the character's mindset or mood. This deeper significance is also illustrated by the design of costumes and props. Gianetti and Leach (1998) discuss this quality,

In the most sensitive films and plays, costumes and makeup aren't merely frills added to enhance an illusion, but aspects of character and theme. Their style can reveal class, self-image, even psychological states. Depending on their cut, texture and bulk, certain costumes can suggest agitation, fastidiousness, delicacy, and so on. A costume then is a medium, especially in the cinema, where a close-up of a fabric can suggest information that's independent even of the wearer. (p. 289)

The characters are fleshed out by the details of their dress and the objects they use. In *Hamlet*, Polonius says to Laertes, “ For the apparel oft proclaims the man” (Shakespeare, trans.1982, 1. 3. 72). This is true of how the director dresses characters to reveal and enhance their personality traits. Examples of expressive costuming and props include: the Little Tramp’s derby hat, baggy pants and bamboo cane from *City Lights* (1931) which contrast his poverty with his indefatigable dignity; Atticus Finch’s black framed glasses in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) which symbolize reason in the face of lawlessness; Neo’s black leather trench coat in *The Matrix* (1999) which represents a maverick in a structured oppressive world; and Scarlett O’Hara’s dresses in *Gone With the Wind* (1939) which reflect her status, resourcefulness and passion. Props are also imbued with symbolic meaning and serve as thematic cornerstones. Corrigan and White (2004) give an example of this facet of props,

In *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), when Gene Kelly transforms an ordinary umbrella into a gleeful expression of his new love, an object whose normal function is to protect a person from the rain becomes better used as an extension of a dance: the pouring rain makes little difference to a man in love. (p. 51)

Props sometimes take on an a mystical significance such as Charles Foster Kane’s childhood sled, Rosebud in *Citizen Kane* (1941) or the mysterious contents of a stolen briefcase in *Pulp Fiction* (1994). The ambiguity of these props allows the viewer to assign their own meanings to the objects.

Composition

The composition of visual elements in the *mise en scène* affects how they are perceived by the viewer. The director is acutely aware of this fact and positions characters and objects to convey meaning to the viewer. One of the key compositional techniques used by directors is known as the rule of thirds (Barsam, 2007). Each shot is envisioned as a grid with nine separate squares. Each shot has a top, middle and bottom as well as a left, centre and right. The director plans the *mise en scène* using this framework. Gianetti and Leach (1998) discuss this visual structure,

Certain areas of the frame can suggest symbolic ideas. By placing an object or character within a particular section of the frame, the filmmaker can radically alter his or her comment on that object or character. Placement within the frame is another instance of how form is actually content. (p. 44)

The *mise en scène* reflects how we see the world. In reality, we look at what is most significant to us at any given time. The person we are talking to is directly in the middle of our field of vision. We watch a baseball game and focus on the action. Likewise in film the most important characters or objects occupy the central portion of the screen and are considered dominant. In keeping with our natural visual tendencies, characters and objects to the sides of the frame are viewed as inconsequential. Our psychological associations with space affect our perception of elements placed in certain areas of the frame (Monaco, 2009). We see characters placed in top of the frame as powerful and in control, and those in the bottom as weak and servile (Gianetti & Leach, 1998). Positioning within this grid has become standardized through use and most

characters' eyes are placed along the top horizontal line or even more strikingly at an intersection with a vertical grid line (Monahan, 2006).

The rule of thirds allows the director to create balance in the *mise en scène*. This is easily achieved when a character is placed in the central portion of the shot; however, when a strong visual element is placed to the side of the frame, the other half of the image must be equally weighted to symbolically restore equilibrium. Characters' values may be assessed by their positions within this balancing scale. Gianetti and Leach (1998) discuss this idea,

Isolated figures and objects tend to be heavier than those in a cluster. Sometimes one object—merely by virtue of its isolation—can balance a whole group of otherwise equal objects. In many movies, the protagonist is shown apart from a hostile group, yet the two seem evenly matched despite the arithmetical differences. (p. 57)

This balance may also be achieved by the use of colour in certain portions of the grid or the positioning of objects of intrinsic significance, such as a gun on a table. Directors may leave the frame unbalanced on purpose to convey a character's disenfranchisement or to create an oppressive atmosphere by having the sky occupy two-thirds of the frame (Monahan, 2006). Sometimes the frame is completely balanced resulting in each half reflecting the other. This technique may enhance themes of order or simply be used to create aesthetically pleasing compositions (Monahan, 2006). When characters are grouped together their pattern and number indicate the dynamics of their relationships. A movie dealing with infidelity, for example, may consistently use a triangular composition when the three central characters are together.

The *mise en scène* is a three-dimensional space that allows the director to locate elements in the foreground, middle ground, and background. Just as with the two-dimensional screen, characters and objects take on meaning when placed in these positions. Sobchack and V. Sobchack (1987) discuss quality of film composition in *Citizen Kane* (1941),

While Mrs. Kane signs guardianship of her son over to Mr. Thatcher at a table in the foreground, and Charlie's father hovers ineffectually in the middle distance, young Charlie is visible through the window playing innocently in the snow. Thus the free spirited boy is present in the viewer's consciousness as we see his mother put in motion the series of events which will deprive him of his innocence and freedom. (p. 87)

The authority of a character depends on where they appear in the depth of the shot. Young Kane's mother dominates the screen in the foreground and this enhances her thematic power. Kane is portrayed as small and powerless in the background. This aspect of *mise en scène* is known as deep space composition (Monahan, 2006). The further a character is from the foreground, the smaller their relative size in the frame and the more they are perceived as weak or ineffectual. Another indicator of a character's strength and control is the territory the character occupies within the depth of the shot. Gianetti and Leach (1998) explain this idea,

. . . space is one of the principal mediums (*sic*) of communication in film. The way that people are arranged in space can tell us a lot about their social and psychological relationships. In film, dominant characters are almost always given more space to occupy

than others—unless the film deals with the loss of power or the social insignificance of a character. (p. 62)

Powerful characters occupy more territory and are blocked accordingly in the mise en scène. Characters arranged in tight groups may imply closeness and solidarity or a loss of freedom depending on the narrative. Corrigan and White (2004) discuss director Fritz Lang's memorable use of space in *Metropolis* (1926) where “the oppression of individuality appears instantly in the mechanical movements of rectangles of marching workers” (p. 56). This is a clear example of composition alone providing the viewer with information through character proxemics. The atmosphere of the mise en scène is ever changing due to the movement of characters and their shifting spatial relationships.

Lighting

The physical composition and detailing of the mise en scène provide the viewer with a great deal of information about the characters and the narrative. The director is further able to convey meaning and create atmosphere through the use of lighting. Light and shadow affect our state of mind and the way we perceive our surroundings. A cemetery at noon is picturesque and peaceful, but after nightfall becomes an eerie or frightening place. A room lit by florescent light seems clinical and soulless, but one lit by lamps or soft sunlight appears cozy and inviting. Bobker (1969) says, “Light, then, is the substance with which the filmmaker ‘paints’. The subtle use of light to illuminate, create mood, give character, and communicate has elevated lighting for film from its craft origins to its present artistic level” (p. 79). Using both natural and artificial light, the director and the cinematographer are able to alter the look of actors and sets and focus the viewer's attention on specific elements within the frame. Film is dynamic both physically

within each shot and chronologically from beginning to end and the lighting is in a constant state of flux. As power relationships and themes change through the course of the narrative, the lighting will often reflect and highlight those changes (Casebier, 1976).

In its use of lighting to create emotion in the viewer, film is indebted to its artistic predecessor painting. Of particular significance is a technique developed in the Baroque period known as chiaroscuro. Chiaroscuro is an Italian term that means “an effect of contrasted light and shadow created by light falling unevenly or from a particular direction on something” (“chiaroscuro”, 2005). The 17th century European painters Caravaggio and Rembrandt were masters of this style, which created powerful visual effects. Kitson (1987) says of Rembrandt,

Like Caravaggio he tended to concentrate the light on the forms in the centre of the composition and to leave the background in darkness. But whereas Caravaggio’s darkness is space-denying, Rembrandt’s is space-creating. Varied by half-lights and reflected lights and sometimes by light from more than one source, it is intensely luminous. Its effect is spiritual and poetic rather than dramatic. (p. 633)

This description of Rembrandt’s work could easily be applied to a thoughtfully constructed film where the quality and direction of light enhance the aesthetic and thematic goals of the film (Watson, 1990). A director will use natural light whenever possible and this may be modified for artistic effect through the use of reflectors and shadow-producing objects. When shooting indoors and on sets artificial lighting is used to alter the mood of the *mise en scène* and influence the viewer’s impressions of characters and objects (Sobchack & V. Sobchack, 1987). The two main instruments of artificial light are spotlights which produce hard, direct light and floodlights

which create softer, more spread out illumination (Barsam, 2007). Typically a three-point lighting system is used, which involves a key light, fill light and backlight. The key light is the main source illuminating the dominant visual element of the shot. This direct lighting produces an effect known as fall-off where light drops severely or gradually into shadow from objects and people (Casebier, 1976). The amount of fall-off is regulated by the mitigating and balancing effect of the fill light. Backlight has the effect of fleshing out the characters three-dimensionally and providing depth to the *mise en scène*. The arrangement and intensity of these lights dramatically affect the mood of each shot. Monaco (2009) describes the aesthetic significance of lighting,

Needless to say, all the lighting codes that operate in photography operate in film as well. Full front lighting washes out a subject; overhead lighting dominates it; lighting from below makes it lugubrious; highlighting can call attention to details (hair and eyes most often); backlighting can either dominate a subject or highlight it; sidelighting is capable of dramatic chiaroscuro effect. (p. 219)

Lighting can have a myriad of effects and communicate symbolically and tonally with the viewer. Stylistically lighting is divided into high key and low key. High key lighting floods the scene with light. It creates little shadow and is used in comedies, adventure movies and musicals because it conveys a cheerful, positive and carefree atmosphere (Barsam, 2004). Low key lighting produces a great deal of shadow and stark contrasts between light and dark. It is synonymous with tragedies, the horror genre and crime films where the overall mood is sombre, depressing, and filled with anxiety (Casebier, 1976). Low key lighting allows for a great deal of

visual information to be passed to the viewer. Our common associations with light and dark are often played upon to present characters as good or evil. Characters move in and out of shadow or are painted with light to highlight certain aspects of their nature and how they change through the course of the narrative. Sobchack and V. Sobchack (1987) discuss this technique in *Citizen Kane* (1941),

The face of the youthful and idealistic Charles Foster Kane is fully and evenly lit so that it appears attractive, soft, without shadows . . . As Kane's idealism fades, and as he becomes a more complex and less comprehensible figure, his face is seen more and more frequently in partial shadow. As he becomes finally an enigmatic cipher, more inscrutable in his motives and actions, so does the light reveal less and less of him to the audience. (p. 73)

It is common to use low key lighting to cast half in shadow the faces of morally dubious characters or those with divided psyches. Entire cinematic worlds are often rendered in low key lighting as in movies in the film noir genre of American films from the 1940's and 1950's which emphasize moral corruption and the ethical dilemmas facing the characters. Gianetti and Leach (1998) describe these films,

Noir is a world of night and shadows. Its milieu is almost exclusively urban. The style is profuse in images of dark streets, cigarette smoke swirling in dimly lit cocktail lounges, and symbols of fragility . . . The tone of film noir is fatalistic and paranoid. It's suffused with pessimism emphasizing the darker aspects of the human condition. (p. 18)

The stark contrasts of light distinguish heroes from villains. Villains are found in dark rooms and alleyways and even when they come into the light their faces often remain symbolically shaded (Barsam, 2007). The heroes moving through this nighttime world often use light as a weapon of truth, turning on lights and pointing lamps to expose evildoers.

Camerawork

It has been shown that *mise en scène* and lighting influence the viewer's impressions of characters, atmosphere and the narrative within the frame of film. The manipulation of this frame by the director's camera movement further imparts meaning to the viewer. Bobker (1969) explains,

The mobility of the camera enables the filmmaker to change his vantage point in an instant. It allows action. Even more important, it enables the filmmaker to change the character of the image as the action evolves. For example, the camera moves in on an action and a long shot becomes an extreme close-up. The camera pulls away—and the scene opens from a microscopic view of a figure to a long shot of the person standing alone in an empty city. (p. 68)

The moving camera changes the scale and significance of objects and people in the frame. Certain shots mimic our natural vision deepening our connection to the filmic world. Pan shots (short for panoramic), where the camera revolves from side to side on a fixed axis, imitate how we turn our heads in real life (Barsam, 2007). This technique reveals the contents of a scene to the viewer and locates characters in vast settings. Similarly, tilt shots increase realism by simulating our natural visual inclinations to vertically scan an impressive scene or significant

object or person. Pan and tilt shots when used from a character's point of view and not omnisciently, allow the viewer to realistically look out through the character's eyes heightening identification and suspension of disbelief (Corrigan & White, 2004).

Unlike an edited scene where the camera is moved for each shot, and the images reassembled later, camera movement allows for time and space to be presented naturally. This idea is taken to its extreme with handheld cameras, which allow the director to film the narrative in an almost documentary fashion. The shaky, unstable nature of these shots creates a visual immediacy which places the viewer in the middle of the action and heightens the fear and chaos of chase or fight scenes. Handheld shots produce disorientation in the viewer and are often used when characters are psychologically or physically out of control (Barsam, 2007). Dolly or tracking shots, where the camera is fixed to a vehicle, allow for the frame to move back and forth and laterally. This continuously shifting point of reference allows the viewer to feel as though he himself is moving along with the characters (Corrigan & White, 2004). These shots may also convey deeper meaning as explained by Gianetti and Leach (1998),

One of the most common uses of dolly shots is to emphasize psychological rather than literal revelations. By slowly tracking in on a character, the filmmaker is getting close to something crucial. The movement acts as a signal to the audience, suggesting, in effect, that we are about to witness something important. A cut to a close-up would tend to emphasize the rapidity of the discovery, but slow dolly shots suggest a more gradual revelation. (p. 105)

The moving camera may also have a mind of its own, so to speak, omnisciently searching for someone or something in a crowded street or tracking away from a central conversation to reveal contradictory elements elsewhere in the setting. Crane shots are particularly useful in this regard as they can pull back to a great height revealing the character's place within his environment. A classic example of this is in *Gone With the Wind* (1939) where the crane shot pulls back from a close-up of Scarlett O'Hara revealing the hundreds of wounded Confederate soldiers in Atlanta (Gianetti & Leach, 1998).

Camera Angle

The angle of the camera in relation to the subject is another means by which the director may affect the tone of a scene or the impression of a character. As viewers, we witness the filmic world through the screen frame as though it were our own eyes. Thus our natural reactions towards seeing something below us or above us can be exploited by the director. Gianetti and Leach (1998) discuss this idea,

The angle from which an object is photographed can often serve as an authorial commentary on the subject matter. If the angle is slight, it can serve as a subtle form of emotional colouration. If the angle is extreme, it can represent the major meaning of an image. (p. 12)

As in everyday life, the normal position for the camera is at eye-level (Barsam, 2007). When the camera deviates from this neutral level, it changes our perception of characters and situations on screen. A high angle shot looks down on the subject and can make him seem inferior, frail and diminished as in a shot of a boxer on the canvas trying to rise from a crushing punch or a

homeless person looking up as she begs for change. Low angle shots shoot from below and impart qualities of dominance, superiority and control to the subject such as a shot of a landlord throwing out a tenant or a domineering teacher over a student. The reverse is true of the observer in a point of view shot; a character looking down from a high angle shot seems powerful, and when looking up from low angles, powerless (Corrigan & White, 2004). An extremely high angle shot is referred to as a bird's eye view shot which looks down from high above on the scene rendering the character almost insignificant in the greater setting (Barsam, 2007). The camera may also be tilted creating an oblique angle shot that cants the frame. This creates an atmosphere of disequilibrium, which alters the way the viewer perceives the happenings on screen (Sobchack and V. Sobchack, 1987). The diagonals of the frame increase anxiety and tension. Oblique angles often signify panic or mental imbalance and are often used in suspense and horror films.

Shot Type

Another way in which the director communicates meaning through technique is shot type. Our physical viewpoint as movie-watcher is the camera. Shot type refers to how close we are to the subject in each shot. This distance, which may be changed by camera position or the focus of the lens (Monahan, 2006), affects the importance we place on people and objects in the shot. Barsam (2007) explains,

. . . imagine yourself on a crowded dance floor at a club or party. Among all the other distracting things in your field of vision, you see an attractive person looking at you from the opposite end of the room. You may assign that person some significance from that distance, but if that person walks up to you, virtually filling your field of vision, then the

person suddenly has much greater significance to you and may provoke a much more profound reaction from you. (p. 161)

There are varying distances of shot: extreme long shot, long shot, medium long shot, medium shot, medium close-up, close-up and extreme close-up. Within each shot is a ratio of background and subject that provides fundamental information about the character and the narrative. Extreme long shots are composed almost entirely of landscape with the human form barely visible (Corrigan & White, 2004). This shot type makes a character seem insignificant. It is often used as an establishing shot and shows the character's situation vis-à-vis their natural environment. From this distance, the landscape dominates and we know nothing about the subject (Monahan, 2003). As the camera gets closer to the subject with long, medium-long and medium shots, the background diminishes and we are able to see the character more clearly. The person becomes our main focus and we see how she functions in her surroundings. This provides us with a great deal of physical information about the character and her spatial relationship to other characters in the frame. As proximity increases, the character grows in size and significance and at medium distance we can see her from the waist up (Corrigan & White, 2004). At this range it becomes possible to see the character's expressions and subtle body language. The portion of the frame devoted to background is reduced to what immediately surrounds the subject. The character's state of mind and attitude is becoming of central importance and we are entering into a more personal range.

As the camera moves closer to the character, the viewer becomes increasingly aware of a character's emotional and psychological condition. The camera moves up and into the character

until the face dominates the frame in the close-up. We are now close enough to experience the character's private world. Gianetti and Leach (1998) discuss this idea,

When we are offered a close-up of a character, for example, in a sense we feel that we're in an intimate relationship with that character. In some instances, this technique can bind us to the character, forcing us to care about him or her and to identify with his or her problems. If the character is a villain, the close-up can produce an emotional revulsion in us; in effect, a threatening character seems to be invading our space. (p. 71)

The intense proximity of the subject at close-up range magnifies gestures and expressions allowing the viewer to relate directly to the character. Moving even closer, the extreme close-up is used by the director to call attention to a small detail or object such as a tear on a cheek or the pulled safety pin from a hand grenade. This technique may also invest insignificant objects with symbolic meaning by singling them out from the overall setting.

Editing

Once the scene is composed, lit and filmed the director and editor assemble the shots into a coherent whole in the editing stage. The director could simply start the camera and film an entire story with one shot in real time, but editing allows film the freedom to transcend space and time. For example, a director may show us a close-up shot of a man daydreaming at his office desk followed by a shot of the same man on holiday years before in Paris. Corrigan and White (2004) explain the unique formal quality of editing,

Human perception is continuous. Unless we consciously or externally interrupt our vision (as when we blink our eyes), we do not see the world as the construction of separate images linked together in selected patterns. However, we find it perfectly natural that a film consists of eight hundred or more discrete images, often not noticing the cuts. In terms of human experience, the activity of editing—moving sometimes randomly and rapidly between different images—may best approximate the visual activity of a dream . . . (pp. 111-112)

The filmmaker is able to choose not only how we see a scene but also the speed and order in which we watch the narrative unfold. Cuts allow for flashbacks and digressions to be spliced into the sequence of events, freeing the film from the constraints of time (Monahan, 2003).

Bobker (1969) explains,

Time is the single major factor in the art of editing. The editor, in effect controls time. He can so extend a scene that action supposedly taking place in one minute will feel like an hour; and he can, by means of fragmented flash-cutting, compress an hours action into a minute. (p. 137)

This temporal manipulation allows the director to draw out dramatic events or speed through sequences required only by the plot. For example, a lawyer crossing a city by cab may be communicated by a few shots freeing screen time for her important final remarks to a jury. The organization and choice of shots create atmosphere and give each scene its own internal rhythm (Bobker, 1969). A couple enjoying a picnic in a sunny field will be edited in a languid pace as

opposed to the frenetic rhythm of a car chase. Editing also allows for the development of parallel story lines, which can be followed simultaneously through interweaving cuts (Monahan, 2003).

Sequencing of shots is generally used as a means of creating verisimilitude; this is accomplished through continuity editing, discussed in the previous chapter. Shots may also be arranged to create atmosphere, rhythm and produce desired effects in the viewer. In choosing which shot will follow another, the director is able to produce meaning by contrasting successive images. The Russian director Lev Kuleshov demonstrated the emotional and psychological effect on the viewer from this juxtaposition of shots in a short film in the 1920s. Sobchack and V. Sobchack (1987) describe the experiment,

He intercut images of an actor's expressionless face with images of a bowl of soup, a woman in a coffin, and a child with a toy. Audiences who saw the film praised the actor's performance—they saw in his face, emotionless as it was, hunger, grief, and affection. They saw, in other words, what was not really there in the separate images. Meaning and emotion then were created not by the content of the individual images, but by the contextual relationship of the images to each other. (p. 144)

This juxtaposition of images is the underlying principle of cinematic montage, a French term which translates as “to assemble or put together” (Barsam, 2007). Through the careful organization of consecutive images a director is able to construct meaning. Sergei Eisenstein compared the idea of montage to Chinese and Japanese ideograms. In Japanese, two different characters may be combined to form a new word with a different meaning. For example, the

character for oneself is 自, and the character for trust is 信. When they are used together 自信 they mean self-confidence— to trust in oneself (Takebayashi, 1996). Similarly in Kuleshov's experiment, a shot of a face followed by a shot of a bowl of soup produces the idea of hunger. The viewer creates a third overarching meaning from the two shots. Montage sequences may also show images from the cinematic environment that are representative of a central idea (Sobchack and V. Sobchack, 1987). A film wishing to express the dehumanization of a turn of the century factory might show a montage of uniforms, assembly lines, clocks, disembodied hands at work, and tired faces which build this theme.

In looking at *mise en scène*, lighting, camerawork, and editing it becomes clear that film is much more than a simple recording of actors' movements and dialogue. These cinematic techniques are used by the director to create a unique aesthetic experience of the viewer. The composition and styling of the *mise en scène*, the way we see setting and characters through lighting and camera technique and how the story unfolds through editing all shape our impression of characters and narrative. The camera is the film artist's tool, like a painter's brush or a sculptor's chisel. The filmmaker's medium is reality itself—people, objects and landscapes that are reshaped through imagination into new worlds and stories. In understanding how a director uses cinematic technique to tell a visual story, we can better appreciate the beauty and communicative power of film.

CHAPTER 4: THE FRENCH NEW WAVE AND THE EVOLUTION OF FILM

Film, like other art forms, evolves aesthetically through the work of artists and theorists who re-imagine the possibilities of the medium. One such period is the New Wave, which began in the late 1950s in France. The term ‘New Wave’, from the French *Nouvelle Vague*, was originally applied to post World War II youth in 1955 by the French journal *L’Express* to reflect the liberal attitudes and social mores of a new generation (Douchet, 1999). However, due to the success of the stylistically original films *Les Quatre Cent Coups* (*The 400 Blows*) directed by François Truffaut and *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (*Hiroshima My, Love*) directed by Alan Resnais that debuted at the Cannes Film Festival in 1959, ‘New Wave’ came to describe a vanguard of young French directors and their work. The New Wave, though only lasting roughly from 1958 to 1962 (Greene, 2007), is an important period in the evolution of the art of film. In these years, directors came to view themselves as the authors (auteurs) of their films and developed new styles and techniques that engaged the viewer with realistic portrayals of everyday life. This chapter will examine the factors that led to the birth of the French New Wave, and discuss the technical and theoretical innovations of the period that allowed film to more fully express the human condition.

Love of Film in Postwar France

At the basis of the New Wave in post-war France was cinephilie— a love of film. In German-occupied France from 1940 to 1944 public meetings were banned, artistic freedom was restricted and the showing of most foreign films was prohibited (Powrie & Reader, 2002). After the liberation of France by the Allies, people were again allowed to meet freely and ciné-clubs were created where people would gather to watch, discuss and debate film. Film historian Jean Douchet (1998) says, “The Liberation arrived like a string of exploding volcanoes. With the

need for self-expression that shook up post-Pétainist France came an increased urgency in disseminating, understanding, and, most importantly, recognizing, the language of cinema” (p. 45). At ciné-clubs, films from different genres but with relatable themes or structures were shown to encourage debates about the nature of the art (Powrie & Reader, 2002). In Paris, a film-lover and ciné-club organizer, named Henri Langlois had amassed a huge collection of films, which he had hidden from the Nazis. Following the war he set up a sort of film museum and screening room known as the Cinémathèque (Greene, 2007). Here he showed foreign and silent films and would often remove subtitles or soundtracks in order to focus the viewer’s attention on how the film was composed. Douchet (1998) describes these showings,

Langlois forced the viewer to abandon whatever literary understanding he or she associated with a film story and to penetrate a magical universe based on a new form of dramaturgy that was brought into existence by the visual treatment of and plastic interpretation of space. The viewer was forced to examine the film’s form, what was later to be known as *mise-en-scène*, which contained, delivered and explained the work’s true meaning. (p. 53)

Most of the young film lovers and fledgling critics who would go on to form the New Wave were informally educated by watching and analyzing Langlois’ collection of films at The Cinémathèque. Similar to Langlois, another ciné-club organizer who went to great lengths to educate the public about film was André Bazin. Bazin would exhibit films at schools and factories and along with fellow critic and theorist Alexandre Astruc set up a rival film festival to Cannes called “Film Maudits” or ‘rejected films’ at Biarritz in 1949 (Greene, 2002). Biarritz demonstrated the desire amongst leading critics to present new forms of expression in film. It

becomes clear in looking at the growth of ciné-clubs and the Cinémathèque that the New Wave grew out of a groundswell of cinephilié in France following the Second World War.

The love of film displayed by men like Langlois and Bazin and their desire to protect, promote and educate the public about this art form fostered a climate from which the New Wave was born. Relating this idea to Canada, it is important to see how inculcating an interest in film in young people, both in the educational system and in the community, can enhance their aesthetic appreciation and lead to future artistic expression. Also the camaraderie, critical awareness, intellectual engagement and opportunities for debate and discussion involved with film clubs are all positive experiences for youth which could be experienced in the classroom.

A New Philosophy of Film

The New Wave was heavily influenced by the film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* which was founded in 1951 by André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Lo Duca (Holmes & Ingram, 1998). It was here under the theoretical leadership of Bazin that future directors Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer and François Truffaut (referred to as the Young Turks) all worked as critics and developed their philosophy of film. Godard says of the group and the journal,

We at *Cahiers* always considered ourselves future directors. Going to ciné-clubs and the Cinémathèque was already thinking the cinema and thinking about the cinema. Writing was already making cinema because between writing and filming there is only a quantitative difference, not a qualitative one. The only person who was completely a critic was André Bazin. (Godard, 1968, as cited in Marie, 1998, pp. 26–27)

The young writers were very critical of the French films of the day commonly referred to as the Tradition of Quality and pejoratively as ‘le cinema de papa’ (Holmes & Ingram, 1998). These were unimaginative mainstream movies with elaborate sets and formulaic plots usually adapted from existing plays or novels (Holmes & Ingram, 1998). Film historian Naomi Greene (2003) discussing the Tradition of Quality films, explains that the Young Turks

. . . decried it for a variety of reasons: its dependence on literary scripts, its theatrical artificiality and its divorce from contemporary reality. It was, they charged, a cinema made by skilled craftsmen—not by artists who were responsible for every aspect of the film and who put their very souls into their work. (pp. 8–9)

This contempt for the status quo in French film culminated in a 1954 essay by François Truffaut for *Cahiers du Cinéma* entitled, “A Certain Tendency of French Cinema”. Truffaut had been one of the most vicious critics of the Tradition of Quality pictures. He had panned so many films he was banned from the Cannes film festival in 1958 and was known as the ‘gravedigger of French cinema’ (Sandhu, 2009). In the essay Truffaut dismisses films which were mere adaptations of literature and which relegated the director to a position subordinate to the screenplay. Truffaut writes,

Scenarists' films, I wrote above, and certainly it isn't Aurenche and Bost who will contradict me. When they hand in their scenario, the film is done; the metteur-en-scene, in their eyes, is the gentleman who adds the pictures to it and it's true, alas!
(Truffaut, 1954, p. 7)

The term *metteur-en-scene*, ‘one who puts on the stage’ (Gianetti & Leach, 1998) is used disparagingly by Truffaut to describe directors who use formulaic techniques to present the story outlined in the script. These directors were not using the camera creatively to create original works of art as much as filming pre-existing literary pieces.

The Auteur

Truffaut felt that the director should have creative control over the film. When the screenwriter had the power, he selected scenes he felt were significant and distorted the original intent of the work. Truffaut says that such films demonstrate,

1. A constant and deliberate care to be unfaithful to the spirit as well as the letter; 2. A very marked taste for profanation and blasphemy. This unfaithfulness to the spirit also degrades *Le Diable Au Corps* - a love story that becomes an anti-militaristic, anti-bourgeois film . . . (Truffaut, 1954, p. 4)

In opposition to the status quo, Truffaut champions “auteurs who often write their dialogue and some of them themselves invent the stories they direct” (Truffaut, 1954, p. 8) and draws a battle line by saying, “I do not believe in the peaceful co-existence of the “Tradition of Quality” and an “auteur's cinema” (p. 8). Truffaut’s coining of the term *auteur* (author) centralized the director in the creative process and re-envisioned the film as a work of art authored by that individual. The Young Turks at *Cahiers du Cinéma* openly favoured directors who exerted such creative control over their films and whose unique style was readily apparent in any given film from their body of work. The founder of the journal Jacques Doniol-Valcroze stated, “From then on it was

known that we were for Renoir, Rossellini, Hitchcock, Bresson...and against X, Y, Z. From then on there was a doctrine, the *politique des auteurs*, even if it lacked flexibility” (Doniol-Valcroze, 1959, as cited in Greene, 2007, p. 28).

The idea of the director as *auteur*, though formally presented by Truffaut, had its origins in an earlier essay by director and theorist Alexandre Astruc in the magazine *Écran Français* titled, “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo” in 1948. In this essay, which became a sort of manifesto for the French New Wave, Astruc announces a revolution in filmmaking. Astruc (1948) says,

. . . the cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as all the other arts have been before it, and in particular painting and the novel. After having been successively a fairground attraction analogous to boulevard theatre, or a means of preserving the images of an era, it is gradually becoming a language. By language I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be . . . (pp. 17–18)

He feels the language of film is not limited to the visual image as in the montages of Eisenstein or the movies of the silent film era. It is also not dependent on dialogue as a sole means of communication with the viewer. Astruc goes so far as to say that “contemporary ideas and philosophies of life are such that only the cinema can do justice to them” (Astruc, 1948, p.19). This vision of film was an incitement to expand the art form stylistically and urged directors and the viewing public to be open to new forms of expression. The camera is recast as an artistic instrument rather than an object that simply records what is before it. Astruc declares,

That is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the age of caméra-stylo (camera-pen). This metaphor has a very precise sense. By it I mean that the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as a written language. (Astruc, 1948, p. 18)

In seeing the director as author and calling for film to be used as a means of individual expression with new creative techniques, Astruc foretells the coming of the French New Wave. He says of the new spirit of filmmaking, “Of course, no tendency can be so called unless it has something to show for itself. The films will come, they will see the light of day – make no mistake about it.” (Astruc, 1948, p. 22) and they did come, en masse ten years later.

Realism

The films of the New Wave were stylistically antithetical to those of the big budget, star-driven, lavishly decorated literary adaptations of the Tradition of Quality. Though each director’s films differed from one another, they were unified by the desire to make more personal films that presented reality in an honest and unique way. Film historian Naomi Greene (2007) says,

For the phenomenon was not only about new modes of production or changed filmmaking techniques ... or, even, a new conception of the director’s role as a complete auteur. At its core lay an overarching need to draw close – as the Italian neo-realists they greatly admired had done – to reality itself. (p. 9)

This desire for the realistic portrayal of life by these young directors was influenced in part by Andre Bazin's conception of film. Bazin felt that while watching a film, a person could see reality in a new light. He explains this idea in his essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image",

Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, are able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love.

(Bazin, 2005, p. 15)

Bazin felt that directors should attempt to present this reality faithfully and with little adornment. For this reason he advocated the use of long takes and deep focus, where the viewer could discover the story for himself instead of being bombarded by montage (Bazin, 2005). He believed that film should examine social issues realistically such as the economic hardship faced by the characters in Vittorio de Sica's *The Bicycle Thieves* (1948) (Greene, 2007).

Aesthetic and Technical Innovation

Armed with a new ethos, the New Wave directors made their first films outside the studio system on small budgets. To illustrate this point, François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* was made for \$47,000 when the average cost of a film was \$300,000 in 1959 (Marie, 2003). This is significant in the evolution of the art as it is essentially the birth of independent film as an alternative to mainstream productions. The main reason for the move towards independent production was artistic control. This allowed directors to express themselves as auteurs and not

simply turn out films that were commercial successes for studios lacking in sincerity and creativity.

Script

The first change made in the filmmaking process by New Wave directors concerned the script itself. As was clear in both Astruc's and Truffaut's essays, directors prior to the New Wave had little or no control over the creation of the script. Astruc states in his essay that ideally "the scriptwriter directs his own scripts: or rather, that the scriptwriter ceases to exist, for in this kind of filmmaking the distinction between author and director loses all meaning" (Astruc, 1948, p. 22). In Truffaut's essay, screenwriters are lambasted for altering the intended meanings of literary works and a call is made for the director to become the true author of his work. This was a major break from the status quo and original scripts increased in the period between 1959 and 1961 (Marie, 2003). The new auteur philosophy led to more active director involvement with scriptwriting. Directors would now write or co-write their own scripts, personally adapt literary works into screenplays or oversee script production (Marie, 2003).

This shift in script control meant that directors were not bound to dutifully follow another author's ideas and structure. In striving for realism and spontaneity the 'plan-of-action' script became another innovation of New Wave directors (Marie, 2003). Film historian Michel Marie (2003) says,

. . . the "program script" (scénario-programme) organizes the story events into a fixed structure, ready to be filmed; the "plan-of-action" script" (scénario-dispositif) is more open to the uncertainties of production, to chance encounters, and ideas that suddenly come to

the auteur in the here and now of filming. Clearly, the plan-of-action script is the New Wave's ideal . . . (p. 77)

This intuitive style suited the New Wave directors who were tired of the staged productions of the Tradition of Quality pictures which lacked vitality. Working from loose shooting scripts encouraged the actors to often improvise their lines and this led to a change in cinematic dialogue. Pre-New Wave characters were mere mouthpieces for overly witty or poetic dialogue which was not natural to their environments and at times appeared greater than the speakers themselves (Douchet, 1999). New Wave filmmakers wanted to show life as it was, using common vernacular with less polished lines. Film historian Jean Douchet (1998) explains,

Auteurs on the other hand *work* the character's dialogue, that is, they demand the reply that logically follows from the situation and reveals the character's truth . . . The young directors of the New Wave wanted to provide a voice for the people they were filming. It was a matter of life, truth, and incidentally, and therefore fundamentally, democracy. Real people didn't speak like they did in French films of the period, and they certainly had no desire to speak like them. (pp. 189–190)

For New Wave directors dialogue became one of many elements of the film, not the dominant one. Freed from adherence to a script, directors were able to let language flow naturally. This made for a cohesive artistic whole and not a film simply built around or supporting a fixed script. New Wave directors preferred to use non-professional or inexperienced actors thus accentuating the rawness of the dialogue (Marie, 2003).

Location Shooting

The search for authenticity in their work led the New Wave filmmakers to leave the artificial and static environment of the studio and film on location. Filming on location in the streets of Paris or the countryside of France had an almost documentary feel and let the viewer experience the characters' world directly. This transition was made possible by new film equipment developed in the 1950s that brought about many aesthetic innovations. Of central importance were new, smaller 35-mm cameras, which liberated the director to shoot characters in natural settings. Douchet (1998) explains,

... the Arriflex and the Cameflex cameras were lightweight and portable and could be easily synched. Carried around on the operator's shoulder, it could closely follow the actor's every movement. A new intimacy developed between the camera and its subjects. The act of filming became a close physical encounter. (p. 204)

These cameras could be placed in any type of moving vehicle and were not restricted to dolly shots on fixed tracks. This was used to great creative lengths as in Godard's *Breathless* (1960) where a camera placed in a postal pushcart follows two characters down the Champs-Élysées (Marie, 2003). A common stylistic feature of New Wave films was to purposely allow the camera to shake with the movement of walking cameramen to increase a sense of truthfulness and immediacy to the scene (Douchet, 1999). These handheld cameras were able to shoot in small spaces dramatically increasing the *mise en scène* possibilities for filmmakers. This is evident in Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* where the family is filmed in a tiny Parisian apartment creating an atmosphere of entrapment.

Creative Freedom

The development of high-speed film and lightweight sound recording equipment in the 1950s allowed New Wave directors to achieve their goals of more vividly presenting reality. High-speed film allowed for shooting in low light conditions and scenes were no longer confined to the studio where three-point lighting was the standard (Marie, 2003). This lighting system was usually controlled by the head cameraman who followed set patterns. This resulted in the perfect but lifeless atmosphere of Tradition of Quality films. With high-speed film directors were able to shoot at all hours of the day or night with existing light sources (Douchet, 1999). Films became more realistic because they were lit by natural light sources such as nighttime scenes by streetlamps or apartments by window light. Douchet (1998) states that this aesthetic shift

. . . resulted in a beauty that was no longer arbitrarily manufactured by the chief cameraman who moves light sources around at will, but from the need to accept the very limited possibilities offered by the location. It emerged from the vibrant light captured directly by the camera. The lighting no longer captured the frozen beauty of a magnificent mausoleum, but the beauty of life. (p. 215)

Similarly, the New Wave revolutionized sound, by using lightweight tape recorders which recorded the sound of the shooting environment directly. Previously, sound was dependent on burdensome equipment that limited mobility or was synched after the fact in the studio (Douchet, 1999). In pre-New Wave films the sounds of a character's environment was usually artificial being added on after shooting. By recording the sound at the location as it was heard at the time

of shooting, it became another aspect of the *mise en scène*, creating atmosphere and heightening realism. Jean Douchet (1998) says of the New Wave approach,

They never manufactured a sound track from tired and dusty clichés (the sound of gulls that was added if the scene took place by the sea or the well-known motorcycle in the night). They rejected traditional ambient sounds, and never considered using a sound library, much less a sound effects technician. They were careful to use real sounds, to scrutinize the grain of sound that characterized the moment, its continuity. (p. 226)

Natural, place-specific sounds brought the environment to life and made the viewer feel as though they were really there. Directors would incorporate existing background noise into the scene and the actors would work around it making the story feel fresh and authentic (Douchet, 1999).

The French New Wave marked a new direction in the art of film. New Wave directors grew up in a climate of cinephilie, watched and discussed films at cine-clubs, and later wrote about and criticized film in the *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Disdainful of the unimaginative, clichéd period productions of the Tradition of Quality films, they became directors themselves and put their limited money where their mouths were. Theoretically influenced by Andre Bazin, Alexandre Astruc and the Italian Neo-realists, they exercised artistic control over their works of art and became the authors of their films. In Astruc's words, their cameras became their pens as they shot realistic films dealing with everyday issues. Shooting on location with handheld cameras, using natural light and sound, and using believable dialogue and scripts, directors brought the viewer into an intimate relationship with the characters on screen. Film was liberated from being

a mere entertainment product of the studios, to its rightful place as a legitimate art form creatively expressing the human condition.

CHAPTER 5: THE 400 BLOWS – A CINEMATIC STORY

The 400 Blows (1959), French title *Les Quatre Cent Coups*, exemplifies the power of film to express the essence of the human condition and create a work of artistic beauty. This film was the first feature length work by Francois Truffaut, and is based upon his difficult childhood growing up in Paris. It was one of the most influential films of the French New Wave and was shot with bold, innovative techniques that authentically portray the pain of adolescence and child neglect. *The 400 Blows* manifests Astruc's ideal of 'camera-stylo' as Truffaut writes a heartbreaking story with the camera. The fresh and realistic cinematography draws us into the world of the young hero, Antoine Doinel, and we vividly experience and empathize with his struggle to survive.

The viewer's close involvement with the story begins with the opening sequence of *The 400 Blows*. Filmed in black in white with natural light, the first shot is from a moving car looking up at the Eiffel Tower in the distance. As the car moves through the streets, the subjective gaze of the camera remains fixed on the tower even when interrupted by rows of buildings. This simulates the point of view of a child fascinated with the landmark, often looking from the side window of the car (the driver couldn't look away from the road for so long). The tower grows larger and larger as we approach and makes the viewer feel small, allowing them to identify with a young person. Passing by the tower, the camera turns to watch it fade in the distance. This dynamic and beautiful sequence establishes realism and reminds the viewer of when they were young and saw the world in such a way.

After the fade out from the introduction, a fade in places the viewer in a classroom looking over the shoulder of a student. He pulls a pin-up calendar out of his desk and the picture is passed around the classroom. The camera tracks this photo and then zooms in on Antoine

Doinel as he defaces it in some way. We hear someone shout at him and the camera quickly pans up and around to reveal an angry teacher. As we look, Antoine moves past us to the front of the classroom where he is scolded in front of the students and made to stand in the corner. Through the camera movement the viewer has a feeling of being there— following the photo, being frightened by the teacher, and witnessing the unfair treatment of Antoine (who is only as guilty as the rest of the students, but is singled out). The scene ends with Antoine instructed to stay in the corner alone as the boys go out to play, the teacher saying, “Recess is a reward, not a right” (Truffaut, 1959). The teacher leaves, closing the door and the camera remains with Antoine panning his walk back to the corner. We are witness to his harsh treatment and isolation and through the active camera movement have already begun to identify with the protagonist. School is presented as a harsh and oppressive institution crushing the natural spontaneity of the boys.

When the children return from recess, Antoine has written a poem on the wall in the corner. It states that Antoine has been unfairly punished for the pin-up photo. The *mise en scène* of this shot shows a wall divided horizontally in black and white with Antoine standing in the lower black half looking up at what he has written. A map is to the right of his line of vision. In this frame composition there is a great deal of meaning. School is a world of black and white, Antoine is trapped in the corner, down in the dark, and he looks up to his work of art in the light with the map symbolizing freedom to the right. The poem on the wall is a sort of meta-narrative in that Antoine is expressing his objection to the repressive and unjust treatment he has received through a work of art (the poem). This work of art is set within a greater work of art (the film) where Truffaut is autobiographically conveying the same message.

In *The 400 Blows*, Truffaut creates scenes that subtly convey themes without overtly stating them through dialogue. After Antoine is scolded for his graffiti-poem and leaves the classroom, the teacher forces the students to copy out a traditional poem. The camera follows Antoine out of the classroom and then notices a boy having trouble with his pen. It zooms in on this boy as he tries to keep up with the teacher writing on the board. Each time he writes, he blots ink on his page and tears it up. Truffaut cuts between the teacher writing on the board and the boy tearing up his ruined pages until the boy has nothing left to write on. This is an example of film creating a humorous moment without resorting to witty dialogue. It also communicates visually to the viewer the idea that the student is being left behind by the education system.

Another example of Truffaut subtly conveying ideas through technique occurs in his editing of scenes. At the end of the classroom scene, the teacher slaps a pile of essays off the desk and as the pages fly he cuts to an outside shot of the school with the French motto ‘Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité’ carved beneath a relief. Antoine’s school life is sorely lacking in the first two elements, but Truffaut sets the scene for ‘brotherhood’ as the camera pans down to follow the boy and his friend outside the school. Once outside in the city, the camera shoots the friends in a long shot as they walk through the streets of Paris. After the close quarters of the classroom, the city is presented as a place of freedom with the street flooded in sunlight. The boys sit together on a park bench and their friendship is symbolized by the closeness of a two-shot. The balance of the composition visually establishes the bond between Antoine and Rene, one of the few things the boy can depend on in his unhappy life.

Antoine’s home life and relationship with parents is expressed by Truffaut’s artistic camera use and mise en scène. The street scene dissolves as Antoine runs towards his building and fades into the boy stoking the fire in his cramped apartment. The camera follows the boy in close-up

as he walks around the tiny living room, nearly bumping into him as it pans and zooms reinforcing the tightness of the space. Antoine reaches under the mantle for something and Truffaut uses a tilt shot and an extreme close up to allow the viewer to look down at Antoine's hands as he steals money from his parents. The boy is becoming the focus of our attention through this camera work, which does not shy away from realistically showing us Antoine's faults and secrets. The honesty of the narrative is heightened by these techniques. The subjective camera allows the viewer to be present in the scene. This is particularly evident when Antoine opens the door to his parents' bedroom and the camera moves in first looking around the dark room in point of view style. The boy turns on the light and the camera turns around to find him sitting down at his mother's vanity table. In this poignant scene, Antoine brushes his hair with his mother's brush trying to simulate the affection he lacks from her. Truffaut creatively uses the *mise en scène* to express the boy's fractured self-image and search for identity by reflecting his face in the handheld mirror, the vanity mirror and the closet mirror. It is important here to recognize that the director selects all scenes, shots and frame compositions intentionally to convey meaning to the viewer. These decisions made by Truffaut allow for the silent narrative of this scene that tells us so much about Antoine's condition and elicits our sympathy.

The 400 Blows is based on Truffaut's own life and is reflective of the personal interest New Wave directors had in their story material. Truffaut was an unwanted child born to an unwed mother who gave him to her mother to raise. When Truffaut's grandmother died, he was returned to his mother. She had married a man who was not Truffaut's natural father, but who gave him his name (Fabe, 2004). Truffaut's mother would barely tolerate him, and he and his friend Robert Lachenay would skip school and steal in order to get money to visit the cinema and later to set up a cine-club. The neglect of his parents led him to run away from home and his

petty thefts eventually resulted in Truffaut's father having him put in jail. He was later sent to a state juvenile detention centre (Murray, 1978). Truffaut joined the army, then deserted and was rescued by film critic Andre Bazin who hired him as a critic for his film magazine *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*. *The 400 Blows* is both a recounting of his painful childhood and a testament to his love of film. Truffaut said, "I feel it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that cinema saved my life" (Truffaut, as cited in Holmes and Ingram, 1998, p. 12).

Truffaut's troubled life is reflected in the scenes that take place in the family's small Parisian apartment. The claustrophobic *mise en scène* of the apartment emphasizes how the family members are trapped in a hostile and loveless situation. In their tiny home, the handheld camerawork magnifies the close quarters and the contempt of the mother towards her husband and son. The mother resents Antoine for reappearing in her life after she disposed of him. She does not love her husband and is having an affair. The father is jealous of his wife and though he is not cruel to Antoine, seems content to make jokes rather than care for him. Truffaut expresses this idea brilliantly by having Antoine sleep in the small hallway where his parents walk by or step over him, showing him to be an obstruction in their lives. Truffaut further illustrates this point in a simple and realistic sequence where Antoine takes out the trash. Antoine descends the spiral stairs to the basement where he dumps out the trash as a baby cries plaintively in an adjacent apartment. The power goes out momentarily and he is left in total darkness. Though a seemingly ordinary event, it is visually charged with meaning—Antoine is crying out for love and attention, he feels alone and treated like unwanted garbage by his mother.

Antoine's defacing of the classroom wall, leads to him being given lines as punishment and due to his bad home life, he doesn't complete his homework. Figuring the teacher will not let him in class, he and his friend René decide to play hooky from school. Truffaut captures their

feeling of freedom with a montage of deep focus, long shots of the boys running through the streets of Paris, and arriving at a movie theatre with a swish-pan (a spinning, blurred pan, which was a New Wave innovation). In a tribute to the central importance of film in his life, Truffaut uses a tilt shot to look slowly up at the movie theatre sign and holds shortly on the words 'CINE' lit up in block capitals. This also demonstrates the self-referential nature of New Wave films whose directors wanted to make the viewer aware of the beauty of the medium itself. The boys then go to a carnival and Antoine rides a rotor, a machine that spins its riders in a massive upright barrel and then retracts the floor leaving them stuck to the walls by centrifugal force. In this beautifully filmed scene, Antoine's fellow riders are two men, one of whom is Truffaut himself (Truffaut's story and Antoine's are spun together), and a woman. The rotor spins faster and faster and the faces of the spectators above, shot from Antoine's point of view, become blurred. Antoine manages to turn himself around on the wall and the symbolism of the *mise en scène* is complete— his world is upside-down, he is out of control, disoriented and confused. The joy of the day in the city is ended abruptly when Antoine sees his mother on the street kissing another man. Truffaut uses a medium close-up shot which makes the image especially jarring due to its intimate nature.

Truffaut uses natural lighting to create mood and convey meaning. This is illustrated by the nighttime scene in the apartment after Antoine witnesses his mother's affair. She comes home late and steps over Antoine who is shot from a low camera angle feigning sleep in his makeshift bed in the hall. Truffaut cuts to a close-up of Antoine's face in the dark listening to his parents fight loudly over her infidelity in the next room. In this long take lasting over 40 seconds, Antoine's forlorn face is barely visible in the blackness save for the two points of light in his eyes. We keenly feel the boy's fear and loneliness seeing the sadness in his eyes as he listens to

the argument rage on. When his name is mentioned by his father, his mother shouts that she will send him away. Truffaut draws out our sympathy for Antoine by placing us there in the darkness, at his level, forcing us to hear the heartless, disembodied shouts of his parents.

Truffaut's emphasis on authenticity and his unidealized depiction of society is reflected in the scene where Antoine is caught in a serious lie at school. Having failed to complete his homework and without an excuse Antoine blurts out that his mother has died. His parents show up to school later and his father walks in and slaps Antoine across the face. The slap in which the actor Albert Rémy actually strikes the boy Jean-Pierre Léaud (Leberre, 2005) is shocking for the viewer. The violence is sudden and unexpected. The realistic treatment of abuse by Truffaut jolts us out of passively and intellectually understanding the story to viscerally experiencing Antoine's pain and humiliation. In the long take following the slap, the camera tracks along with the boy as he walks slowly back to his desk, accentuating his shame and zooms in on his face as he realizes he is truly alone.

That night Antoine wanders the streets and Truffaut silently conveys the boy's sadness and desolation through cinematic technique. The boy is shot in the darkness lit only by the natural light of streetlamps, shop windows and traffic. He walks past people laughing in a store with 'Joyeux Noel' written on the window and this realistic touch intensifies our pity for Antoine who has no real family with which to celebrate the holidays. Truffaut positions the camera inside a brightly lit diner and shoots Antoine in the dark looking in from outside accentuating his alienation from society. Cold and hungry, the boy steals a bottle of milk and runs into the shadows to drink it. In this heart-rending long take which lasts over 40 seconds, Truffaut shoots Antoine in medium close up as he chugs the stolen milk in a dark alcove of a deserted street. The dismal atmosphere of the *mise en scène* heightens our feelings of compassion for the boy.

On a symbolic level, this sequence shows how Antoine, who is unloved (un-nursed) and abandoned by his mother, must resort to stealing milk to nourish himself.

Though *The 400 Blows* evocatively tells the sad story of Antoine's neglect it is not an overwrought, depressive work of art. Truffaut inserts beautifully shot, lighthearted and comic sequences within the narrative, which provide a realistic balance to the hardships faced by the boy. After Antoine spends the night on the street, Truffaut shows the school's physical education teacher taking the boys out for a run. A bird's eye view shot from high over the street shows the boys begin to run and then gradually sneak off in small groups into the stores and side streets until only the oblivious teacher and two students remain. The inventive camera angle and the liveliness of the *mise en scène*, make for an amusing and memorable scene that good-naturedly satirizes the educational system.

Truffaut's ability to balance the tone of the film is also evident in the scenes following Antoine's night on the street. He is allowed to return home by his mother who is afraid he will divulge her affair to the father. She displays rare acts of kindness and affection to Antoine who seems bewildered by the show of attention. She suggests they all go to see a movie and Truffaut presents us with a happy scene reminding us of the way things should be in a family. In their tiny car on the way to the cinema, the *mise en scène* is cramped like the apartment, but the effect is cozy and secure. The balanced composition frames Antoine safely between his mother and father, as they drive along laughing through the bright, sparkling streets. Truffaut juxtaposes this briefly joyous family experience with Antoine's normally loveless life of neglect so that we may feel his predicament more sharply.

Antoine is expelled from school for plagiarism, and fearing his parents' wrath goes to live with his friend Rene. The boys run around Paris and Truffaut's camera shoots them from a

distance in deep focus revealing the beauty of the city. Though they are free, the viewer feels a certain anxiety, as we know that the future for Antoine, with no parental support and without an education looks bleak. Their escape from the oppression of school and family is bittersweet. The stark city looms in the background as they run wildly through the rainy streets. They visit the cinema, smoke cigars and drink, and commit petty theft—engaging in ‘adult’ behaviour, but Truffaut’s camera tells us otherwise. They sit amongst adults in a movie theatre but Antoine is chewing gum and blowing bubbles like a child. Later, they plot the theft of a typewriter, but are watching a Punch and Judy show with a room full of little children. Truffaut shows us they are still innocent, like the captivated boys and girls watching the show.

Antoine is caught stealing a typewriter and his father turns him over to the police signing away his parental rights. Truffaut films this scene quietly, with slow pans and simple dialogue as the police go through their booking procedures. This realism heightens our concern for the boy. A man in the small cell asks him what his crime was and Antoine answers, “I ran away from home” (Truffaut, 1959) revealing his absolute incomprehension of his predicament. The camera hovers over Antoine trying to sleep on the floor of the cell and expresses the cruelty of his imprisonment, by zooming in to confine his face to a square of the wire mesh. As the boy is taken away in the paddy wagon to the detention centre, his toughness is finally broken. As the van moves through the dark streets a tear runs down his half-lit face, seen through the bars. The lighting conveys Antoine’s sadness and isolation and shows that although Antoine is entering adolescence, part of him is still a child in pain.

Antoine is removed to an even more heartless environment at the youth observation centre. Now a ward of the state, Antoine has the last traces of his freedom quashed by its extreme regimentation and severe punishment. Truffaut uses costuming and long tracking shots of the

boys marching to reflect the authoritarian, dehumanizing atmosphere of the centre. When Antoine begins to eat before the dinner whistle blows, he is violently struck in the face by a guard. Truffaut purposely makes this assault a mirror image of the father's slap to signify that at the hands of his parents or the state he is equally abused and powerless.

The viewer's close connection with Antoine is strengthened by Truffaut's documentary-style filming of the boy's psychological assessment. In this scene, Antoine is shot in medium close-up sitting directly across the table from the camera. The psychologist is never seen and we hear only a disembodied female voice asking the questions. Antoine's answers are edited together with quick dissolves showing ellipses in the recording. Truffaut blurs the line between fiction and documentary in this sequence, making Antoine's responses all the more compelling. The young actor Jean-Pierre L aud's improvised answers to questions concerning his home life, and his misbehaviour are natural and heartfelt. In this cold and impersonal setting, Antoine is finally allowed to speak, explaining his actions and expressing his feelings directly to the viewer.

Antoine's isolation and hopelessness are expressed by Truffaut's creative composition and camera technique in the visiting day scenes. His friend Rene, the only person who cares for him, rides out to the country to see him, but is turned away by the guard. Antoine watches helplessly, trapped behind the glass as his friend walks out the door that frames the outside world. His mother comes to visit, but it is only to rub salt in his wounds. She tells Antoine that it was he who almost ruined their marriage and that his father has absolved himself of his responsibilities to the boy. Truffaut shoots the conversation in shot/reverse shot sequence, and as the mother heartlessly gloats over Antoine's misery the camera looks up from the boy's point of view to his mother's face. It continues to tilt upwards and focuses on the brand new hat on her head. The

shot communicates to the viewer that Antoine sees through his mother. He sees that she is simply a vain and selfish woman concerned more for her own beauty than his happiness.

Abandoned by his parents and isolated from his only friend, Antoine decides to escape from the harsh and oppressive reform school. He waits until the boys are taken to a soccer field and mid-game slips through a hole in the fence. Antoine's determination to be free and his exhilaration in leaving the institution behind are conveyed by a one minute long tracking shot of him running away through the countryside. At the beginning of this long take, the dynamism of the tracking camera and the openness of the natural *mise en scène* create a feeling of euphoria. However, as he continues to run down deserted farm roads, the mood of the scene darkens as we realize that he has nowhere left to go. Antoine eventually arrives at the seashore and another long tracking shot follows him as he runs out towards the waves. He steps into the water and as he turns around the camera zooms in on his face. Truffaut freezes the frame and Antoine's enigmatic and haunting look is the final shot of the film. The 90-degree rule of not shooting the subject head-on is purposely violated to break the 'fourth wall' between the filmed reality and the viewer. The boy looks us squarely in the eyes as he seems to wonder 'What will I do now?' Our empathy, elicited throughout the film by Truffaut's cinematic technique reaches its crescendo as we realize that Antoine must now face the cruel world alone.

The 400 Blows is a story told as much through cinematic technique— lighting, camera angles, *mise en scène* and editing, as it is by the dialogue of its characters. Film historian Edward Murray says of the film,

Truffaut's film is thoroughly cinematic—it could not be done in any other form. It achieves universality not only because of its theme, but also because of its treatment. There are many

scenes in which there is no dialogue at all ... One might almost say that *The 400 Blows* is a half-silent movie. (Murray, 1978, p. 128)

Truffaut communicates ideas and emotions visually through the *mise en scène* and his subjective camera allows us to vicariously experience the hardships and fleeting joys of Antoine's life. We are present as he listens in the dark to his mother scream that she will get rid of him. We run through the streets with he and Rene as they enjoy the freedom of Paris. We ride in the paddy wagon with him as he sheds tears on his way to jail. Finally, we escape with him from the reformatory to the sea where he turns to face us—hopelessly lost. A poignant and beautiful work of art, *The 400 Blows* demonstrates film's unique ability to convey meaning and develop empathy in the viewer.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDY

It has been shown in the preceding chapters that film is a beautiful art form capable of conveying the essence of the human experience through a visual narrative. It is commonly used as a pedagogical aid in high school curricula, but deserves to be studied independently as a distinct aesthetic entity. The film viewer suspends her disbelief and enters into a fictitious world where she is able to virtually experience characters' predicaments and see firsthand the effects of their decisions. In closely identifying with the characters in this manner, students are able to develop their capacity for empathy and deepen their understanding of others. The authenticity and immediacy of filmic realities exposes students to social issues, lifestyles and cultures they may never encounter in their daily lives. As it is a work of art, a film must also be appreciated aesthetically. In showing students film, we are exposing them to the beauty of a modern art which is almost limitless in its imaginative possibilities. An analysis of its structure reveals how cinematic techniques create mood, tell a story, express ideas, and elicit emotion from the viewer. Understanding how a film is constructed develops reasoning skills and critical awareness in students. These positive attributes demonstrate that film is a dynamic and engaging art form, which merits serious study in the Ontario high school curriculum.

Inclusion in the 2011 Ontario Curriculum

During their high school years adolescents have greater autonomy and will begin to choose which movies they will watch. The earlier students are exposed to a film of high artistic quality and learn basic cinematic techniques, the richer will be their future movie-viewing experiences. Already media-literate, students entering their first year of high school are ready to be introduced to the fundamentals of film as an art form. The 2011 Ontario Curriculum does not include a Media Arts course for the Grade 9 level, but there are two courses where film study may be

included. The curriculum for English is an appropriate area for inclusion as an understanding of media texts is one of its educational objectives. The guidelines state,

English, Grade 9, Academic (ENG1D)

This course is designed to develop the oral communication, reading, writing, and media literacy skills that students need for success in their secondary school academic programs and in their daily lives. Students will analyse literary texts from contemporary and historical periods, interpret informational and graphic texts, and create oral, written, and media texts in a variety of forms. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 46)

Film, is both a literary (screenplay) and visual (cinematographic) text, which is accessible for young people and allows for curriculum integration. Students, who spend much of their out of school time immersed in visual culture will find film an engaging way to learn about narrative structure. This media literacy element is also a focus of the Grade 9 Applied English course (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). As English is a required course, inserting a film study unit into this curriculum would reach the maximum number of students. Alternately, the Visual Arts course for Grade 9 stipulates that,

This course is exploratory in nature, offering an overview of visual arts as a foundation for further study. Students will become familiar with the elements and principles of design and the expressive qualities of various materials by using a range of media, processes, techniques, and styles. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 10)

The inclusion of film is justified in this course, as it is an overview of all visual arts. Students will learn design, style and technique as they learn the basics of how a film is created. In either Grade 9 English or Visual Arts, a short unit on film will be sufficient to introduce students the basic principles of cinematography and present an exemplar film.

Learning Objectives

As students begin their high school years, it is important for them to understand that a film is not simply a piece of entertainment but a work of art like a novel or a play created by a director, a film crew and a cast. A film study unit must show the student that there is a purpose behind the various shots and scenes of a film that are designed to communicate ideas and mood to the viewer. It is expected that students will become familiar with basic film terminology and the fundamentals of (a) cinematography, (b) editing, (c) lighting and (d) mise en scène. Students should be able to identify these techniques within a film and understand how they convey meaning. Short sample clips or screen shots illustrating these cinematographic elements should be viewed and discussed by the class. To encourage the visualization of a narrative, students should also plan out and shoot a brief dramatic scene. Depending on the available resources of the school, this scene could simply be a hand-drawn storyboard, a series of photos or a video. In planning and shooting a scene, students can put into practice the techniques they have learned in the preceding classes. After becoming familiar with film fundamentals, and planning and creating a small film scene the students will be shown an exemplar film.

The Exemplar Film

Viewing a critically acclaimed exemplar film starts the students off on the right foot aesthetically by showing them the artistic possibilities and expressive power of the medium. Philosopher Ralph A. Smith in his essay *Teaching Film as Significant Art* states that,

Indeed, some would argue that the schools have no right whatsoever teaching students *what* to think or like: yet I find it odd that a teacher should either say or imply that he doesn't really care if his students are indifferent to the finest creative and spiritual achievements of man. I suspect that many teachers do want their students to admire excellence and that, intentionally or not, they attempt to persuade them to do so. (Smith, 1971, p. 274)

It is hoped that in showing students a film that is both beautifully shot and meaningful, they will develop a critical eye for significant and edifying works of art. Though the choice of the exemplar film lies with the teacher and the local Board of Education, some essential qualities are desirable. The film should not be an adaptation from a preexisting novel or play. Choosing a film with an original screenplay demonstrates that the film is a unique work of art from inception to completion, which stands apart from literature. In terms of genre, a drama would best be suited to display film's ability to evoke empathy in the viewer and portray complex ideas and emotions. The film should be realistic and its themes and narrative relevant to the students' lives. Finally, an aesthetically pleasing and technically innovative film is ideal, as it will represent the beauty and expressive capabilities of the art form.

A film that possesses these qualities is François Truffaut's masterpiece *The 400 Blows*, which won the Best Director award at Cannes in 1959 (Greene, 2007) and is listed in the top ten films one should see by age 14 by the British Film Institute (British Film Institute, 2010). In *The 400 Blows*, Truffaut beautifully expresses through cinematic technique the joys and hardships of a boy growing up in Paris neglected by his parents and the education system. As demonstrated by

the preceding chapter, *The 400 Blows* is a work of art rich in creative shots and evocative scenes that engender empathy in the viewer. The film is content-appropriate and thematically accessible for Grade 9 students. It has a manageable running time of 99 minutes. While watching the exemplar film, students should be mindful of how the cinematic techniques they have learned convey meaning in shots and scenes. Post-screening, when students discuss and write about the film they should cite examples of lighting, cinematography, editing, or mise en scène to support their arguments. It is hoped that through learning the fundamentals of cinematic technique, and watching and analyzing a critically acclaimed film, that students will deepen their appreciation for this dynamic and enriching art form.

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