

Manipulating Emotion in Film

**What Games Can Learn from
100 Years of Cinema**

Means of triggering emotions

- performance of the actors
- staging
- composition
- lighting
- sound effects and music
- setting
- editing

Film grammar

- stylistic elements need to be integrated into the overall “syntax” of the film
- cinematic syntax is a set of rules governing the organisation of visual language for expressive purposes
- it is based upon conventions worked out over the course of film history

Audience participation

- stylistic conventions rely upon the audience's active participation in the creation of a meaning which is not present in any one shot, but only in the relations between shots and groups of shots (sequences)
- the effect is therefore non-naturalistic
- as in the other arts, the meaning resides in the structured form of the piece as a whole, not just in the surface story ("content")

Narrative

- mainstream cinema is a narrative form
- in narrative, cause-and-effect relations play out in time
- causal relations lead to change
- change results in conflict
- the essence of drama is conflict
- conflict engages the audience

Eisenstein and editing

- montage is the essence of film
- the essence of montage is conflict
- conflict between shots generates a meaning that is present in neither shot by itself, nor in their sum
- $A + B \neq AB$; rather, $A + B = C$
- conflict within the shot is “potential montage”

Dialectical montage

- conflict can take many forms, both between shots and within shots
- there can be graphic conflict, conflict of movement, conflict of scales, of masses, of volumes, of depths
- each fragment is almost abstract; shots become language-like
- “Emotional effect begins only with the reconstruction of the event in montage fragments.”

Orchestration

- for maximum effectiveness, scenes and sequences should be structured according to “grammatical” principles
- good examples: the “rules” of continuity style; the POV shot
- also: separation, parallel action, slow disclosure, familiar image

Battleship Potemkin (1925)

- “Odessa Steps” sequence lasts 6’45”
- divided into three “movements”
- each movement features different “themes”
- our excerpt includes the prelude, the first movement, and the beginning of the second movement

Introduction of characters

- the mother and son
- in terms of the narrative, this scene depicts the status quo

The people flee

- extreme long shot
- crowd runs toward the camera

Man falls to his knees

- conflict of shot size
- graphic conflict

Soldiers descend the stairs

- in opposition to the crowd, they move away from the camera
- conflict of form: the soldiers move in unison as one body
- the crowd moves chaotically, individually

Parallel action

- different individuals or groups are singled out by the camera
- conflict between the one and the many

Familiar image

- the return to similar shots gives a sense of unity to the fast cutting and apparent chaos of the scene portrayed
- it helps us to recognise at a glance different strands of parallel action

A second theme emerges

- the mother and son, first seen in the introductory sequence, reappear
- the tracking shot provides a contrast to the adjacent stationary shots
- it makes this moment more dynamic

The soldiers fire

- graphic conflict with the preceding shot of the stairs
- conflict of tonality

The boy is shot and falls

- graphic conflict between the diagonal lines created by the stairs, and the body of the boy splayed out perpendicular to them

The mother picks up her son

- conflict of direction: she goes against the flow of the crowd
- in terms of narrative structure, this provides a transition into the second “movement” of the sequence: the people’s appeal to the soldiers

A counter flow

- a group of people join the mother and move against the flow of the crowd
- conflict of direction
- the power of this moment is due largely to the strong use of a consistent screen direction until this point for the fleeing crowd and the pursuing soldiers

Structuring the long take

- in opposition to both the montage aesthetic and continuity style is the long take style
- sometimes referred to as the mise-en-scène style
- to analyse this style, we treat each new graphic arrangement as a separate “shot”

Dreyer and staging

- a master of the long take and staging Dreyer uses duration and blocking as a means of intensifying dramatic action
- the long take allows the actors time (and space) to reveal their inner thoughts and feelings through physical movement
- the long take must be carefully structured to be effective and meaningful

Ordet (1954)

- based on a stage play by Kaj Munk
- the style is indeed “theatrical”
- the actors express themselves not only vocally, but through their conscious *and unconscious* movements
- but the style is also cinematic in its use of composition and camera movement

The initial situation

- Morten and Peter at loggerheads over the issue of their different faiths

A moment of communication

- Peter hints that something might persuade him to change his mind
- Morten and Peter make eye contact
- because they have barely looked at each other in the course of this very long scene, this action carries weight

Peter repositions himself

- he breaks away from Morten, then crosses over to his side of the table
- this movement breaks the impasse and changes the dynamic between the men
- it also dramatically changes the composition
- a new visual “axis” is created

Peter proposes a solution

- the strength of his feeling is expressed physically
- fearful, Morten shrinks in his chair - and in the frame

Morten reacts

- Morten recovers himself
- moving to a new position, he changes the physical relationship as well as the composition
- Peter's and Morten's positions are now reversed
- this reflects a reversal of the power balance

A new “movement” follows

- reflecting the change in the situation, the characters take up new positions
- setting, composition and staging combine to create the context for a new dramatic situation

