

Discuss the way in which Edgar Wright uses cinematography to illustrate the progression of a narrative.

This essay will focus on the ways in which Edgar Wright illustrates the narrative in his stories. It will explore all the different cinematic techniques and consider a variety of movies that Wright has directed, as well as a variety, in which he hasn't directed, that challenge the idea of being a good feature length film. Other components of this essay will be expanding concepts of the definition of cinematography and what factors make a well-respected movie; with not only high ratings but also a large fan following.

Cinematography can be defined as the art of motion-picture photography (Webster, 1828). Which, broken down, simply means the way in which things on the screen are illustrated. For example, everything we see on and off screen are purposely positioned there to create the image of the movie. Lighting began to appear in the early 1900's; which involved just shooting with the light from the sun shining towards the camera. (Salt, 2009, Pg. 24). As the film industry developed, so did the use of lighting. Traditionally, filmmakers usually use the "three lights"; The main key light, a filler light and finally a rim light" (Barrance, 2013). Although, films more recently have developed and improved on the lighting techniques to illustrate more than what is being shown. A good example of this, would be Natural Born Killers (1994) (Natural Born Killers. 1995). Oliver Stone used a whole variety of lighting and colours to illustrate the character arcs within the narrative. Colour codes, such as red was an important part of the film as it showed the viewers when Mikey and Mallory were about to wreak havoc.

It wasn't until European film-makers became interested in the practice of camera movement in the 1920's (Salt, 2009, Pg. 24); that it became popular to use close ups, swish pans and even dolly movements in films (Kyle, 2017). At this time in the movie industry, colour movies were slowly being introduced; initially by hand painting on to the film itself. The colours of a certain character's clothes could represent more than we, as a viewer, may think. As well as, something simple like the weather; we may just think that it is the weather on the day, but in truth, the movie creators can manipulate the mood of the entire scene due to how the weather is in the background. For instance, if the sequence involves sad emotions between characters, the weather will be displayed as grey and possibly raining to represent the pathetic fallacy (Literary, Devices 2017), imparting emotions to something else.

Edgar Wright is an English Director; most recognised as the director and producer of the "Three Flavours Cornetto" film trilogy; consisting of Shaun of the Dead (2004), Hot Fuzz (2007) and The Worlds End (2013). (Wright, 2017). Wright started out in the media business as a young teen from Somerset making films with his super 8 cameras; He finally received recognition in the United Kingdom after directing the Channel 4 series "Spaced" (Spaced, 1999). A series which starred Simon Pegg; the future star of the cornetto trilogy. This then sparked the collaborative makings of, the first film in the series, Shaun of the Dead (2004). Which went on to win an award for Best Screenplay in British Independent Film Award. (Wright, 2017) "Wright has become known as a meticulous, hands-on and sound-conscious director who remains involved with his films from the writing through the final stages of

post-production” (McQueen, 2013, P. 143). Staying with his work until post-production allows him to see his ideas come to life and be able to see if his vision works or not.

Wright comprehends the views of a cinematographer, which allows for his films to have a high energized look to them; such as, involving fast moving shots. He also communicates with his audience using the film language of the present day (Bettman, 2014, P. 5). Wright has discussed in interviews that he believes films should be a visual media; he wants people to visit the cinema and create a magical experience for them, in doing so, he makes his films as far from real life as he can. Throughout all his scenes, he uses visuals to tell the story. For example, in the latest blockbuster, *Baby Driver* (*Baby Driver*, 2017), the main protagonist is always wearing black and white. This can be interpreted as a representation of his moral compass; The black illustrating his dark side, being a getaway driver for bad people, and then the white to symbolise his lighter side, when dating Deborah. As well as this, Wright inserts black and white sequences which represents old feel good films; such as, *It's a Wonderful Life* (*It's a Wonderful Life*, 1946). Which could be seen as a juxtaposition of the action crime narrative. Although, on the contrary, the film *12 Angry Men* (*12 Angry Men*, 1957), there is basically no elaborate cinematography, but went on to win 16 awards and received 11 nominations.

Eisenstein argues that we as humans associate certain things to each other, thus we speak of ‘inner tonality’ and ‘inner harmony of line, form and colour’ (Eisenstein, 1943, P. 91), we have in mind a harmony with something or even, a correspondence with something. The inner tonality must contribute to the meaning of an inner feeling. For example, red is a connotation for passion or anger; thus, if we see the colour code red throughout a scene we will then unconsciously associate that sequence with anger. Eisenstein also suggests that “particular colours exert specific influences on the spectator.” (Eisenstein, 1943, P. 92) The way in which Wright incorporates colour connotation’s in his works is best exhibited in his recent film ‘*Baby Driver*’ (*Baby Driver*, 2017). One of the scenes I am going to discuss is the laundromat sequence. Shown in the background of the two protagonists, there are a arrangement of colours in the washing machines; red, yellow and blue. These are calming colours which represents the atmosphere of the scene. Also, there is a clever scene transition from the close up of the red washing machine to the red vinyl record was also an ingenious way to introduce a new scene.

“A narrative can be defined in many different ways; for most modern blockbusters, the most popular use is the traditional linear narrative” (Cuttings, 2016, P.1713), in which there is a protagonist who is involved in an inciting incident, which he or she has to overcome. Wright however, has a unique way in which he likes to develop a narrative. Bill Nichols suggests that language is not the only code that plays a part in a movie. Nichols then goes on to discuss that other systems, like those that “govern in this or that social cultural areas, the expressive or affective intonation the connotations of various sort – other systems come to be combines with the action of the language – system and they too come to impress their own articulations in the text” (Nichols, 1976, P. 585). Nichols is implying that there are other ways in which characters can convey what they are thinking that doesn’t just involve speaking to each other and even the audience. For example, a conversation between three people can be shown in depth in the way it is framed. It can be devised in a very clever way. If the people in the room are on different sides of a discussion, it can be shown that the two

in the frame are on the same side, whereas, the one always alone in the frame can be shown as being the outsider. Although, as simple as two people talking to each other is, it can also be effective in the development of a story. For example, in *The Silence of the Lambs* (*The Silence of the Lambs*, 1991), Jonathan Demme is able to present a scene with such high suspense and all that is being shown are cuts to each character talking to each other.

Bettman discusses “Bob’s rule” (Bettman, 2014, P. 29) in which the “story is the most important component of films, and so everything else in the film should serve the story” (Bettman, 2014, Pg. 30). This rule, which is a fundamental part of a film, is exhibited in the work of Edgar Wright’s films. Everything in his films serves the story. For example, in “Shaun of the dead” (*Shaun of the Dead*, 2004) the two protagonists actually foreshadow the ending of the film in a brief discussion at the pub. Bettman also suggests that “The way the drama unfolds is unique to that scene, and every scene is shot in a different location at a different time” (Bettman, 2014, P. 69). Wright actually has very clever ways of introducing story lines. In another scene, Shaun is unconsciously flicking through the channels which reveals that there is a zombie apocalypse happening through the use of miniature media clips blending into a linear story.

Bettman argues that a “director’s ability to direct the camera and control the overall look of his film is not of paramount importance” (Bettman, 2014, P. 3). Wright completely undermines this idea as the way in which he directs the camera can reimburse the development of a character’s progression in the narrative. For example, in many other blockbuster films which prompt a character moving to a different location, the shots are generally helicopter shots of a new city and pans of a moving vehicle, accompanied by a few close ups of signs of that new location; For example, in the action, comedy film *Spy* (*Spy*, 2015). Whereas, in the film *Hot Fuzz* (*Hot Fuzz*, 2007), Wright chose to represent the main protagonist, Nicholas Angle, moving to Sandford, by a sequence of quick cuts. Some extreme close ups, such as a shot to his phone in which one cut has full signal and then a change to a cut with no signal. Thus, in the space of 2 quick cuts we can tell that Sandford is in the middle of nowhere. Another example of the use of camera direction to develop a character’s narrative, is in the movie “*The Worlds End*” (*The Worlds End*, 2013). Wright uses another set of quick cuts to emphasise a character not drinking. Instead of capturing the protagonists discussing in a conversation of back and forth shots, the close up, quick cuts show the bartender pulling pints and then a glass of water in each scene they enter a new pub; eventually near the end of the film, the character decided to give up staying sober, and this is shown by the audience viewing the bar tender pouring everyone a pint. This character arc was displayed to the audience in an unconventional way and had a higher impact on the audience as it added a comical element.

Wright incorporates close up shots throughout all of his films; especially in this “Cornetto trilogy”. The way in which he subtly moves the storyline on is through the many uses of quick cuts and close ups. (Furstenau, 2010, P. 57) It is a method used a lot in the cinematic industry but executed well in the Wright films. Elsaesser discusses Balazs opinion of the importance of the close-up and the face. Balazs suggested that in a “truly artistic film the dramatic climax between two people will always be shown as a dialogue of facial expressions in close up”. (Furstenau, 2010, P. 57). It has been shown that close ups can express the characters feelings towards each other but that alone cannot justify the

dialogue in the dramatic climax. There is much more to a scene when it comes to dramatic climax. For example, the way in which the character is shown in the shot. The use of low angle and high angles can emphasise the hierarchy within the relationship of the characters.

Ian Inglis suggests that “music is dependent on performance” (Inglis, 2003, P. 6) which Edgar Wright very much supports this idea. In his recent 2017 action, crime movie, ‘Baby Driver’ (*Baby Driver*, 2017). Wright develops this thesis by having music drive the narrative of the story. Due to the main protagonist Tinnitus’, Baby has to constantly listen to music to drown out the ringing. In doing so, the music correlates with the story’s linear plot; everything that is happening on the screen is nicely associated to the lyrics which Baby is listening too. Furthermore, James Gunn also supports Inglis’ theory of music being dependent on performance. In Gunn’s latest blockbuster, “Guardians of the Galaxy 2” (*Guardians of the Galaxy 2*, 2017). the soundtrack is one of the most important components of the narrative. The songs represent the time in which the villain visited earth, as well as one of the songs having an emotional backstory to the main protagonist. In fact, both of the Guardians of the Galaxy movies are highly recognised for their soundtrack. In 2016, the top selling cassette album was the soundtrack to the first Guardians of the Galaxy movies. (Caulfield, 2017)

Theo Van Leeuwen argues that music should understand that, in cinema, it should nearly always remain in the background, he then goes on to describe music as the ‘left hand’ of the melody on the screen and it is bad business when his left hand begins to creep into the foreground and obscure the melody. (Van Leeuwen, 1999) The understanding from this is, Leeuwen is saying that having non-diegetic score music over taking what is happening on the screen is just as bad as having a hand in the shot whilst filming; it diverts the attention away from what is really happening. This is not entirely true, as Wright’s recent film ‘Baby Driver’ (*Baby Driver*, 2017) focuses on the music the entire film. In fact, the story line can’t develop without this music. Each song dictates the narrative. The music is actually the timer for most of the heists; the police siren and gun shots in the first action sequence match up to the music on the set. As well as this, in a number of Wright’s films, non-diegetic sound effects are regularly used to humorously exaggerate the drama of a particular narrative moment” (McQueen, 2013, P. 152) Furthermore, words on the walls and signs correlate to the song lyrics which allows us to be in the protagonist’s head; subliminally letting us see and hear what is happening in Baby’s mind throughout the film. Another note about the music in this film is that the song used in a heist sequence; called ‘Neat Neat Neat’, by Brian James, was too short for the scene so Wright incorporated Baby having to restart the song in this scene, which came about because Baby changed car therefor allowing for the music to fit the action scene. This also allows Wright to tell us more about the Baby’s character. In Wright’s films, sound and image function cooperatively. “Visual and aural formal flourishes emphasise each other, allowing sound to enhance, reinforce, and supplement the stylistic norms of editing and cinematography that currently characterise global entertainments cinema.” (Bordwell, 2006, P. 143), Wright discusses in an interview that the soundtrack came before the actual film was made. In the opening sequence, we hear sound before any images; which illustrates the importance of sound in this movie. The first sound we hear is actually a high-pitched noise which then blends into a musical note, the audience don’t find out until later that the high pitch noise is actually Baby’s tinnitus.

As McQueen mentions, the films sound and image function cooperatively. "Visual and aural formal flourishes empathise each other, allowing sound to enhance, reinforce, and supplement the entertainments cinema" (McQueen, 2013, P.145). Films sound and image function cooperatively. In many of the sequences the actions are actually cleverly adapted to the songs beats. This in a way allows the audience to be a part of Baby's world as we are listening to what he is listening too and effectively seeing his world through the 'window'. Bazin theory of the "window" (Furstenau, 2010, P. 56) on the world is simplified as breaking the fourth wall. In which the film maker makes slight nods on the world today and sometimes even talking directly to you (Furstenau, 2010, P. 57). Films such as *Deadpool* (*Deadpool*, 2016) exhibits breaking the fourth wall perfectly in their comedy blockbuster. The main protagonist continuously talks directly at the camera to involve the audience. This technique is popular in the younger generation, especially in *Deadpool*, as it lets the viewers feel as if they are involved in the cinematic universe.

In conclusion, Edgar Wright uses many techniques within his films to advance a story. As discussed earlier, everything in the film should serve the narrative and he practices his own unique direction in doing so. Wright uses a varied amount of stylised camera shots; such as quick cuts, to evolve the linear narrative movement. As Wright demonstrates, a script is not essential in illustrating what is occurring within the story, instead, what we are shown can describe a great portion of the scene. Although as examined, using stylised camera shots doesn't always contribute to making an esteemed film; for example, the 1957 crime, drama film, *12 Angry Men* (*12 Angry Men*, 1957). From this essay, it is clear to see that as a director, he has only recently begun to revolve the score music to the content of the movie. Which, is a popular way to track the progression of the narrative; as indicated by the success of Gunn's *Guardians of the Galaxy* soundtrack.

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