

In this essay, I will explore how are settings portrayed and the use of visual language. I will investigate this by researching how does a setting reflect lighting choices, and finally how camera lenses reflect a setting choice. I have decided to research this question because I want to be able to personify settings within my work, to give certain settings their own character with the help of cinematography. I am hoping to discover how I can utilise a setting to the best of my ability when filming in the future, how to understand a setting and pick cameras, lenses, and lighting to help portray the setting to its fullest. I have decided to research the use of settings in this project as I am heavily influenced by the area I grew up in and how I perceive settings, this is a common approach with cinematographers as in a masterclass with Christopher Doyle he states “... *the natural environment... informs very much how you are, how you respond to life, how you see things...*” Lisbon & Sintra Film Festival (2015)

How are certain settings portrayed within visual language?

As a cinematographer, I am always inspired by my surroundings and what caught my eye one day was the brightly neon covered St. Helens Road which is home to a melting pot to different restaurants and shops from many cultures. This road has inspired me to investigate the importance of setting within visual language as I would like to show the characteristics of the settings within my applied story telling. I am preparing to create a poetic documentary to explore the visuals of my chosen setting. I have chosen a poetic documentary as my genre as this is the best way to portray my cinematography choices. My applied story telling will be focusing on cinematography, and I want my chosen setting to be the ‘character’ instead of having a protagonist in my story. For the aesthetic of my applied story telling want to have a realistic approach, I want the short film to show the true authentic high street. When researching contemporary social realism, I came across Art History for Filmmakers which talked about how British cinema incorporated social realism “focus on the melodrama of everyday life” (McIver, 2015, p.66) When looking at the book Art History of Filmmakers in the section ‘Edward Hopper and the Cinematic Quality of Light’ it states, “*Hopper portrays a world that is recognisable as authentic*” (McIver, 2015, p.76) which is what I want to portray in my applied story telling. I want the visuals of this applied storytelling to represent modern Britain and to be able to be recognised by ordinary people in these working-class areas. Additionally, in this section she also states the ordinary settings that Hopper captures

"Depicting things as mundane as gas stations, diners and movie houses" (McIver, 2015, p.76) having these very normal and similar settings will allow a wider audience to recognise and get a sense of familiarity with the film *"...making a series of choices in what to represent and how to represent it"* (McIver, 2015, p.76) This stuck out to me as I want to show what people may find as a very monotonous setting that can be seen in a lot of places in Britain- but that is exactly what I want to portray. I want it to be recognised by people so they can relate to it.

How does a setting effect lighting choice?

When reflecting on my research on the importance of lighting I found a Masterclass that included *"Lighting defines and supports the genre of the film"* Masterclass, (2021). For my applied story telling practise I want to use the surrounding neon lighting to help set a gritty and grudge tone. When deciding what time of day, I wanted to film for my applied story telling I chose to schedule my filming for night to capture the bright neon and fluorescent lights emitting from the buildings on St. Helens Road. I really like the contrast of the darkness and the brightness of the neon, how you can only see the silhouettes of people bypassing, but also highlighting the workers and the customers in the buildings going by with their life. The use of neon is extremely popular and iconic in movies such as *Bladerunner*. The neon style is very nostalgic aesthetic, when researching I found an article from *Film and Furniture* explaining how iconic neon lighting is in film *"sense of urban, moody drama and a pop of colour in the dark."* *Film and Furniture* (2021). Additionally, I researched a cinematographer that influences me, Christopher Doyle, I wanted to find out how he uses lighting in his scenes. A YouTube channel called *In Depth Cine* and they say along the lines that Doyle uses a multitude of different lighting sources; for example, an outside streetlamp illuminating inside the building, florescent overhead lighting creating a grunge aesthetic, a tv in the corner of a room and finally neon signs on buildings. Having these practical lighting sources adds a rougher and gloomy aesthetic, which can represent the type of environment a subject is in. Christopher Doyle's use of neon and practical lighting gives him his signature iconic look.

How can camera lenses reflect a setting?

I believe that your camera lens can affect how you perceive space and a setting, one shot that comes to mind is *Fallen Angles*, 1995 Dir. Wong Kar Wai and D.O.P Christopher Doyle used an extreme wide-angle lens in a small setting to manipulate the limited space, but this also helped them portray the characters in a symbolic way, Doyle says *"It was about space. We use a wide-angle because these people are so close together but so distant"* Films Extras (2020) the use of the extreme wide-angle lens gives a sense of distortion and claustrophobia, if they used a different lens then we would perceive the film in a separate way.



(Doyle,1995)



(Doyle,1995)

"...your choice of focal length can make a space feel inhospitable or inviting, claustrophobic or soothing, oppressive or liberating." Mercado, 2019, p.69. Christopher Doyle is one of my main inspirations when it comes to cinematography, not only for the way he approaches his work but also for his shot types. Doyle's work feels very chaotic with the technical choices he makes, using high angle shots with wide lenses to distort the scene, following the characters while they are moving, and using texture whether that be shadows or colourful walls. The gritty aesthetic of Doyle's films is what draws me in, he captures the true authenticity of his settings and relates it to the emotions of the characters in the story. The YouTube channel *In Depth Cine* perfectly explains Doyle's cinematography styles. The channel explains his style like; he uses high angles with rough movement to create a chaotic and contorted look. Additionally, he also uses *"centred and traditional framing depending on the look and emotion of the scene"* *In Depth Cine* (2020)



(Test Shots)



Analysing Christopher Doyle's work influenced me in my applied story telling. When taking test shots, I referred to the In Depth Cine video for inspiration on how to take my shots, I incorporated a lot of centred framing to give a more balanced tone to the short film. For these shots I used an 85mm lens to just capture the front of the restaurant building, this lens was appropriate to just show the outside of the establishment and to not include the surrounding buildings on the street. Personally, I like how these test shots came out and I will be using this framing and lens for my filming.



Furthermore, I also used a fisheye lens to create Doyle's famous distorted look. When reflecting on this shot, I have decided to not use a fish-eye lens for my applied story telling as this is too much of a chaotic look for my poetic documentary. I want to use more centred

framing with such lenses as 24mm, 50mm, 85mm lens. I also used an 85mm lens to capture medium shots of the street to gather a variety of the different establishments on the road.



To conclude, when researching the importance of settings within visual language it has helped me understand how I should use lighting and lens to the best of my ability. Learning from influential and iconic cinematographers like Christopher Doyle and practicing his cinematography style helps me try to develop my own cinematography style. Additionally, reflecting on my future ideas for cinematography and reflecting on my own work has helped

me understand myself better as an aspiring cinematographer, understanding further on my I selected certain lenses, lighting styles and settings and how they reflect me. After this process I have been able to understand more about myself and my filming process. Looking at cinematographers like Christopher Doyle and agreeing with his personal anecdotes about being inspired about the area he is in makes me more confident to make movies in my area. Experimenting with night shoots and neon lights is an aesthetic I would like to explore with again.

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