



Holocaust through Hollywood's Eyes



Goals

- Identify working assumptions about “reading” film.
- Raise questions about how Hollywood can or should imagine the unimaginable.
- Define essential film study terms and concepts including cinematography techniques.

Working Assumptions about “Reading” Film

- Every film has messages or lessons or themes.
- “Readers” may learn different lessons or messages than intended.
- Nothing is accidental; Everything is intentional even what’s left out.
- Hollywood gets the “first draft of history”.
- The medium of film understandably requires compression of timelines and the invention of characters to advance story.

Questions to ponder to define criteria:

- If a filmmaker wants to teach history, is s/he more obliged to be historically accurate?
- What is the director's stated goals?
- How important is plausibility?
- How does the intended audience shape content and cinematography?

Imagining the Unimaginable

- Are some topics simply too horrific to be explored through the artistic format of film?

Imagining the Unimaginable

Annette Insdorff, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (1989)

"How great a role are films playing in determining contemporary awareness of the Final Solution? . . . How do you show people being butchered? How much emotion is too much? How will viewers respond to light-hearted moments in the midst of suffering?" (xviii)

"How do we lead a camera or a pen to penetrate history and create art, as opposed to merely recording events? What are the formal as well as moral responsibilities if we are to understand and communicate the complexities of the Holocaust through its filmic representations?" (xv)

Imagining the Unimaginable

Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (1988)

"Art [including film making] takes the sting out of suffering." (viii)

The need for popular reception of a film inevitably leads to "melodramatization or trivialization of the subject." (46)

Hollywood/American filmmakers' "universalization [using the Holocaust to make statements about contemporary problems] is rooted in specific social concerns that seek to avoid burdening a basically indifferent public with unbearable facts of the Nazi genocide of the Jews. . . . **[Hollywood] provides the banal, comforting message that everybody is guilty, and everybody suffers, but redemption is still possible, or else that 'people are still good at heart [Anne Frank],'** a significant statement not because of its meaning but because of its purpose, namely to disburden the conscience from **the implications of unsettling events of the magnitude of the Holocaust.**" [emphasis added] (133)

Imagining the Unimaginable

Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (2001)

On the problems of American films universalizing themes in Holocaust films, Mintz writes, "To discern in a discrete institution, historical event, or cultural product a meaning that transcends the particular is to enhance the moral significance of the particular; it is, in a sense, to redeem the particular by rescuing it from its onetime, accidental and specific identity and then connecting it to a large order of value. In the case of the Holocaust, historical significance of the event is supposedly elevated by virtue of its being taken as an example or illustration or a larger rubric such as the individual's responsibility for other human beings.

"At the same time, universalizing is a way to avoid seeing the particular and what is troublingly un-universal about it.

"Universalization is, in the end, a double-edged sword. It evades its subject, on the one hand, yet on the other, it may, under certain conditions, represent the *only* way to approach the subject." [emphasis added] (99-100)

A film strip is shown at an angle, featuring three frames. Each frame contains a large black number '3' centered within a white circle. The film strip has sprocket holes on both sides. Overlaid on the middle frame is the text 'Essential to Know' in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

Essential to Know



1. What are the large and small ideas that explain the actions and events in the film?
2. Who are the central characters?
3. What do the characters represent?
4. What do their actions reveal about the themes?
5. Does the storyline tell lessons about perseverance, hope, heroism, individualism, good, evil?
6. Is there a coherent message or lesson? Or not?
7. How does the film make you feel at the end? Happy? Depressed? Confused? Why?
8. What kind of values does the film wish to impart?



Narrative

Story: all the events that are presented to us or that we can infer have happened.

Plot: the arrangement or construction of those events in a certain order or structure (e.g. chronological, flashbacks, flashforwards).

Narration: refers to the perspective that organizes the plot according to a certain emotional, physical, or intellectual point of view.

Are there logical relationships from one event to another?

Are the viewers provided with a sense of closure?

Are the stories focused on characters? Or events?

Is there an attempt to be realistic or objective?

Timothy Corrigan, *Film: A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, 8th ed., 2012 , 39.



Classical Narrative

- Logical relationships from one event to another
- Provided with a sense of closure
- Focused on characters.
- Attempt to be realistic or objective



Alternative or Post- Classical Narrative

- Little or no logical relationship between events.
- No or little sense of closure
- Little attempt to be realistic or objective



Characters

1. Are the characters meant to be realistic? If so, what makes them realistic? Or makes them unrealistic? (e.g. costumes, dialogue, setting)
2. Are there a few or one or two central characters? Or are there multiple characters competing for the viewers attention or representing themes?
3. Do the characters undergo a transformation? What kind?
4. What values do the characters represent?
5. Are the characters a caricature?



Mise-en-scène

What is put in the scene or put before the camera.

Includes:

- Lighting
- Costumes
- Sets (props)
- Quality of Acting
- Characters



Mise-en-scène

If film impresses you as realistic, then you can easily fail to pay attention to props, etc that create the sense of realism.

What is realistic within film-making is relative to the technology and knowledge of events at the time in which the film is made.

What makes the scene realistic? What is left out?



Mise-en-scène

1. How are the props or objects significant to the story or characters?
2. How are the arrangement of props, objects, and characters within a scene related?
3. What do the props, objects, characters reveal about the film themes?
4. How does the actor play the part?
5. Are the costumes realistic?
6. Do the costumes suggest how the characters think about themselves? Or how the audience is suppose to think about the characters?
7. Does the lighting seem artificial or natural?

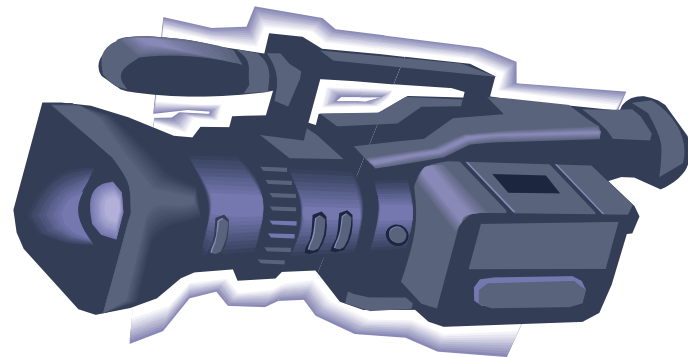
Dialogue: The Screenwriter's Contributions

- Adaptation from a novel, memoir, diary?
- Is the dialogue authentic, believable?



Cinematography

- Framing shots
- Focus
- Camera Angles
- Sound (Diegetic and non-diegetic)
- Lighting
- Camera Movement
- Editing Techniques



Long Shot

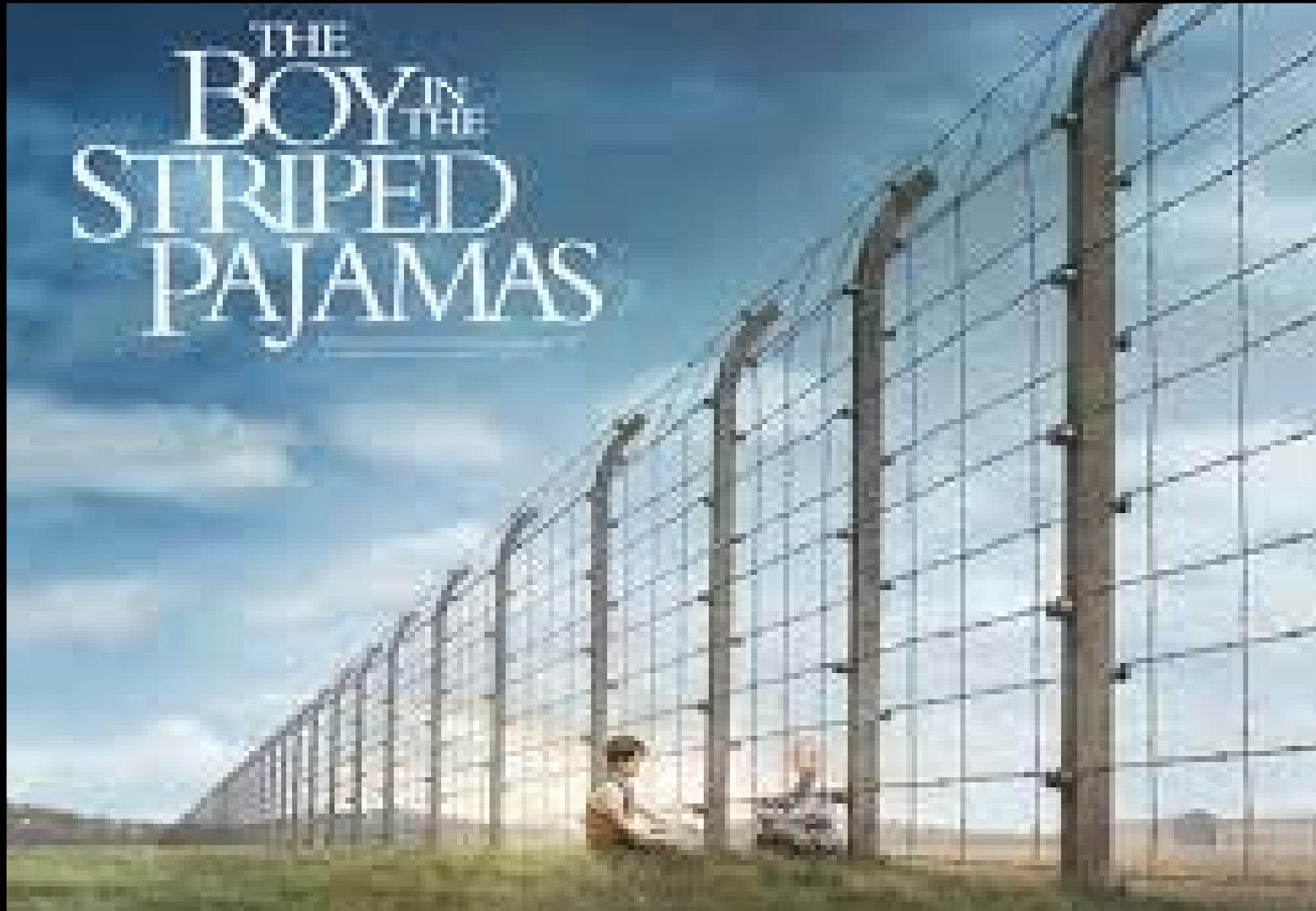
Framing shots



Establishes context, setting, time and space;
can show a person integrated into the scene or quite the opposite

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Establishing Shot

Framing shots



Sets the scene or shows the space of a scene; often a long shot or series of shots

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Sets the scene or shows the space of a scene; often a long shot or series of shots

Medium Shot

Framing shots



Most common in film making, natural, neutral shot;
gets the audience to focus but provides some context;
limited in its ability to show relationship between character and setting

Framing shots

Close Up Shot

- Object or character appears very large
- 80% of the frame
- Director getting the audience to focus
- Deprived of context
- Have to consider what is missing
- Intimate, revealing, intrusive, authoritative



Soft Focus



Director intentionally puts his or her object slightly out of focus to make the image look softer or unclear

Conveys romance, softer mood, uncertainty

Rack Focus

- When a director shifts the focus from one object to another in the same shot in order to direct the audience's attention
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCdtQ9ceGeU>

Deep Focus

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbGbqRWwC_Q
- When the foreground and background are equally in focus
- Focus all the way from front to the back of the shot
- Establishes context but gives audience a choice as to what to look at; create a greater sense of reality

High Angle

- Camera is above the subject
- Usually has the effect of making the subject look smaller than normal – weak, powerless, trapped



Low Angle

- Camera shoots subject from below
- Has the effect of making the subject look larger than normal – strong, powerful, threatening, in control
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8V1uE1-wTPs>



- Accounts for 90-95% of the shots seen; most natural;
- Camera is even with the key character's eyes
- To go from high angle to eye level, the director may be trying to communicate growing strength or confidence

Eye Level



Dutch (or Canted) Angle

- Shot that is tilted sideways on the horizontal line
- Used to add tension to a static frame; creates a sinister or distorted view of a character
- Conveys evil, danger, tension, moral uncertainty
- Effect is intensified when combined with close-up



Diegetic Sound

- Sound that could be heard logically by the characters within the film
- Background noise, traffic, dialogue
- Audience and characters hear; sharing the experience
- Internal diegetic, meaning that the sound can be heard only within the mind of one character (suspense, foreboding, foreshadowing, irony)

Nondiegetic Sound

- Sound that could not be heard by characters
- Director intends the sound only for the audience, not the characters
- Create suspense, anticipation, manipulates mood somehow

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLK5OWU2YGw>

Low-key Lighting



- Scene is flooded with shadows and darkness
- Creates suspense, suspicion, mystery, danger

High-key Lighting



- Scene is flooded with light
- Creates bright and open-looking scene
- Romantic comedies, musicals, costume dramas.
- No room for audience to misunderstand or feel threatened

Neutral Lighting

- Neither bright nor dark – even lighting throughout the shot
- Most television is neutral, medium shots at eye-level

Bottom/Side Lighting

- Direct lighting from below or from one side
- Often used to convey danger, evil, split personality, moral ambiguity, characters hiding something



Front/Rear Lighting

- Soft, direct lighting on face or back of subject
- May suggest innocence, create a “halo” effect, innocence, openness



Exemplary lighting by Janusz Kaminski

Not backlight, soft lit, darkness in between
Film still from "Schindler's List" (Dir. S. Spielberg, 1993; DP J. Kaminski)
Image used with permission of the Film Foundation

Pan Camera Movement

- Stationary camera that moves left or right
- Most often moves left to right because that is how westerners read
- Character takes in his/her surroundings and makes discovery
- Used to introduce audience to a setting

Tilt Camera Movement

- Stationary camera moves up or down
- Tells an audience where a person is heading
- E.g. male gazing at a woman's chest, then legs, feet

Zoom Camera Movement

- Camera is stationary but the lens moves, making the objects appear to grow larger or smaller
- Director can direct audience's attention

Dolly Camera Movement

- Camera itself moves with the action, on a track, on wheels, or held by hand
- Makes the audience feel like they are part of the action
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2XIwG4-UMY>

Cut – Editing Technique

- Move to another image
- Blink of an eye, second of black

Fade – Editing Technique

- Scene fades to black or white
- Often implies that time has passed
- Tends to be particularly slow, not very realistic

Dissolve – Editing Technique

- An image fades into another
- Can create a connection between images, objects, or characters
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bup_zehvBo

Crosscutting (parallel editing)

- Cut to action that is happening simultaneously
- Shows events occurring simultaneously in two spaces
- Can create suspense
- Can create connections between a person and his/her actions or between two characters who do not even see each other
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts1x6uADFtM>

Flashback & Flash forward – Editing Technique

- Movement into action that has happened previously
- Often signaled by a change in music, voice-over, or a dissolve
- What is the information that the audience is being given at the flashback?
- Who in the scene does not have information can add tension or foreshadowing?

Eye-line Match or POV Shot – Editing Technique

- Shot of a person looking, then a cut to what he or she saw, followed by a cut back for a reaction
- Looking at action or object that a character is looking at
- May reveal what the character is thinking
- Gets audience to feel what the character feels
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hp5mLbSpKT8>

references

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbGbqRWwC_Q
- John Golden, *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom* (2001)
- Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*, 8th ed (2012)