Film Portfolio Assessment
Production Reel/Pages

IB Film Standard Level
M2019
gcq433

Reel URL: https://youtu.be/TjkZaR1W1IE
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Film Production Role 1: Cinematographer

The role of the cinematographer is crucial in establishing the “look and feel” of a film (Moura, 2014a). Through manipulation of framing, composition, exposure, focal length, lighting and colour the cinematographer is equipped to create meaning through what is presented visually on screen. Various productions within the role of the cinematographer facilitated the development of my skills and allowed me to gain insight into the role of lenses, framing and lighting in film.

**Clip 1. Expiration (0:46)**

**RATIONALE** - In this silent film we focussed on exposing how an insecure woman is confronted with the tragic fate of her relationship just as she rushes to retain it. Through the use of chiaroscuro lighting and framing to reflect dominance against vulnerability, I attempted to build an atmosphere of discomfort while establishing a tense setting. In doing so, I drew upon F.A. Wagner’s use of high contrast, low key lighting in F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922) and Willy Hameister respectively in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920).

**INQUIRY** - Additional research into use of german expressionist lighting and the use of “light and shadow” (Martin, 2015) supported the creation of a shot list (Figure 1). I aimed to convey the female character is conveyed as frail and vulnerable through the cinematography and lighting, similar to in Murnau’s presentation of the protagonist in *Nosferatu*, this film embodies the dominance the male figure holds over the relationship and his potential for destruction.

**ACTION** - The focus was laid on portraying the male figure as a dominant character, framed from low angles and through the manipulation of his shadow to fall over the female character and Halogen lights to create high contrast lighting and shadow. In turn, the female character would be presented as powerless in the eye of the male, where she is subdued into the shadows of the relationship as she runs in a wide shot and only her silhouette is seen (Figure 2).

**REFLECTION** - While the film successfully conveys the marginalisation and condescending nature of the relationship as intended, the process required time and many attempts. I was challenged in setting up the light so that both characters were lit, but only the male’s shadow casted over the female, revealing this dominance. In turn, the high number of different shots we had meant that I constantly had to keep moving lights and tripods around, adjusting the framing and shooting. I was able to keep track of this using the shot list. Ultimately, effective manipulation of framing and lighting allowed me to highlight the dominance versus vulnerability in the presented relationship. This production challenged me to inquire and take risks in utilizing lighting techniques that were new to me.

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**Figure 1. Extract from the original shot list**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHOT #</th>
<th>SHOT TYPE</th>
<th>CAMERA ANGLE</th>
<th>CAMERA MOVEMENT</th>
<th>SHOT DESCRIPTION (subject, action, lighting)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[1] A</td>
<td>LONG</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>WOMAN comes in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>EYE</td>
<td>follow</td>
<td>FOLLOWING WOMAN running in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Footsteps of WOMAN running past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>EYE</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>WOMAN runs from behind the corner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[2] A</td>
<td>LS</td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>pan closer</td>
<td>MAN is sitting at one end of a table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>rack focus</td>
<td>MAN slams hand on table, focus on watch, reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[3] A</td>
<td>MLS</td>
<td>M/IOTS</td>
<td>rack focus</td>
<td>OTS of MAN, WOMAN comes running in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>EYE</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Shot of MAN, disappointed at WOMAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>MLS</td>
<td>EYE</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>WOMAN is seen sitting down</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2. Silhouette of female character through low key lighting, male character presented as dominant through low angle and use of overarching shadows**
Clip 2. The Handover (0:36)

RATIONALE - This clip is taken from a film within the spy genre depicting the handover of a package between two individuals and consequences of this action. As the cinematographer, I intended to work within the spy genre conventions, intriguing the audience and building suspense through cinematic language. Specifically, this would be done through the manipulation of depth of field and framing to establish the interaction between the two characters. Inspiration was taken from the camera movement by Robert Burks in *North by Northwest* (1959) and Hagen Bogdanski in *The Lives of Others* (2006) to build tension and engage the audience with the conflict.

INQUIRY - Inspired by Bogdanski’s cinematography, a wide, bird’s eye establishing shot, panning shots and close ups were planned to be used and annotated on the screenplay (Figure 3) to build tension and establish a mysterious atmosphere. To engage the audience in the film, the creative decision was made to figuratively and physically bring them in to the scene in this way, emulating Burk’s shots in the crop duster scene. By starting with a wide, aerial view, the audience is aware of the environment before they are physically brought in to the interaction through the drone flight down and pan in (Figure 4).

ACTION - On set, I was challenged in assembling the crew and utilizing the screenplay and a shotlist to shoot the film. The use of rack focusing as utilized by Bogdanski in *The Lives of Others*, was employed to draw the audience’s attention to the approach of the allie. In turn, by framing the two characters in a collective wide shot, we reveal the alliance between the two. The transition from a close up of the spy’s face as the contact enters the scene brings the audience closer to the character, engaging them in his thoughts before rack focusing on the other character walking (Figure 5).

REFLECTION - A major challenge in this production was that we ran out of natural light as the sun set. This meant that I had to omit some shots to be able to conserve light for the most essential ones. In addition, equipment failure in the form of one light running out of battery meant that I had to compensate in-camera by opening the aperture and bringing up the ISO, which traditionally is not desirable as it brings high amounts of digital noise or grain into the image. A weakness of this production was the lack of utilization of lighting to create meaning. This was a production element and aspect of the cinematographer’s role I aimed to work on in the next production. All audio elements recorded for this production were done by ourselves on site and in post production.
RATIONALE - As the cinematographer, my intention was to explore an inner conflict imposed on an individual due to social pressures through the manipulation of lighting, framing, composition, focal length, exposure and colour in an experimental film. This particular extract features the rising tension and fear up until the climax, where the paper, as an extended metaphor for social pressures falls over the protagonist, just before she turns against this and tears these apart. Inspiration was drawn from framing in Eoin Duffy’s *I Am Here* (2016) and Nicholas Musuraca in Boris Ingster’s *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940), and Russel Metty’s lighting from Orson Welles’ *Touch of Evil* (1958).

INQUIRY - Research was conducted into various films of the experimental genre and those conveying inner conflict. For the structure and framing inspiration was drawn from the experimental film *I Am Here*, laying a particular focus on the motivated framing to convey the insecurities of the protagonist. In addition, inspiration was taken from the Musuraca’s framing and high contrast lighting in the dream sequences of *Stranger on the Third Floor* and Russell Metty’s low key high contrast lighting in *Touch of Evil*. Adaptation of these elements would contribute to emphasize inner conflict and frustration.

In the framing, as planned out using a shot list (Figure 6), I aimed to push the protagonist out of the centre of the frame, pushed to either of the thirds and overwhelmed by the negative space and darkness. Only after the climax is she first centered, conveying her attempt at standing central and overcoming her struggles.

ACTION - Moving on from the previous production, a focus was laid on utilizing lighting to convey meaning. In this production, the red catch light acts as a motif for the underlying pressure acting on the character. Red as a colour emphasizes danger and evokes fear. The combination with a white key light builds contrast, evoking the contrasting and conflicted emotions of the protagonist. In the final shot, the break of the fourth wall, the red light dominates the protagonist’s face revealing how she has been overwhelmed by the pressure and lets go by apologizing.

In production, I focussed on manipulating the lighting setup and using the camera’s aperture and lenses to create this isolated representation of the protagonist.

REFLECTION - One weakness of this production was the conscious decision to underexpose the majority of the shots. While this was aimed at challenging the audience to effectively uncover what they see reflecting the challenge which the protagonist encounters at understanding her internal conflict, this effect ultimately takes away from the film. This meant that in post production, I had to spend time brightening the highlights, in hope of restoring the image without bringing in too much grain.

Nevertheless, my risk taking and inquiry into isolating low key lighting techniques and marginalising framing in this production allowed me to develop my cinematic understanding and effectively convey meaning through cinematic language.
Film Production Role 2: Editor

The film editor plays a fundamental role in assembling all audio and visual elements of a film. Editing establishes tension and mood as well as dealing “with all aspects of filmic rhythm” (Wiedemann, 1998).

While video editing had always been an area of interest, various productions facilitated the development of my skills in advanced titling, colour grading and application of editing styles and particular transitions.

**Clip 1. Defiance (0:45)**

**RATIONALE** - As the editor my intention was to evoke the protagonist’s fear of the unknown and build a tense atmosphere. As this clip serves as the premise to a chase sequence, inspiration was taken from Marsha Nakashima’s high pace continuity editing in chase scenes of Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982) and Buster Keaton’s editing in *The General* (1926). In addition, an advanced titling technique was inspired by Charlie Phillips’ on screen texting in the *Sherlock* series (2010), a creative element driving the plot forward.

**INQUIRY** - Research was conducted into films of the action genre. Inspired by Nakashima and Keaton, this film shares the juxtaposition of certain shots to create tension and meticulous editing to the beat of the soundtrack to capture the audience’s attention.

Prior to production, I was challenged to become familiar with *Motion 5*, a graphics tool that would allow me to design the on text framing effect. Inspired by Phillips’ on screen texting, I researched methods and self-taught how to recreate this in a visual effects programme. Taking a test shot, I started out experimenting by creating shapes and adding in text and animations to create the effect (Figure 8). In addition, collaboration with a music student allowed me to establish the feel of the final cut through the creation of a tense and restless soundtrack inspired by Scott’s *Blade Runner*.

**ACTION** - By creating the on screen texting effect, I was able to reveal the character’s frightened reaction, while revealing key plot elements to the audience, allowing the audience to observe what the character sees. This technique engages the audience while evoking the fear of the unknown haunting over the protagonist (Figure 9).
To reveal the fear overpowering the protagonist’s thoughts, continuity editing and rapid intercutting of shots was utilized, building tension. In the sequence prior to the texts arriving, continuity editing builds a familial, atmosphere. However, intercutting of similar shots reveals a sense of inner conflict, building a sense of apprehension for the arrival of the antagonist. The on-screen texting provokes the audience to question the nature of these messages just before the scene takes a turn and the antagonist enters. A transition from familiarity and a calm, yet tense atmosphere is facilitated by the transition in the soundtrack, from a slow guitar piece to restless, fast paced piano. This is supported by the rhythmic and rapid intercutting of close ups of the two characters (Figure 10). The intercutting and quick transitions between these shots reveals the tensions between the characters, initiating the chase sequence.

**Figure 10. Rapid intercutting of shots of the protagonist and antagonist, building tension**

**REFLECTION** - Despite having met my intentions of revealing the protagonists fear and building a tense setting, editing techniques and filmic rhythm could have been used to a greater extent to develop the tension and mood with a greater impact on the audience. Cuts and transitions could have been used to reveal character but also to cinematically build upon the setting and time in film. While this production was valuable in introducing me to basic visual effects and cuts, it allowed me to identify the areas of film editing in which I wanted to develop. These included the rapid intercutting or blending of shots or cutting to the beat of the score to create further tension. In the next production I hoped to embrace these elements of editing and develop my skills further.

**Clip 2. Fallen pages, extract 2 (0:26)**

**RATIONALE** - In this clip from *fallen pages* I aim to convey the inner conflict and anxiety imposed on the protagonist through the use transitions, montage editing and colour grading. With a particular focus on disrupting the continuity of time, conveying the protagonist’s lost of grip with reality, inspiration was drawn from George Tomasini’s use of transitions in Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) and Malkin, Marks and Zinners cross fades in Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather Part II*.

**INQUIRY** - While researching *Psycho* and *The Godfather Part II*, I paid attention to the editor’s use of fades as well as cross cutting which allows them to convey the passing of time, while having two situations and realities bleed into one another. Similarly, in this sequence I aim to convey how the character’s confessions blend into one another, where the audience is forced to lose track of time.

Edits between shots were planned out using a storyboard (Figure 11), this would allow the actor to prepare for the different shots the film required as well as providing a visual overview for myself as the editor in post production.

**Figure 11. Extract from initial storyboard, planning out edits**
In addition, I spent time during the planning stage to get in contact with a music student, who I then collaborated with to develop a score. I spent time instructing and refining the production of this score as it would be essential to building tension and should underpin the atmosphere of insecurity, fear and isolation in the film.

**ACTION -** The first shots in the film establish the scene, as the shot reveals the wrongful actions the protagonist had previously engaged in. Following this, I decided to introduce a sequence of straight cuts, conveying how the character struggles to move on and accept her failure (Figure 12). After introducing this reluctance, the inner conflict of the character is established, and built up further through the next sequence of edits.

By introducing a sequence of montage shots interconnected through crossfades, similar to those employed in *Vertigo* and *The Godfather II*, I aimed to convey the passing of time blending the stages of the protagonist’s confession. In addition, the employment of J and L cuts overlap and blend each of the shots into each other. This further emphasizes the protagonist’s lack of control over her own thoughts, as they are blending into each other and all over the place. Furthermore, additional fragments of the protagonist’s confession are overlaid over different shots in the confession. With the spoken words not physically matching the visuals, the audience is engaged into the disorientation of the protagonist. The use of cuts and transitions effectively facilitate the development of the conflicted character towards the climax of the film, which occurs after this sequence.

An additional element of editing which I focussed on in this production was colour correction. In particular, focus was laid on bringing up the contrast, brightening up the highlights and pushing down the shadows (Figure 13). This effectively separated the protagonist from the background, emphasizing her isolation within her own thoughts and disconnected nature from the outer world.

**REFLECTION -** This final production through the role of the editor allowed me to build up my editing skills and take risks to employ a wider range of editing techniques to create meaning. One main challenge in this production was cutting together the fade sequence, where I had to find a balance in disorienting the audience, putting them in the protagonists shoes and keeping them engaged. I hoped to find this by not overloading the audience with too many fragments of the confession overlapped on top of each other, but only single fragments at a time. Ultimately, the editing in this production effectively explored an inner conflict through the manipulation of cuts, transitions and colour grading.
As the “creative mind that chooses the aesthetical and technical specifications to be implemented in their vision” (Mourab, 2014), the director plays a key role in the production of a film.

**Clip 1. Overhead (2:57)**

**RATIONALE** - Taking on this role for the film, *Overhead*, my intention was to convey the process of individuals overcoming their internal struggles and seeing the bigger picture of life through an artistic and dramatic expression in film. This production drew inspiration from Pawel Pawlikowski’s motivated framing and character direction to move the plot forward in *Ida* (2013), Jean-Pierre Jeunet’s linear narrative and dramatic premise of seeing beyond oneself in *Amélie* (2001) and Akira Kurosawa’s use of movement to convey meaning in film.

**INQUIRY** - In order to portray the themes of self-centeredness versus selflessness in the film effectively, research was conducted into the genre through the films *Amélie* (2001) and *Ida* (2013). Inspiration was taken from Jeunet’s high pace narrative to establish the pressures of society which overwhelm the protagonist. With an established the vision for the film, the scriptwriting process was one which saw many revisions and drafts (figure 14). The main focus of this process was to focus on the development of the protagonist, facilitating the character arch from closed-mindedness to widening her scope and learning to see the bigger picture.

The high paced narrative driven by rapid cuts and a sophisticated soundscape in *Amélie* inspired the intercutting of shots and heartbeat in the opening sequence of *Overhead*. Here, the heartbeat and abrupt introduction of shots establish the protagonist’s sense of fear, and makes the audience at unease, consequently building tension. This creative decision builds on the isolation Anne initially is driven into.

In the drama genre, I aimed to portray the character development of the protagonist Anne and character Angus, taking inspiration from Pawlikowski’s *Ida* in the selective framing, repetitive imagery and muted colour palette. Pawlikowski repetitively drives the protagonist out of the centre of frame, never framing her fully (Figure 15).

**Figure 14. Initial script writing, annotations and revisions**

**Figure 15. Focus on close up shots of protagonist in first scenes of the film**
ACTION - In Overhead, the creative decision was made for the framing to transition from close ups of the protagonist (Figure 16), conveying her self centered nature, to wider shots after she overcomes her fears and talks to Angus, the other character, in the third scene. This consequently reveals the development of open-mindedness in the protagonist’s character, succeeding in seeing the world beyond herself.

Here, parallelism is drawn between the audience and the protagonist. The audience not being able to see her full body reflects her being unable to see the full picture of her surroundings. In addition, as the director, the creative decision was made to shoot the film on a gimbal, allowing for dynamic camera movement revealing Anne’s potential to change, and see what is beyond herself. These elements acting in harmony facilitate the development of the characters towards seeing the bigger picture.

In the final scene, I took inspiration from Kurosawa’s use of movement to develop character, theme and plot. By juxtaposing character movement and characters sitting still I hope to introduce how finally, the characters stand still, and ignore the rush of the 21st century in the final scene. The characters essentially take a moment to reflect and open their mind while the world continues in rapid motion around them. In this extended metaphor, the leaves and cowbells in the background signify this continuity of movement around the characters, while they sit still (Figure 17). To make use of the movement of nature, I ensured we were filming on a day where there was high wind velocity and during sunset, signifying how the characters are closing an old chapter of closed-mindedness, and ready to open to a new of seeing the bigger picture. To do so, I scouted out the location and regularly checked the weather forecast for a suitable day to shoot on (Figure 18). By working closely
with the actors during production, blocking and line delivery was manipulated to capture the manner in which the characters open up to see the bigger picture.

The third and fourth scenes were two where I explored the characters opening up through the role of the director. Through close collaboration with the cinematographer, the cinematography was manipulated to reveal how the characters widen their scope and see the bigger picture. This was done through the utilization of a pan out, each occurring after Anne interacts with Angus, seeing that there is more beyond themselves (Figure 19).

**Figure 19.** Panning out to wide shots of the two interacting at the end of scene 3 and 4

To score this film, I collaborated with a musician to write a piano based soundtrack. The score was inspired by Amelie’s high pace in contrast with Ida’s slow paced classical pieces. To add to a sophisticated and tense soundscape I recorded additional foley and sound effects with an external microphone, sounds of footsteps, heartbeats and white noise aimed to create unease amongst the audience and build tension.

**REFLECTION** - Throughout the production the script and shooting schedule acted as key resources in keeping the shoot on track and focussed on the theme. In addition, this role allowed me to realise the necessity of detailed planning. The last scene challenged the planning as I had to take into account the sun setting. With the threat of losing light as the shoot went on, moving quickly was of the essence. Although there is a gradual loss of light during the last scene, this signifies the extended passing of time and the closing of a chapter of closed-mindedness.

All in all, this production was one to reveal the challenges of the role of the director. Time had to be put in to ensuring the set was ready before the actors came and planning out the shoot so that we would finish on time was quite a challenge. In addition, I learnt that clear communication with the actors was essential in conveying the right emotion out of the characters. In addition, the director plays a major role in overseeing the artistic intention of the film. Ever so slight decisions during production or in post production, such as manipulating the weather or character direction, have a major impact on the final film.

Ultimately, this production has taught me how to reflect on previous creative choices, research, communicate, inquire and engage with established works of film, taking inspiration from them to adapt them to a narrative to create an expressive film. Time management and planning have been key areas in which I have grown, but skills that should still be developed further.

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**A note on copyright:**
- No copyright music or sound effects were used in this film portfolio.
- All of the music used in “Fallen pages”, “Defiance” and “Overhead” are original compositions composed and performed by fellow students.
Bibliography


Ingster, B. (Director) (1940). Stranger on the Third Floor [Motion picture]. RKO Radio Pictures.


Keaton, B. (Director) (1926). The General [Motion picture].


