

Film – Narratology Terms

General Terms

Frame: a single image on the strip of film. When a series of frames are projected onto a screen in quick succession (currently 24 frames per second), an illusion of movement is created.

Shot: a continuous, uninterrupted run of the camera to expose a series of frames. Also called a *take*.

Scene: a segment in a narrative film that takes place in one time and space (or that uses crosscutting to show two or more simultaneous actions).

Sequence: a series of scenes that form a distinct narrative unit connected by the unity of time or location.

Mise-en-scene: the particular results of the filmic subject's arrangement that comprise the film's visual component as mise-en-scene and editing. Specifically, mise-en-scene is the observable expression of the filmic subject's exploitation of space within the frame: the placement of the actors and props, the relationship of the camera to the space in front of it, camera movement, the use of color or black and white, lighting, the size of the frame itself.

Editing: addresses time and space by building the temporal structure of a film and breaking apart and reordering its spatial construction.

Soundtrack: the result of the filmic subject's arrangement that comprises the film's auditory component is the soundtrack. The soundtrack is either an optical or magnetic band along the side of the celluloid strip that contains the recorded sound for the film. The soundtrack features include dialogue, special sound effects, and the musical score; moreover, each of these features falls into one of two basic categories – diegetic and nondiegetic.

Aspect ratio: the relationship of the frame's width to its height.

Types of Shots

Close-up: Head and shoulders, enabling you to easily see facial expressions, so you can see what characters are thinking and feeling.

Extreme close-up: From just above the eyebrows to just below the mouth, or even closer: used to emphasize facial expression or to make the subject appear threatening.

Medium close-up: a framing in which the scale of the object shown is fairly large; a human figure seen from the chest up fill most of the screen.

Medium shot: a framing in which the scale of the object is of moderate size; a human figure seen from the waist up would fill most of the screen.

Long shot: a shot in which a figure can be seen from head to toe.

Bridging Shot: a shot that attempts to "bridge" or smooth out a jump cut, thus giving the impression of continuity even though the jump cut has created a spatial or temporal break of some sort.

Crane Shot: a shot in which the entire camera is moving in one direction (often while on a crane, hence the term). Also sometimes called a boom shot.

Establishing Shot: In film, a camera shot that establishes a scene, often as a long shot. This is a common maneuver at the beginning of Hollywood films, especially if the setting plays a significant role.

Eye-Line Shot: In film, a sequence of two shots. In the first, you are shown a character looking; in the second you are presented with what he or she sees, as if you were looking out of that character's eyes (in other words, an objective treatment of a character followed by a POV shot focalized through that character).

Gaze Shot: a shot of a character gazing at something; such a shot is often followed by a POV shot, in which case it is termed an eye-line shot.

Over-the-Shoulder Shot: a shot that gives us a character's point of view but that includes part of that character's shoulder or the side of the head in the shot. There are numerous examples in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*, especially of the focalizing gaze of the nameless reporter; indeed, we are often given over-the-shoulder shots that include his glasses, thus self-reflexively underlining the fact of the focalization.

POV or Point-of-View Shot: A sequence that is shot as if the viewer were looking through the eyes of a specific character. The shot is a common trick of the horror film: that is, we are placed in the position of the killer who is slowly sneaking up on a victim. (Note that horror directors sometimes "cheat" with this device; that is, after a building of suspense, it can also turn out that we were not in the position of the killer after all.)

Tracking Shot: the camera is literally running on a track and thus smoothly following the action being represented or perhaps thus giving the viewer a survey of a particular setting.

Full shot: a shot of a subject that includes the entire body and not much else.

Matte shot: a type of process shot in which different areas of the image (usually actors and setting) are photographed separately and combined in laboratory work.

Pull-back shot: a tracking shot or zoom that moves back from the subject to reveal the context of the scene.

Reaction shot: a shot that cuts away from the main scene or speaker in order to show a character's reaction to it. rear projection: a process in which a foreground action is combined with a background action filmed earlier to give impression that actors are in the location of background scene, for instance. The foreground is filmed in studio, against a screen; the background imagery is projected from behind the screen. largely superseded at present by front projection and matte technique.

Editing

Cut: in filmmaking, the joining of two strips of film together with a splice.

Jump Cut: In film, an editing cut that creates a break in time or space in what would otherwise be a continuous sequence. The same action may, for example, "jump" forward in time or suddenly change scene.

Match Cut: Technical term for when a director cuts from one scene to a totally different one, but has objects in the two scenes "matched," so that they occupy the same place in the shot's frame. The director thus makes a discursive alignment between objects that may not have any connection on the level of story. Match cuts offer directors with one way to create visual metaphors in film since the match cut can suggest a relation between two disparate objects

Shock Cut: A cut in a movie that juxtaposes two radically different scenes in order to shock the viewer. A famous example is the opening sequence in Stanley Kubrick's *2001* in which a prehistoric man throws a bone into the air, which then shock cuts (and match cuts) to an oblong star-ship in space.

Crosscutting: editing that alternates shots of two or more lines of action occurring in different places, usually simultaneous.

Montage: an approach to editing developed by the Soviet filmmakers of the 1920's; it emphasizes dynamic, often discontinuous, relationships between shots and the juxtaposition of images to create ideas not present in either one by itself.

Wipe: A smoothly continuous replacement of one shot by another shot, as if the new shot were "wiping away" the old one. The wipe usually proceeds from left to right or vice-versa, but can also proceed from top to bottom or vice-versa.

Lighting / Color

Backlighting: lighting cast onto the figures from the side opposite the camera. It creates a thin outline of light on the figures' edge.

High-key: the lighting is bright and relatively low in contrast often used for Hollywood musical comedies.

Low-key: much more pronounced shadows and dramatic contrasts.

Top lighting: lighting coming from above a person or object, usually in order to outline the upper areas of the figure or to separate it more clearly from the background.

Underlighting: lighting from a point below the figures in the scene.

Saturated Color: lush, rich, deep tones.

Desaturated Color: washed out, pale tones.

Sound

Soundtrack: the result of the filmic subject's arrangement that comprises the film's auditory component is the soundtrack. The soundtrack is either an optical or magnetic band along the side of the celluloid strip that contains the recorded sound for the film.

Diegetic: noise, speech, or music that originates from an identifiable source in the current scene. For example, the viewer hears a news report and sees that it originates from a television that has just been turned on. Conversely, nondiegetic sound is noise, speech, or music that does not emanate from an identifiable source in the scene. For example, in Kubrick's epic *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the viewer sees a ship moving through space and, concurrently, hears a full orchestra version of Johann Strauss' *The Blue Danube* (1867).

Nondiegetic: noise, speech, or music that does not emanate from an identifiable source in the scene. For example, in Kubrick's epic *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the viewer sees a ship moving through space and, concurrently, hears a full orchestra version of Johann Strauss' *The Blue Danube* (1867).

Musical Score: music composed for the film, or existing music used in the film.

Dialogue: actors voices

Special Sound Effects: sounds recorded for special use in the film. i.e. the sound of a spaceship

Camera position (Where the camera is in relation to the subject)

Low angle: camera points upwards, usually making the subject or setting seem grand or threatening.

High angle: camera looks down, making the subject look vulnerable or insignificant.

Bird's eye: camera looks vertically down at the subject.

Camera movement (moving relationship between camera and that which it films)

Pan: movement of camera from left to right or vice versa on a stationary tripod. On the screen, it produces a mobile framing which scans the space horizontally.

Track: moving the camera itself towards or away from the subject, or to follow a moving subject. (Not to be confused with a zoom, where the camera's lens is varied to give the impression of moving closer to, or away from the subject.)

Tilt: pivoting the camera vertically up or down.

Arc: moving the camera in an arc around the subject.

Hand-held: used to convey a sense of immediacy.

Narratology Terms

Anticipation and Retroversion: What is commonly referred to in film as "flashback" and "flashforward." In other words, these are ways in which a narrative's discourse re-order's a given story: by "flashing back" to an earlier point in the story (anticipation) or "flashing forward" to a moment later in the chronological sequence of events (retroversion).

Diegesis: A narrative's time-space continuum, to borrow a term from Star Trek. The diegesis of a narrative is its entire created world. Any narrative includes a diegesis, whether you are reading science fiction, fantasy, mimetic realism, or psychological realism. However, each kind of story will render that time-space continuum in different ways. The suspension of disbelief that we all perform before entering into a fictional world entails an acceptance of a story's diegesis. The Star Trek franchise is fascinating for narratology because it has managed to create such a fully realized and complex diegetic universe that the narratives of all five t.v. shows (TNG, DS9, STV, Enterprise,, the original Star Trek) and all the movies occur, indeed coexist, within the same diegetic time-space.

Fabula and Story: Fabula refers to the chronological sequence of events in a narrative; story is the re-presentation of those events (through narration, metaphor, camera angles, the re-ordering of the temporal sequence, and so on).

Filmic Subject: To produce a film, a team of individuals is led by the director who directs the use of a specialized camera and translates the screenplay's written narrative into a filmic one. In this way, a film is a collaborative product, and on this basis it is apparent that sources other than the director contribute to the many parts of a film's overall information. Rather than refer to the host of individuals who produced the film, I refer to the collective agency as the filmic subject. The filmic subject is a theoretical agent behind a film's organization and arrangement and assumed to be guided by the maxims of giving adequate and relevant information. Based on this principle, the filmic subject selects what it needs from various sources and organizes, edits, and composes this information for telling a filmic narrative. A film shows us what the filmic subject has arranged for us to see, and, consequently, all filmic information is ultimately a corollary of its mediation, choice, organization, and arrangement.

Focalize (focalizer, focalized object): The presentation of a scene through the subjective perception of a character. The term can refer to the person doing the focalizing (the focalizer) or to the object that is being perceived (the focalized object). In literature, one can achieve this effect through first-person narration, free indirect discourse, or what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as dialogism (see Module on Bakhtin). In film, the effect can be achieved through various camera tricks and editing, for example POV shots, subjective treatment, over-the-shoulder shots, and so on. Focalization is a discursive element added to a narrative's story.

Frame Narrative: A story within a story, within sometimes yet another story, as in, for example, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. As in Mary Shelley's work, the form echoes in structure the thematic search in the story for something deep, dark, and secret at the heart of the narrative. The form thus also resembles the psychoanalytic process of uncovering the unconscious behind various levels of repressive, obfuscating narratives put in place by the conscious mind. As is often the case (and Shelley's work is no exception), a different individual often narrates the events of a story in each frame. This structure of course also leads us to question the reasons behind each of the narrations since, unlike an omniscient narrative perspective, the teller of the story becomes an actual character with concomitant shortcomings, limitations, prejudices, and motives. The process of transmission is also highlighted since we often have a sequence of embedded readers or audiences. A famous example in film of such a structure is Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. See also the definition for narration.

In medias res: Technical term for the epic convention of beginning "in the middle of things," rather than at the very start of the story. In the *Odyssey*, for example, we first learn about Odysseus' journey when he is held captive on Calypso's island, even though, as we find out in Books IX through XII, the greater part of Odysseus' journey actually precedes that moment in the narrative. Of course, films and written tales often begin in the thick of things and fill in the background later; in other words, narrative regularly reworks discursively the simple chronology of its story.

Narration: Narration refers to the way that a story is told, and so belongs to the level of discourse (although in first-person narration it may be that the narrator also plays a role in the development of the story itself). The different kinds of narration are categorized by each one's primary grammatical stance: either 1) the narrator speaks from within the story and, so, uses "I" to refer to him- or herself (see first-person narration); in other words, the narrator is a character of some sort in the story itself, even if he is only a passive observer; or 2) the narrator speaks from outside the story and never employs the "I" (see third-person narration). See also third-person omniscient narration; third-person-limited narration; and objective treatment.

Suture: Through a particular transition of shots, the filmic subject is thus able to create the hypothetical existence of the filmic narrator and manipulate it in order to suture the viewer's gaze to the filmic narrator or that of a fictional character. Silverman sees suture as a particular effect of shot relationships where the level of enunciation remains veiled from the viewer's scrutiny, which is entirely absorbed within the level of the fiction (202). For example, at times, the gaze that directs our look seems to belong to a character rather than the camera in the point of view shot (POV). According to this approach, the viewer's gaze can be hypothetically sutured to a fictional character residing internally or to the filmic narrator that resides externally. Either way, the contrived internal gaze (or internal focalization) or external gaze (external focalization) within fiction serves to conceal the controlling existence of the filmic subject. Thus, the filmic subject interjects a "benign" other (filmic narrator) to obscure its presence as a "coercive" other embodied by the camera. Theorists of cinematic suture agree that films are articulated and the viewing subject spoken by means of interlocking shots. Shot relationships are seen as the equivalent of syntactic ones in linguistic discourse, and the junctures whereby meaning emerges and a subject position is constructed for the viewer. However, some theorists conceptualize those relationships differently from others. Nevertheless, as Silverman asserts, it is imperative that the camera deny its own existence in order to foster the illusion that what is shown has an independent existence, free from any technological interference, or any coercive gaze that would self-reflexively shatter the viewer's "suspension of disbelief" (1983: 201).

Unreliable Narrator: A narrator that is not trustworthy, whose rendition of events must be taken with a grain of salt. We tend to see such narrators especially in first-person narration, since that form of narration tends to underline the motives behind the transmission of a given story. There are numerous famous examples in literature (James' "Turn of a Screw" is a superb example) and a few notable examples in film (Citizen Kane perhaps most famously among them).

Voice-Over Narration: In voice-over narration, one hears a voice (sometimes that of the main character) narrating the events that are being presented to you. A classic example is Deckard's narration in the Hollywood version of Ridley Scott's Blade Runner. This technique is one of the ways for film to represent "first-person narration," which is generally much easier to represent in fiction.

Allusion: a brief reference, whether explicit or indirect, to a person, place, event, or another artistic work.

Homage: recognizes or repeats a scene, or a particular feature from another film.