**Queer Cinema - Cinema Studies Vocabulary Handout[[1]](#footnote-1)**

This handout contains terms that you can use in your homework notes, class discussions, and scene analysis presentations. Keep this with you throughout this course so you can become more familiar with the language of cinema studies.

**Mise-en-scène:**

Mise-en-scène is a term used to describe everything that appears in a frame. This includes four elements: **1) setting and props; 2) costumes, hair and makeup; 3) facial expression and movement; and 4) lighting and color.**

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| **Setting and Props**  **Questions to ask:**   * Where is this scene taking place? * How does the setting communicate ideas about the film? * What props do I see? * Do the props help establish a time or place? * Do the props reappear or represent something significant? | **Costumes, Hair and Makeup**  **Questions to ask:**   * How are people dressed? * What does the clothing suggest about the scene? * Does anyone’s costume stand out? Why? * Is hair or makeup used to signify something about the characters? * Do any articles of clothing reappear throughout the film in significant ways? |
| **Facial Expression and Movement**  **Questions to ask:**   * How are actors positioned (standing, sitting, etc.?) What does this tell us? * How are actors using their faces? What does this tell us? * How are actors gesturing? What does this tell us? * How would you describe the **blocking** (arrangement and movement of actors)? | **Lighting and Color**  **Questions to ask:**   * Is this scene bright or dark? * Why is the lighting like this? What does it tell us about the time of day, situation, or mood? * Are any parts of the scene darker than others? Why? * Where is the light coming from? * What colors stand out? * What does the color or light tell us about the people or scene? |
| **Lighting Terms:**   * **High key lighting:** lighting where the main source of light creates little contrast between light and dark * **Low key lighting:** lighting where the main source of light creates a stark contrast between light and dark | |

**Cinematography:**

Cinematography is a broad term that describes many aspects of “camera work.” It involves camera’s distance from the subject (**scale**), the angle of the shot, and the movement of the shot, in addition to many other elements. Here are some key terms and questions to consider related to cinematography.

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| **Shots**  **Key terms:**   * **Establishing shot:** locates time/place * **Long shot:** shows whole subject; whole location of action is shown * **Medium shot:** shows head to waist; establishes who is in the scene and is often used for dialogue * **Close up:** shows head and shoulders; often highlights emotion * **Extreme close-up:** shows part of head, such as eyes or mouth | **Shots**  **Questions to ask:**   * What is the main object we are focusing on? Is it a person? * How far away from the camera is the object or person? * Why do you think the camera is where it is? How does it draw attention to this person or object? * Is one shot scale used consistently? * Why might the shot scale change, even if the object shown doesn’t? |
| **Camera Movement:**  **Key terms:**   * **Pan:** camera turns left or right; horizontal movement * **Tilt:** camera tilts upwards or downwards; vertical movement * **Tracking shot:** camera moves smoothly from one place to another * **Zoom-in/zoom-out:** camera appears to move closer to or further from the action * **Point of view (POV):** shot appears from the perspective of a person * **Handheld shot:** Often unsteady shots produced by an individual carrying the camera | **Camera Movement:**  **Questions to ask:**   * Does the camera stay still or does it move at all? * When the camera moves, what direction does it move? * Is the movement from the whole camera or the lens zooming in or out? * What is the movement showing us that wasn’t shown before? * Does the movement help emphasize something or someone? * What is the connection between what we see at the start of the camera movement and what we see at the end of the camera movement? |
| **Camera Angles**  **Key terms:**   * **High angle:** the camera is above the subject; can make a subject look weaker * **Low angle:** the camera is below the subject; can make the subject look stronger * **Eye level:** the camera is level with the subject’s eyes | **Camera Angles**  **Questions to ask:**   * Where is the camera placed in relation to the main object? * Is the camera looking ‘straight on’ or at an angle? * What is the angle communicating? * How would a different angle change this scene? |

**Editing:**

Editing is the process of assembling different shots into a coherent order. This is done in post-production. Editing allows the film to better communicate with its audience and perhaps restricts or plays with what an audience is allowed to know and when.

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| **Key terms:**   * **Cut:** change from one shot to another * **Shot-reverse shot:** shows action-reaction between two characters; often used in dialogue to show characters responding each other * **Insert:** A brief shot, usually a close-up, of a significant detail * **Match on action:** a cut that connects two views of the same action * **Fade:** Shot fades to a solid color (usually black) * **Pace:** How quickly the film appears to move, based on duration of shots and editing style * **Montage sequence:** thematically linked shots that show the passage of time and are often linked by continuous sound | **Questions to ask:**   * How quickly do the images on screen change? * Do some shots stay on screen longer than others? Why? * What does the pace suggest? * Why does the film cut from one shot to another? * How does the editing help propel the story? * Does the sound carry across or stop with the cut? * How does the film move from one scene to another? |

**Sound:**

There are several elements of film sound, including dialogue, sound effects, silence, and the score.

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| **Key Terms:**   * **Diegetic sound:** sound the characters can hear * **Non-diegetic sound:** sound the characters can’t hear * **Synchronous sound:** has a visible onscreen source, such as dialogue * **Asynchronous sound:** does not have a visible onscreen source, such as a voiceover * **Parallel sound:** sound that is similar to the images * **Contrapuntal sound:** sound that is in contrast to the images * **Voiceover:** nondiegetic narration of images * **Score:** music composed to accompany a film | **Questions to ask:**   * Is a recognizable song playing? How does it relate to the mood of the scene? If there are lyrics to the song, do they suggest anything about the film? * Do you notice any silences? Why might there be silence in this moment? * How would the scene be different if a different song was chosen? * What does the song choice tell us about the film’s audience? * What sounds that aren’t music can you hear? What do those sounds tell you? * Can the characters hear those sounds? * Are some of those sound effects louder than others? Why? * How do the sound effects relate to the genre of this film or the narrative? * Listen without watching – what sounds stand out the most? Why? |

1. I adapted this handout primarily from the work of Ian Moreno-Melgar (<https://www.slideshare.net/ianmorenomelgar/film-language-micro-elements-toolkit-and-revision-mats-for-analysing-key-scenes-and-texts-for-film-and-media-studies>). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)