

Poetry in cinema resides in the Essential composition of frames organized in the rhythmic construction of time. That is, each frame must manifest nothing but its Essence and is put together with other frames of Essence that are arranged together by nothing but the rhythm of time. Perhaps a use of example is needed to exhibit what I mean. But first, we must get through two terms stated: *Essence* and the *rhythm of time*. Essence is a frame that manifests only the director's vision and nothing more. Thus, in a true Essential frame common sub-elements of cinema such as *storytelling, acting, lighting, designing, etc.* are absent; in a true Essential frame there is only cinematography and its image – which consists of actors, light, sound, design, etc. in their *noun* form rather than in their *verb* form; in a true Essential frame *only the frame is in action* because *cinema is Essentially the art of framing*. Cinematographically composed images are then arranged by the rhythm of time. Simple way to write out the “rhythm of time” is to say that a filmmaker should only make a cut to another shot when the breath of the former shot runs out. In short, each shot should reach its near death until they are substituted. I use the word ‘substitution’ because in an Essential cinema each and every shot, scene, and sequence are Essentially the same singular vision of the director.

Here is an example of a poetic cinema:

《春怨》

纱窗日落渐黄昏，
金屋人见泪痕。
寂寞空庭春欲晚，
梨花满地不开门。

Loneliness¹

Out of the window wanes twilight of parting day;
None sees her dry her furtive tears in gilded hall.
In lonely courtyard even spring will pass away;
She won't open the door but lets pear blossoms fall.

Lines (referring to the original Chinese version) are composed only by the absolute Essentiality of each character, and the characters are arranged to form four Essential lines of rhythmic exposition of love in and of time. Further, the characters metaphorically mirror love at a particular moment in time as opposed to telling something about love through the use of symbols, which is the predominant feature in many inferior works of art. To sum up, again, traditional Chinese poems are composed with Essential images arranged by the rhythm of time. And just like the poem above, an Essential film is never directly about anything. Rather, it is a metaphorical reflection of the director's vision – his/her life, which is intrinsically incomprehensible but yet beautiful (artful). We can say that true filmmakers are poets. Or better said, true poets are cinema-makers.

I would like to recommend to all those who approach cinema as an artistic medium to read as many traditional Chinese poems as possible. Reading them will give priceless lifetime lessons that one cannot get from repetitively practicing and being taught the “three-act structure of storytelling,” “continuity filmmaking,” “subtextual directing,” etc. We must always keep in mind that cinema is an art of framing. But who frames a film? Of course the director does. As such, cinema is the director's art.

Dear directors, please take control of your frame.

Alexander Kang
2016/07/31
California, USA

¹ Translated from the original poem by 许渊冲 (Xu-YuanChong). Note that the accuracy of the translation is not at all important in regards to the purpose of this paper.