FILM ART AND FILM CRAFT

Most film teachers are overly preoccupied with the training of students in the practical aspects of film production, such as camera operation, lighting techniques, laboratory procedures, editing skills and preparation of materials for the production of an answer print. This technological aspect of filmmaking is no doubt inevitable and is equivalent to the training in handwriting, spelling, and grammar rules received in elementary schools. It has nothing to do with film as art form, nor does it attack the central problem for the film teacher; namely, how to stimulate students to use the medium cinematically and as an aesthetic vehicle capable of expressing their most personal artistic content.

Obviously, students must possess a rudimentary proficency in the technical aspects of filmmaking, such as how to form an image, how to gather and edit sound, prior to examining film form at a university level. Without such a background they can not even begin to examine the artistic possibilities of this medium. Although deeply interrelated and interdependent, these two aspects of filmmaking have to be studied at different stages. Imagine a creative writing course at the university level consisting merely of exercises in grammatical sentence structure and in punctuation and spelling in which the professor would be required to spend his time teaching these skills rather than exploring the expressive function of language or the quality of literary styles. Unfortunately, in many university programs, such is the lot of the film professor.

To solve this problem it is important to separate the instruction of elementary film craft from that of creative

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A Guide to Teaching

Filmmaking As Artistic Expression

by Vlada Petric

Teaching filmmaking is certainly one of the most difficult and complicated enterprises in art appreciation: too often the technical and economic aspects of film production are so complex that the artistic side of the problem—which obviously should be essential and predominant—must be pushed aside.

All teachers of filmmaking are aware of this problem, but can hardly resolve it in practice. Therefore they try to strike a balance between the technical and the artistic aspects of filmmaking—achieving at best a compromise, the most dangerous solution in any artistic activity.

As a result of these difficulties, the methodology of teaching filmmaking has never been examined from a scholarly point of view. Consequently, each professor sets up his own method of lecturing and conveying knowledge to students.

Bearing these problems in mind, I have tried to plan my course at Harvard's Carpenter Center (Department for Visual and Environmental Studies) as an experiment in the teaching of filmmaking *as analytically as possible*—i.e., to introduce the students to the medium as a means of artistic expression; to help them discover its technique; and to allow them to use film as any other artistic medium—according to their personal creative capacities and temperaments.

Consequently, the course is structured to 1) explain the elements and structure of film on the theoretical level; 2) to illustrate these principles by screening typical examples of films made by various filmmakers; and 3) to lead each student to his own project—a short film to be completed by the end of the course.

As the title for the course—"Filmmaking As Artistic Expression"—indicates, professional training and the technical aspects of filmmaking are secondary: *it is designed for students who have already received basic traininig in the use of the camera and the other technical apparatus of shooting.* Rather, the lectures concentrate on how to use cinematic techniques and devices to best express the artist's visions, ideas, and emotions—his attitudes toward reality, his response to dreams and mental images. A strong distinction is made between the use of film as a means of artistic expression and as a means of communication.

The emphasis of the course is on the aesthetic possibilities of cinema: the formal structure of film, dynamic (non-static composition) of the shot, dramatic continuity, the function of light, motion (both of and within the shot), time and space, the relationship of sound to image etc. The ultimate aim of the course is that, through a series of lectures, discussions, demonstrations, and exercises students will acquire both technical skills *and* conceptual awareness of the aesthetic possibilities of the motion picture medium.

The "practical" aspect of the course is arranged so that students will grasp the art of filmmaking through a series of projects or exercises, each of which represents one of the critical aspects of filmmaking. Progress in understanding the essence of the cinematic medium is achieved through the resolution of these problems.

All of the projects are conceived as preparation for the final goal of the workshop: a short film which each student will make according to his own aesthetic vision. No genre, therefore, is preferred. The exercises are structured to teach students the general principles of cinematic language without predetermining

which style they will explore in their final films. Similarly, the films which are viewed by the class represent all genres from straight documentary and narrative films to extremely stylized enacted or abstract cinema, and all time periods from the silent era to the present day are included.

The course is structured in the following way:

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE: FILM AND TV – TECHNIQUE, COMMUNICATION, ART

The teacher outlines the structure of the course, emphasizing that students will study the elements of cinema through various film projects. Students should not expect to focus on film craftsmanship so much as on the aesthetic possibilities of the medium, and especially the difference between film and television expression. Films to be shown: "The Director," "The Cinematographer," "The Editor," and "Basic Film Terms," by Sheldon Renan.

PROJECT I: VISUAL COMPOSITION OF THE IMAGE ON THE SCREEN

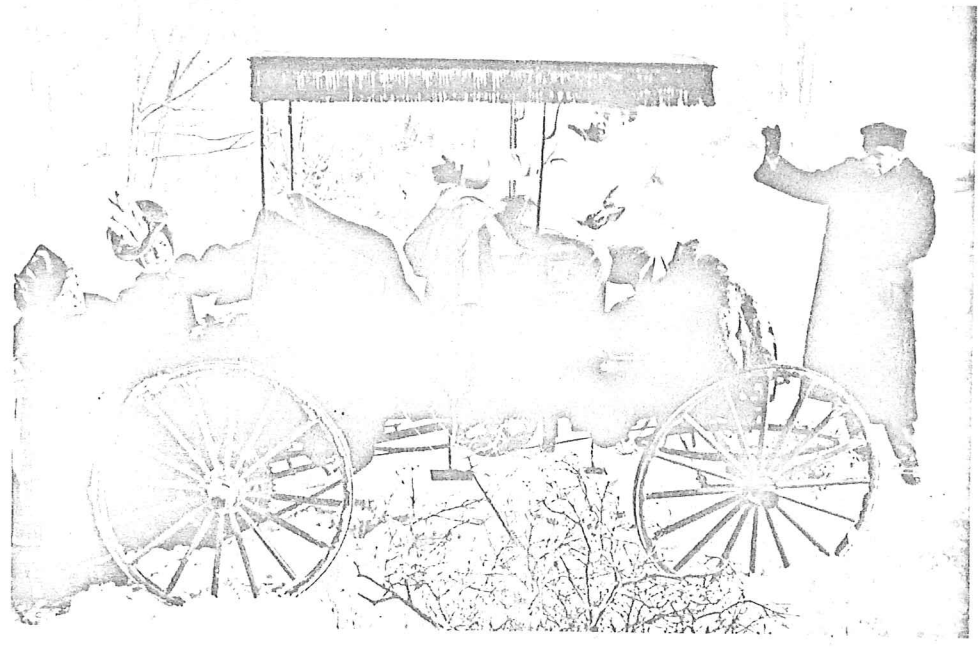
An indoor or outdoor tape no longer than ten minutes, including at least five shots using no camera movement with possible movement within the shot and at least five shots that involve camera movement as well. One pair of shots should attempt to solve the problem of matching two successive pictorial compositions, i.e., to make an adequate transition from one visual unit to another. Films to be shown: Eisenstein's footage for QUE VIVA MEXICO and THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS (Welles). Also, some of the available TV shows which are noteworthy for their elaborate composition of separate shots. (For example, EDITING: VALUES AND INTERPRETATIONS, a sequence from "Gunsmoke" as assembled by three different editors.)

PROJECT II: MOVEMENT AND PROGRESSION WITHIN A SHOT

Students are asked to make a 2- or 3-minute "continuity" of various shots of any objects, personalities, or other phenomena from nature or from imagination that will, in its final form, reveal a sense of movement or progression in time and/or space on the screen. The number of shots is immaterial, but they must be joined in the camera and not in the editing room. Films to be shown: Excerpts from 8½ (Fellini), METROPOLIS (Lang), CITIZEN KANE (Welles), RITUAL IN TRANSFIGURED TIME (Deren), QUICK BILLY (Baillie).

PROJECT III: MOVEMENT OF THE CAMERA VERSUS MOVEMENT WITHIN THE FRAME

This exercise has two aspects: 1) movement of the camera (traveling, pan, tilt, zoom, etc.) through the environment, passing on its way various static objects; and 2) movement of the camera



TOP: The Magnificent Ambersons
CENTER: Potemkin
BOTTOM: 8½

The films are used to show, respectively, VISUAL COMPOSITION OF THE IMAGE ON THE SCREEN; MOVEMENT AND PROGRESSION WITHIN A SHOT; and MONTAGE–SYNTAX OF FILM.

by following an object's motion. These two movements can be combined or juxtaposed in various ways, depending upon the desires and intentions of the director. The major problem, of course, is in the interplay and interaction between movement through a static environment and the camera movement with an object in motion. The one- to two-minute project must be done in the camera without post editing. Films to be shown: WONDER RING (Brakhage), CASTRO STREET (Baillie), DAVID HOLTZMAN'S DAIRY (McBride), WINTER WIND (Jancso).

PROJECT IV: THE INDIVIDUAL IN ITS ENVIRONMENT

Before beginning to shoot this project, the student must decide what his subject will be and how he intends to describe the individual's relationship toward the ambience. As the title indicates, the focus of this exercise will be on a human being. By relating the person to his surrounding (within the shot and/or by juxtaposing various shots of the person with various shots of the environment), the student can reveal or even comment upon the relationship between these two entities. This project gives, for the first time, the opportunity to edit shots after shooting. The student must, therefore, think of the final montage composition of the exercise in advance. Films to be shown: LOUISIANA STORY (Flaherty), ON THE BOWERY (Rogosin), SKYSCRAPER (Van Dyke-Clark), DEAD BIRDS (Gardner), MOTHER'S DAY (Leacock). *Note:* The nature of this project is also close to the television medium, therefore students may have the option of using a sync-sound movie camera or a television porta-pak camera. In both cases it is assumed they are knowledgeable in the techniques of the sound system *prior* to the shooting.

PROJECT V: MONTAGE—SYNTAX OF FILM

This project is intended to be completed entirely in the editing room. Students are provided with 360' (10 minutes) of archive film footage from one film. This material contains about 100 shots which made up one sequence of the film. All the shots are deliberately separated so that the students have the opportunity to re-edit it in their own way. Of course they will find themselves limited by the possibilities of rearranging the editing continuity because the duration of the shots and the selections have already been made by the director of the film. However, many possibilities for restructuring still exist, particularly when the smallest change of order can entirely alter the impact and meaning of the whole sequence. When students have finished the editing, the original version of the sequence will be shown so that they can compare it with their results. Films to be shown: Excerpts from POTEMKIN, STRIKE, OCTOBER (Eisenstein), INTOLERANCE (Griffith), OLYMPIA (Riefenstahl), OUR DAILY BREAD (Vidor), NINE VARIATIONS ON A DANCE THEME (Harris).

PROJECT VI: SYMBOLIC ARRANGEMENT OF THE SHOT

The idea behind this project is to show students in what way the cinematic medium can indicate meanings and emotions which are "beyond" the authentic impact of the film image, i.e., to explore the surrealist possibilities of film. Students have to envision a certain situation (with actors) which will have a symbolic meaning on the screen, or shoot some objects which will connote "more" than their own physical appearance. In other words, to compose the shot and to establish the movement within it so that it reveals some "inner" meaning about the subject or the personality. Films to be shown: MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON (Deren), BED (Broughton), ENTR'ACTE (Clair), UN CHIEN ANDALOU (Bunuel), THE BLOOD OF A POET (Cocteau), FIREWORKS (Anger), NIEBELUNGEN (Lang), SEVENTH SEAL (Bergman).

PROJECT VII: DYNAMICS OF ABSTRACT FORMS

Although basically the photography of the external world, film can also achieve entirely abstract visual dynamism on the screen, a sort of "optical music" or "visual poetry." In the history of the cinema many painters employed film to express their abstract visions by animated graphic forms or painted elements. Others, mostly still photographers, used film to dynamize and distort the photographic representation of reality (in the process of shooting or later in editing). Some used black and white leaders, others scratched the surface of the exposed film stock. In all these cases the basic aim is to create a dynamic, kinesthetic abstract composition on the screen.

This project allows students to experiment with all kinds of abstract filmmaking. In practice it seems that two possibilities are most suitable for the equipment we have available: to shoot real objects so as to distort their illusionistic appearance (out-of-focus; glasses and various lenses in front of the objective; fast movement of the camera; extreme close-ups); or to animate some graphic forms or still photographies (slides). Films to be shown: BALLET MECANIQUE (Leger), RETOUR A LA RAISON (Ray), H_20 (Steiner), STUDIES (Fishinger), PRELUDE TO DOG STAR MAN (Brakhage), SAMADI, MOMENTUM (Belson), LATE SUPERIMPOSITIONS (Smith), McLaren's ABSTRACT EXPERIMENTS.

PROJECT VIII: FILM ACCOMPANIED BY MUSIC

Most of the exercises proposed so far have been directed toward the exploration of the film image without much concern for sound or music. As will be seen in the films viewed for this project, music can be used to create visual dynamism on the screen, accentuate a moment in the dramatic development of the plot, stimulate specific emotional or atmospheric moods envisioned on the screen, or emphasize the rhythm of abstract images exchanged on the screen. Students may elect either to subordinate the visual continuity to music which has been chosen in advance or to search for a suitable composition after the shooting of one's exercise.

A student may use any kind of sound, make his own composition by mixing music and wild (non-synchronous) sound, or experiment with electronic music. But one must always bear in mind whether the film will subordinate image to sound or sound to image. And finally, one should realize through this exercise that in each case sound and image are treated as separate elements to be joined in an harmonic unity. Because the sound will be recorded on tape, it will be possible to project an exercise without sound so that the difference becomes apparent. Films to be shown: FOREST MURMERS, FINGAL'S CAVE (Vorkapich), CORRIDOR (Lawder), LAPIS (James Whitney), RICHTER AND EGGELING FILMS, BLAZES (Breer).

PROJECT IX: SOUND AS COUNTERPOINT TO THE IMAGE

This exercise is an extension of the previous one: the sound (music, wild dialogue, and/or effects) is to be used as a means to "expand" the meaning of the image; 1) often by "contradicting" the visual content; or 2) by introducing a new psychological, intellectual, or emotional dimension to the illusion created on the screen. The term "counterpoint" indicates that both image and sound are treated as equal components of a musical-optical composition. Eisenstein and Pudovkin developed a specific theory of audio-visual counterpoint, and students may be interested in reading Eisenstein's manifesto (included in "Film Form") before the discussion of Eisenstein's ALEXANDER NEVSKY (which will be screened in connection with this project). In America the first experiments in sight and sound counterpoint were done by Rouben Mamoulian, whose CITY STREETS will also be shown. Films to be shown: ALEXANDER NEVSKY (Eisenstein), CITY STREETS (Mamoulian), FALL (De Witt), UNSERE AFRIKAREISE (Kubelka).

PROJECT X: SOUND FILM—ORGANIC UNITY OF VISUAL AND AUDIAL COMPONENTS

This exercise involves the least explored aspect of modern cinema, and is

therefore quite literally the most experimental part of the course. Previous projects showed students how sound can be used as an harmonic accompaniment to the image or as a counterpoint to the visual dynamism on the screen. Now we face the problem of integrating sound with the image not as an additional component, but as an inseparable element of the SOUND-IMAGE, something which the audience will perceive simultaneously as an organic visual-audial unity. It is difficult to cite any theoretical discussions of this filmmaking problem because the cinema in general has not yet reached this kind of unity. But moments of unity are achieved in films from the "cinema verite" school, modern Italian cinema, and American independent filmmakers.

It is important to note that the problem posed in this exercise cannot be solved simply by shooting sync sound. The idea is to penetrate directly into the reality with the objective lens and the microphone. One can give only one piece of advice: Do not mechanically record the sound because it will have the same superficial effect as a mechanical record of the image. The rest is left to the students—to explore a field which will become the cinema of the future. Films to be shown: ECLIPSE (Antonioni), LA PRISE DE POUVOIR PAR LOUIS XIV (Rosselini), HUMAN PYRAMIDE (Rouch), THE CHELSEA GIRLS (Warhol), MOUCHETTE (Bresson).

FINAL PROJECT: STUDENTS' EXPERIMENTAL FILMS

The remainder of the workshop will consist of practical work on the students' final films.

Rushes will be screened and collectively discussed through all the stages of shooting and other phases of completion and structural development of the director's creative process. Also during this period the books and essays from the required reading list will be discussed and studied.

Completed films will be publicly criticized. No grading.

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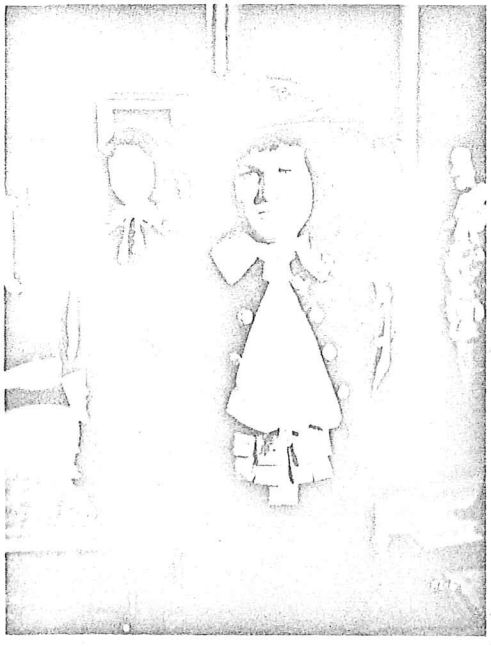
filmmaking even if both aspects are taught by the same person (this does not mean that the creative impulses will be "repressed" at the elementary film training level, nor that the technical aspects of film craft will be excluded from the exploration of the aesthetic possibilities of cinema). Only with this concept in mind can a university course fulfil its goal of helping students to discover whether the cinematic medium is the right one for them to express their own visions, ideas, emotions and attitudes toward the world in which they live. Only then can the physical properties of the medium be tied directly and creatively to the expressive qualities of film, and to the realities of the form making process. Form making means everything from speed of the camera used and its corresponding image quality to the shooting schedule necessitated by a given budget. Once equipped with the technical knowledge of the medium and conscious of its expressive capacities, students can be asked to say something with the medium (again, no one will bar them from saying something in the very beginning of their film craft training).

Ideally, the undergraduate and graduate filmmaking courses in universities have to be based on the fact that students have already received a technical training in film craft at the secondary level equivalent to that received in their native language. Otherwise, the value of the course will be lowered to the level of a technicum or a craft workshop which cannot be qualified as an academic exploration of an art form. Therefore, substantial actions have to be taken to introduce basic film training in secondary schools. Thus, the serious study of the art of filmmaking will be worthy of the university.

V. P.

TOP: The Seventh Seal
CENTER: Corridor (Lawder)
BOTTOM: The Rise of Louis XIV

The films are used to show, respectively, SYMBOLIC ARRANGEMENT OF THE SHOT; FILM ACCOMPANIED BY MUSIC; and SOUND FILM—ORGANIC UNITY OF VISUAL AND AUDIAL COMPONENTS.