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## **Dissertation**

*Problems with Emotion within Cinema*

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**Abstract**

Within this dissertation I will be exploring emotion within cinema through the practice of research, reflection and practical reflection. Firstly, I will research into emotion and how successful cinematographers have applied emotion throughout 4 successful films throughout the past decades. Continuing on from my research, I've dissected all of my previous work as a cinematographer through applying reflective practice, I have understood where I went wrong in terms of conveying emotion in my practice. I will bring forward all the research and reflective practice and apply this to my future projects, this will be me explaining why I believe these shots would work for the applied scenes and examples of test shots taken.

## Introduction

One of the fundamental, key foundations of the world of cinema is emotion. The way film is able to manipulate emotions and portray emotion on screen is what makes it so special. It's a medium unlike any other, it brings together things like art, music, photography all into one, where filmmakers are able to tell the most ingenious stories for us to all enjoy. Film is driven by emotion, every aspect of film can evoke whatever emotion the filmmaker desires to create, it's what makes film so effective but how do they do it? Film is also a form of escapism for many people, for 2 or so hours they're taken on a journey into so many different story worlds. One key component in filmmaking is cinematography, cinematography is the lifeblood of the moving image, it is responsible for the visuals of the film. "The work of the cinematographer inevitably involves aesthetically motivated decisions, decisions based not only on a technical understanding of film stocks, lighting, and lenses but also on an aesthetic understanding of composition, light and shadow, and texture and colour." (Beach, 2015) Cinematography has a strong tie to psychological studies, each element in itself has its own way of manipulating the human psyche. Through this dissertation I am hoping to gain a better understanding of what emotion is, how we can use emotion to our advantage in film and how to portray emotion in my own films. Through reflective practise I will be able to see why I wasn't successful before and how I won't make the same mistakes in my future work. To be able to know how to use emotion in film, firstly you have to watch how other have done it before you, I will be looking into some of the most emotional scenes in films out there today and analysing how these filmmakers were able to evoke emotions within the audience and how elements of cinematography are the driving force behind it. These are the building blocks that us as less experienced filmmakers need to delve into in order to be a success in our own field. I will be proposing cinematic choices I will be making in my upcoming projects after I conclude my research into emotion within cinema and how I will hopefully be able to use it to my advantage and in turn creating a more successful project due to the research undertaken.

## Chapter 1

### *Problems with emotion*

Emotions play a huge role in many of people's everyday life, depending on what we feel, it can determine how we play out our day. At its core it is what drives us as humans, we are constantly in the search for happiness, enjoyment and love. Without emotions things lose their purpose, life as we know it would be unfulfilled with no sense of direction for many people. Those who are happy and joyful are more likely to be able to express them, those who feel sadness or anger may try to hide or suppress them. There are certain stereotypes that surround each emotion, this helps when connecting characters in a film to the audience watching them. So, what is emotion? Emotions are a strong sense of feeling that can affect you physically and psychologically that in turn influences your thoughts and/or behaviour. There are multiple theories that investigate why and how we feel emotions, but a theory that interested me is the 'James-Lange Theory of Emotion' the theory suggests "that emotions occur as a result of physiological reactions to events" (Cherry, 2019) in practice this means that if you were to witness something, for example you saw a figure in the corner of your eye while walking home alone, the fact that your heart rate has quickened this indicates that you are feeling fear, or frightened. Their theory suggests that without physical response you wouldn't feel a psychological response "My thesis, on the contrary, is that the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion." (James, 1890) This theory goes hand in hand with portraying emotion in film, it relays the notion that without a visual cue we as an audience can't fully grasp how to feel. This helps prove how important cinematography is when it comes to creating a story world and to encourage viewers to emote correctly depending on the emotion the filmmakers are trying to portray. If film was based around this theory, then without a visual element would we struggle to fully comprehend the emotion within a scene.

Film at its core is made up of many different components to help tell the story, this can range from the acting, colour, wardrobe, locations, lenses, camera etc. One key part of film is emotion, most of the time the way filmmakers signify an emotion on screen is having a reaction shot of some crying for example. It directly shows the audience what the character is feeling and possibly what the audience is supposed to be feeling also. But as film developed, just showing a reaction isn't enough, emotion is a driving force when it comes to elements of cinematography. How do I convey emotion through cinematography? Well, there are many ways emotion can be conveyed, every element of cinematography can be manipulated into giving you exactly what you wish to convey. This is why film is such a creative field, it can create a story world that can take audiences on adventures when all they're doing is sitting down and taking in information from the screen. Many times, the most successful films/tv shows are able to make the audience feel something, whether it is happiness, sadness or even a range of emotions throughout a scene. Each part of

cinematography – colour, framing, lighting etc has their own unique way of conveying emotion and if done right can still remain very subtle and not thrown in the audience's face.

When talking about emotion within a scene, one scene from 'Fruitvale Station' left audiences in tears. Fruitvale station is based on the true story about Oscar Grant who was

shot unarmed by BART police in 2009. The reason this scene is so emotionally strong is due to elements of the film working in collaboration with each other. We are with Oscar is nearly every shot of the film, this leads to the audience feeling invested in the character which in turn makes the scene so much more impactful because everything is taken away in that moment. The cinematography from Rachel Morrison works in conjunction with the narrative and acting from Michael B. Jordan to create an impact on the audience. Take this shot of Oscar just after he had been shot, the actor takes up nearly the entirety of the screen, accompanied with the raw emotion from the actor leading to a shot full of emotion. The way the actor is staring straight down the lens is like an invitation to the audience to help him, but it ends up leaving us unable to do anything and just watch as the action unfolds. The camera stays on the characters face for a moment of silence & a sort of emotional freeze for the audience until chaos is continued in the next shot. The Dutch angle is used to help portray the emotions felt in the scene, while also having the camera at ground level puts the audience in a state of feeling included and right there with him in his moment of realisation as to what just happened.



(Fruitvale Station, 2013)

Another great example of how cinematography enhances emotion and intensity in a scene is one from 'Whiplash', directed by Damien Chazelle. The film follows Andrew Neiman as he aspired to be a drummer while being mentored by Terrence Fletcher, who pushes Neiman to his breaking point in his unconventional ways of teaching. The scene starts out on a mellow note but as Fletcher stops Neiman playing because its 'not his tempo' the scene quickly turns intense. As tension is building throughout the scene the shots creep closer and closer to the characters to help enhance the intensity. The cinematography works so well as

it keeps the audience invested in the story, they're right there feeling the intensity from Fletcher like they were right there in the room sitting next to Neiman. A common theme within the scene is the technique used by cinematographer Sharone Meir is the use of Fletcher being at a higher position than Neiman at all times, the use of this technique encourages the viewer to understand the hierarchy or dominance between the two characters. When Fletcher is screaming at Neiman, again he is still at a higher angle, but the camera is focused on him, while



(Whiplash, 2014)

Neiman is sat on the corner of the screen out of focus, this allows us the audience to step into the shoes of Neiman, it applies pressure to us as well as a feeling of sadness, that Neiman later screams towards the whole class. The scene is shot extremely well and encourages the main focus solely on Neiman and Fletcher, but also hints towards the fact that there is a whole classroom of students sitting silently in the background. The shots used really embodied this situation as if it were to occur in real life, the suffocation of the dominant voice and the reminder that your peers are currently sat watching the whole thing unfold.

One film that recently captivated audiences across the globe is 'Joker'. The recent adaptation of the comic book villain created waves for the way it portrayed emotion and mental illness. Joker follows a failed comedian, Arthur Fleck, in his descend into madness and his growing embodiment of the character 'Joker'. As the film is solely focused on Arthur, we as the audience are emotionally invested in Arthur and the 2-hour journey we go on together watching him transform. Cinematographer Lawrence Sher outlines how he wanted audiences to feel and resonate with Arthur throughout the film, "we wanted to draw the audience in psychologically to this character and feel empathy and really feel this transition

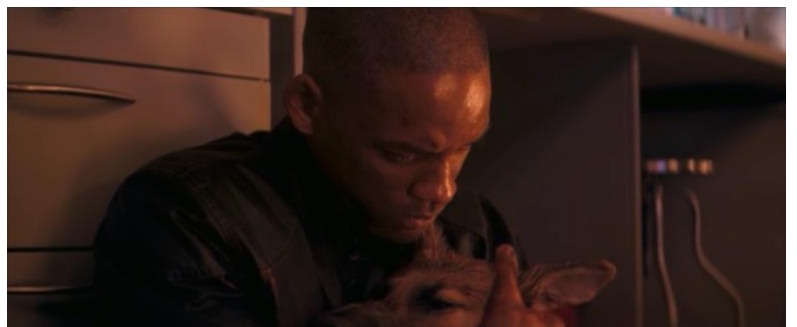


that he was going through, his decent into chaos and madness” (Sher, 2019) This title scene in particular greatly shows the dynamic change from Arthur working as a clown trying to make everyone happy, compared to the real Arthur who is really suffering inside. The slow pull away from a close up on a just beaten up Arthur enhances Arthur’s loneliness and depressed state. We as the audience just want to help Arthur but Sher makes sure we are just out of reach. As the action unfolds, the camera stays on Arthur with no cuts leaving the audience in a growing state of guilt. Linking back to the ‘James-Lange Theory of Emotion’, the longer we see the visual cue of Arthur struggling on the ground, the more we emote with the character.



(Joker, 2019)

In 2007, a film was released called ‘I Am Legend’, which starred Will Smith as Robert Neville the only survivor in a post-apocalyptic New York City run by monsters. We follow the day to day life of Robert, his dog and only company ‘Sam’. We as an audience are fully invested into Robert’s world, simply because there isn’t much else to be invested in. One key moment in the film is where Sam gets infected and starts to turn into one of the monsters leading to one of the most powerful and emotional scenes in the whole film. In a moment of realisation Robert has to put Sam down. The scene starts out at ground level, putting audience and the character are at the same level, this gets rid of any hierarchy in the scene and lets us focus more on the emotion we are feeling with Robert as he has to do this incredibly hard thing. The camera stays in the close up shot of Robert, showing the full extent of emotion felt. When there are no cuts, we as an audience start to feel a sense discomfort coupled with a great performance from



the actor leads the audience to have their own emotional journey as one of the two main characters in the film has just been taken away by the only remaining character.

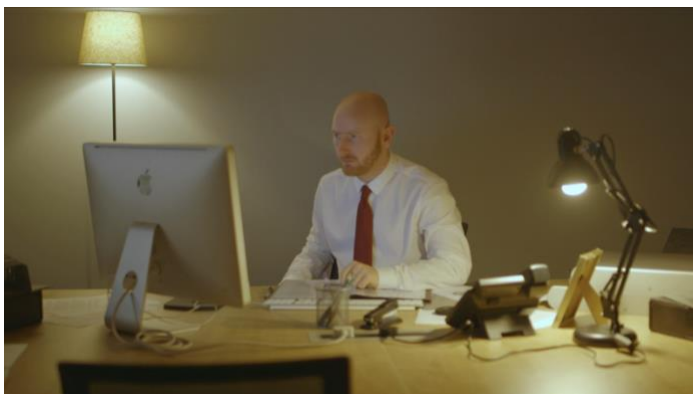


(I Am Legend, 2007)

## Chapter 2

### *Problems with Previous Work*

Reflecting upon past mistakes is a key component in order to further my practise as “Mistakes, obviously, show us what needs improving. Without mistakes, how would we know what we had to work on?” (McWilliams, 1994). Every filmmaker has made many mistakes, but we shouldn’t see them as being mistakes as long as you learn from it. One of my previous projects, ‘Indivisible’, provided ample opportunity when it came to learning from mistakes. ‘Indivisible’ is a short story about a US government official who has a secret that could jeopardise his family and his career, an anonymous hacker hacks his computer and begins to blackmail him, or he will reveal his secret to everyone. The key scene starts off with his normal everyday life, leading to a big emotional pay-out at the end of the scene where the leverage is revealed. It was my job, as the DoP, to help create the director’s vision when it came to this key moment in the scene. Just before the secret is revealed there is a moment of silence, accompanied with a slow movement shot to build the tension and hopefully create an emotional impact on the audience. I don’t believe we achieved the



emotional impact that was intended for the audience, firstly there were some technical issues as the shot was out of focus during the camera movement. This can throw the audience off as it is an anomaly within the shot, it doesn’t appear as fluid as the mistake is easily apparent. I feel the scene didn’t convey emotion as much as we liked it to, as this was basically the only emotionally driven shot throughout the scene the payoff in the scene is

very little. The thought process behind this movement shot was the camera is able to give insight into what the character is feeling in that moment, we move from a position with a lot of space around the character then move closer, creating a more claustrophobic feel when he realises this secret can cost him everything. Where I feel the scene fails is the ending, after the big reveal and the built-up tension, the scene just ends and there isn't a payoff. Another way we could've pulled off a better emotional impact is if we shot more coverage, to be able to build tension with multiple closer shots in a more contemporary way rather than having just one shot and not much happening. This short provided ample opportunity to experiment, to see what worked and what didn't work. Reflective practise begins "where practitioners are polemizing their practise and learning afresh about both the knowledge and skills and attitudes that their practise demands" (Jarvis, 1999, p.178). Through criticising my own work, it only helps me become a better practitioner as I won't make the same mistakes/problems for myself on future projects.

When looking back upon previous work it is important to note that I am not merely insulting my work I am reflecting as "Reflection is a discursive way of creating a space for focusing on problematic situations and of holding them for consideration without premature rush to judgment" (Hoyrup and Elkjaer, 2006, p. 23). Recently I helped create a short documentary for Swansea City Council, it followed Gareth Thomas and his team from 'Gower Hedgerow Hub' who wanted to document their project coppicing a small woodland area at the Hafod-Morfa copperworks. Documentary filmmaking is a completely different undertaking when it comes to creating emotion compared to something like a drama for example. How do I convey the emotions that the director wants the audience to feel? This proved a difficult task as my main subject was inanimate objects, such as a tree. One documentary series by the BBC excels, 'Seven Worlds, One Planet' (BBC, 2019). Apart from



the beautifully captured shots, the reason this series excels as much as it does is because they're able to convey a narrative in every segment that normally includes a variety of emotions and building tension. This is the highest level of documentary filmmaking and something to strive for, but my own documentary skills are not up to scratch yet. When originally shooting the coppice documentary, the idea was to create sense of community and bring history back into the limelight. The emotions that we were trying to convey in the documentary were pride, gratification, satisfaction and overall a happy community. I feel we weren't able to reach our desired goal when it came to the emotional connection between

(Seven  
Worlds, One  
Planet ,2019)

the audience and the film. At its core, the documentary as a skeleton consisted of interviews, some cutaways and b-roll, as well as portrait shots that acted as an introduction to the person talking. We shot two types of portrait shots for each person involved in an interview, one where we move the camera towards the person and one where we move the camera from left to right. The portrait shots worked well as an introductory shot but failed to make a connection between the person on screen and the audience. The left to right portrait created a divide between the two, leaving the audience in a state of always being on the outside and not invested in the film. Other parts of the documentary suffered also, as we used two camera units, one unit's footage was smooth while the other unit was handheld with all the footage coming out shaky and unstable. This made the documentary all over the place and very noticeable which can disinvest the audience, which in turn shies away from the narrative and makes them focus more on the problematic areas of the film.



When inquiring into emotion within film, the horror genre stands tall as one of the best genres that are able to get audiences to emote all across the globe. There have been many times where a horror film has been able to make people feel so invested in the film that they have to leave the room due to being so scared they faint or need to vomit. This is why so many people keep the horror genre alive, they want to experience these emotions, they want to be scared. "There is, in the Freudian view, a pleasure associated with confronting 'forbidden,' repressed material, but also a price to pay, namely the negative emotions produced by the story." (Clasen, 2017) This in essence states that audiences that flock to horror screens do so in order to achieve this feeling of 'pleasure' associated with the horror genre. As a subgenre of horror, 'found footage horror' films hold their own as one of the top in the horror category. One horror film in particular called 'The Blair Witch Project' excelled at bringing emotion out of audiences and really invested audiences in the film. The film created a much more realistic feel to the film compared to other films under the horror genre at the time. With it's realistic camera work coupled with extreme close ups on occasion made many people believe it to be a true story. Recently I was tasked with being the DoP for a short found footage horror called 'Suicide Whisper'. 'Suicide Whisper' is about

a man visiting his sisters' grave site in the middle of a forest where she supposedly committed suicide. Last time he went there was an eerie feel to the forest where out of the ordinary experiences occurred, he then decides to record his next trip to the forest. The Blair Witch Project was a big inspiration when looking into what works in the found footage horror genre. Although 'Suicide Whisper' conformed to most of the genre codes and conventions, I believe it wasn't able to fully bring the audience into the story world. This key scene where our main character is visiting his sisters' grave site is the turning point where everything starts to go wrong for him. I used the Dutch angle technique to show an uneasiness about this location, giving the audience the impression that something is not quite right. One thing I think we failed at was without actually seeing the character, the audience isn't going to be as invested in the story. If we conform to the 'James-Lange Theory of Emotion' without any visual cues the audience are unable to fully experience what emotions I wanted to portray, without the character on screen or any action being shown to the audience they'll find it hard to be invested in the film.



### Chapter 3

#### *Future Projects*

As an aspiring cinematographer researching emotion through camera movement and framing is extremely important, not just as an avid fan of the craft but as a craft maker. In my upcoming projects I want to be able to represent and emote the correct emotions through my cinematography work and hopefully allow the audience to emote those emotions as well. I have numerous projects ahead that require emotion in abundance such as an upcoming feature and two short films with each film falling under a different genre, but closely following a dramatic narrative.

Following my research and putting it into practice, I'm starting off with a short Drama which follows a middle-aged man in his daily routine in life following the recent passing of his wife. From the get-go this is a piece full of emotion due to the fact it takes place right after his wife has passed away. He is in a state where he believes his wife is still alive but us as the audience don't actually know she has died until later on in the scene. If

we were to take inspiration from something like 'Joker', which I looked into in chapter 1, the film is solely focused on one character meaning that there will hopefully be a better



emotional payoff for the audience as they are able to invest much more time into the character. The audience is with the man throughout his grief ridden journey until the funeral of his wife. The scene I will be focusing on is one where he is repeating his daily routine over and over again as if his wife was still alive. He believes his wife is still alive and talking to him like any other day in the days leading up to her funeral. There are many ways this type of scene can be shot. At the start of the scene where he starts to make breakfast and start his routine, I want to keep the composition in a state of extreme close ups focusing on the emotion on the characters face as he's talking to his wife who he believes is still alive. Throughout the scene the wife's voice is less and less apparent, it starts to fade as he's coming to a realisation that she has passed and a revelation to the audience that she has actually died. As her voice fades, I want to move to wider and wider shots, relaying the fact of loneliness. As we move wider and wider it is a revelation that she isn't there with him and it's all in his head, the use of negative space in the room enhances the loneliness aspect using visual messaging. I also want to use lighting and colour to my advantage in this scene, at the start of the scene I want the lighting and colour to have a warm tone, giving the room a comfortable setting as he starts his routine. As the scene moves forward and his wife's voice starts to get less and less apparent, I want to cool down the temperature of the room until by the end the room is the opposite of when it began. The cooler temperatures in lighting at the end of the scene are for when he has the realisation that his wife has died, adding to the visual message throughout the scene. I have undertaken some test shots to try visualising how I would possibly shoot this scene in the future.

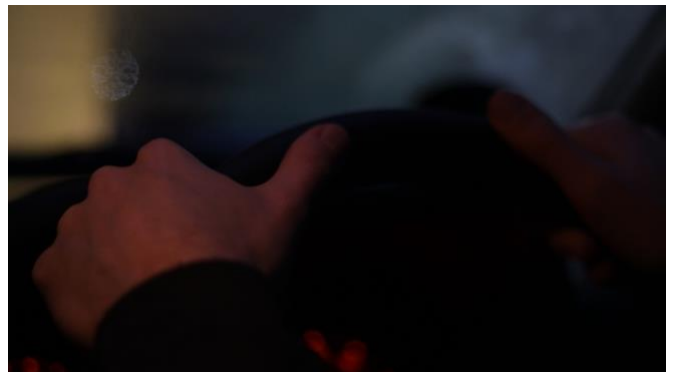
Another emotional scene from the short is just after the voice of his recently passed away wife has finally faded out of the scene. As he realises that his wife's voice is no longer to be heard, he starts to go into a state of panic, as he still believes that his wife is alive and has been continuing to talk to him, but it becomes a moment of realisation for the audience that the voice of his wife has been a figment of his imagination and the voice of his wife is no longer to be heard to the audience or him. This scene is a key scene to opening the realisation towards the character and to the audience, trying to make sure to accurately build tension as he becomes in more of an emotional state. The key part of this scene is to differentiate from the everyday happy life he has been living to the instant realisation of loss and loneliness. In this scene, the man enters the room after his wife's voice is unable to be heard anymore, panicking. At the moment of realisation, I want the man to be sitting in the middle of the room. When he sits down, I want to move the camera in a circular motion around the man, showing his emotion in this moment. As we move in a 360-degree motion around him, the lighting and tone of the room will start to become duller, less saturated and reveal his reality after the passing of his wife. Before his realisation, the tone of the room will be somewhat dreamlike. In this camera movement I hope to help distinguish what he sees in his head in comparison to his reality, in turn a revelation for the audience. This technique is commonly used by Director Michael Bay, although Bay tends to use this technique on the protagonist in the film, usually a 360 spin as the protagonists rises from below frame. Obviously, the protagonist within this short isn't a 'hero' as such, but the idea for the shot is pretty similar, usually once Bay has used this technique it is figuratively saying that the protagonists is coming up from the old equilibrium and is revealing a new equilibrium, as referenced in 'Pearl Harbour' when the children are playing baseball in their neighbourhood and above their head are an army of fighter pilots.

Here are my test shots:





I am going to be the DoP for an upcoming feature film called 'Take Away, Way up' due to be released in 2020. The feature film is about a father and son, who don't really get on, on a road trip from Birmingham to South Wales to cater for a wedding. On the way they are able to grow a bond that neither of them could think is possible. This film is set around the 2016 Brexit Referendum when tensions were high, and unfortunately racism was an issue many had to deal with. One scene in particular is when the father and son are on the road, on their way to cater for a big wedding. As they're going about their day, they get pulled over by the police for not really any reason other than that they're from a different ethnic background. Right from the start this scene is full of tension and emotion. One film that I looked into in chapter 1, 'Fruitvale Station', is a key example of this sort of situation. The way they were able to successfully create tension is something to strive for with this scene. 'Fruitvale Station' builds tension by having multiple quick shots, going back and forth from the police arriving at the train station back to Oscar and his friends. This is something to take inspiration from, in the scene from the feature film I want multiple close up shots leading up to when the dialogue opens between the police and the father. The close-up shots will build tension as the audience is able to see the small inclines of emotion, whether it be the father nervously gripping his hands to the steering wheel or a close up of his eyes looking worried. The audience will see these cues and subconsciously start feeling the tension and emotion in the scene with our characters,



just like the 'James-Lange theory' suggests. A big inspiration for this scene comes from 'Locke' released in 2014, as the film takes place solely in a car where one man goes on a nail-biting journey. This provided ample examples of how to shoot scenes within the constraints of a vehicle while also creating a tension filled story narrative.

At its core, the feature film is focused on the bond between a father and son and the growth of a bond that wasn't there before. When thinking about how I want to shoot this, I always wanted there to be a parallel between the journey of them growing a relationship and the compositional state between the father and son. An obvious emotional journey throughout the feature would be the journey of the father and son, so comparatively I would like to compare the start of the film to the end. At the start, I will stay on a wider lens using negative space and actor blocking to enhance this visual message. The son will most of the time be separated through actor blocking so that he is always behind the father. As the story unfolds and a bond is being built, I will move to a closer and closer lens giving the audience a subconscious feeling of becoming more involved in the story as the film goes on. "A medium close up of two or three characters can indicate a coming together, an intimacy, a certain solidarity" (Hayward, 2017). This visually shows the growth of the father and son as well as the narrative driving it forward. Although, many people would say that using a close up more and more towards the end would unify that bond, but I want to take a different approach by not moving too close, framing wise. The reason for this choice is that if we move too close then it gives the impression that their relationship is fixed but realistically it's just the start of their emotional journey together.

## Conclusion

In any project that comes your way, you will have to deal with emotion in some way or another. Whether it is portraying an emotion on screen or getting emotion out of the audience. The most successful films out in the market have been able to manipulate the audience into feeling a certain way. The film industry is a business industry, the films need to succeed in order to generate a profit. To be able to successfully use emotion to your advantage is a benchmark for success in the industry. Many people go to the cinema or watch a movie to indulge in over 90 minutes of escapism, whether that be from their job, their family or life in general, viewers come and enjoy a small window of freedom until they have to go back to everyday life, so for those 90 plus minutes, it is a filmmakers job to allow them to empathise, sympathise, romanticise, laugh or terrify their problems away.

Before I started my research portion, I underestimated how much cinematography had an effect on the emotion that is built in a scene, but obviously it is the first thing that draws a

viewer in when watching any piece of film. Story is the overarching transmitter of emotion, but without the visuals it wouldn't pack such a punch, just like the 'James-Lange Theory' suggests, which I looked into in Chapter 1. Through my research it became apparent to me how much cinematography plays a part in the emotion of cinema, for example looking back at the scene in *Joker*, the composition of the character, the mis-en-scene, the slight movement of the camera, it all possesses a meaning. The framing of the character tells us far more than some might think, the framing and movement encourages us to feel a particular type of emotion, without all of these elements I question if we would feel the same emotions or react in the same manner? From researching successful cinematographers to analysing my own previous work, I feel that when I approach any future projects, I will understand the importance that each shot I take has on the emotion that the story possesses. I know how I went wrong in past projects, and I can see how I could have rectified them.

Overall, throughout my writing and researching for my dissertation I have gained an understanding on how I could frame each shot and why all of these elements are extremely important in my role as a cinematographer. It has helped me enhance my knowledge of emotion that I can apply to everything I do in the future.

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