

Determination

Without a camera there is no film.¹ Every aspect of filmmaking (lighting, sound, acting, writing, directing, etc.) is dedicated towards making the *visions* manifest as framed images. If any of those aspects run on its own, then the vision falls apart. *In short, everything about cinema is contained within the frame.* Having a visionary director (i.e. auteur) then is a necessary condition for the art of filmmaking – if not the film has no style and is not memorable, which is the greatest insult one can give to any film. Anyone who wants to pursue filmmaking, then, must develop, first and foremost, a fascination and love towards framing.

Framing in cinema is the way in which the vision is contained. It is important to make a distinction between vision and idea. The vision in cinema comes in an image or images – because cinema is an art of framing. Anything that disturbs the tranquility of the vision is an idea that is abstract. Ideas are abstract in the sense that they, at the first sight, provoke analysis, which is theoretical and thus “open to interpretations”. Vision is a thing in itself. When one encounters a vision, one does not, and cannot, analyze it. One is simply frozen by the image at the first sight. One may decide to analyze a vision later but he will find himself not being able to move any further from his memory of the vision. Such vain attempt to analyze vision is aesthetics. *Vision is determinant, and to manifest a vision the entire aspect of filmmaking must act in determination.*

In a screenplay, the text (i.e. what is directly written) is what the director has determined to express. The subtext, on the other hand, is the readers’ creation after psychologically analyzing the text. Subtexts are then ideas, and if a film is driven by subtexts, then it becomes open to interpretation and the images contained in the film never get to manifest the singular vision. Such is why many films are not memorable – they are so overly driven by subtexts to the point that they end up becoming cognitive (i.e. analytical) and not affective. In other words, a film made with subtexts does not act in determination, and it hides behind “open interpretations” which is an excuse from admitting that the film had no vision to begin with and only had a collage of clever ideas. Unfortunately, film students are taught to value subtext. We can see that vision is expressed when the text is not translated by ideas in any process of filmmaking. The text itself then must be determined to be filmed and withstand analysis.

All these statements and those to come in the future are to emphasize that filmmakers need to know what they want. And what a filmmaker wants is his vision to be filmed. His want precedes reason and rationale because his vision is an image without logic.² So he goes through the painful process of writing the text in order to describe³ (not explain) his vision and embrace the ones he loves with his determination to film.

¹ Here I only speak of films that are written that feature actors. I have no interest in documentary, video art, television, etc.

² Note that when an image is linked to logic, that image becomes subject to analysis and transforms into an idea.

³ Descriptions in the text are the ones that should be filmed, not the actions.

Let's now have a look at a text. Say, we want to adapt a novel *The Secret Garden*⁴ into a film. Here is an adapted text based on the novel (imagine that this is the very first scene of the film):

INT. MARY'S ROOM – EARLY MORNING

She awakened feeling very cross.

There was something mysterious in the air that morning.

What the frame needs to contain is *not* the action (“She awakened feeling very cross”) but rather the description (“There was something mysterious in the air that morning”). The action simply happens within the description. *The action is part of the description*. Here, the description expresses a feeling that somehow drove the action. This scene is quite problematic for the actor because there is no subtext for the actor to figure out ‘why Mary was awakened feeling very cross’ and what it means by ‘something mysterious’. In other words, how can a description motivate an action?

An actor becomes a part of the whole image when the scene is filmed. As a result, the performance of the actor in the scene is as good as that of the air. Hence, the actor needs only to act without reasoning and then evaporate into the mysterious quality of the morning air. So the action-reaction relationship that is prominent in theatre is replaced in cinema by *the action that becomes the description*. Every aspect of cinema has to feed into the description of the scene. Description is the image that is determinant and it is the vision. Cinema is much closer to reality than theatre in terms of acting, sound, visuals, etc. Actions in cinema are not exceptions. In cinema, as it is in real life, actions occur without particular reason only to be subsumed by the environment in which the action has occurred. *There is no why in cinema; there are only the things that are in motion within the environment – like a tree branch that sways according to the wind*.

The actor, as well as everyone in the team, must submit to the camera’s ability to contain descriptions as images, for it is the cinematic determination. I stress once more that anyone who wants to pursue filmmaking must develop, first and foremost, a fascination and love towards framing.

Alexander Kang
2015/10/22
Shanghai, China

⁴ Original novel written by Frances Hodgson Burnett.