

CP3 Conference 2007: Creative Workshops

MOBILE FRAMING

Julie Green

'In film it is possible for the frame to move with respect to the framed material.'

(*Film Art* (pg 266), Bordwell and Thompson)

ABSTRACT

Mobile technology is slowly creeping into the classroom... Mobile phones are no longer being confiscated and some schools have even introduced the PSP into the classroom as a learning tool. The words 'handheld', 'Educational Digital Assistant' and 'location based m-learning' have been bandied about recently, but what exactly do they mean, and how will they affect the way our pupils learn?

The one connecting factor of all of these new initiatives is the apparent relevance of the moving image. Yet, teachers lack confidence in reading and writing film.

The workshop applied film language rules and techniques to the use of mobile technology and filmmaking. Delegates used N95 mobile phones to create a short abstract film in order to maximise the potential of the equipment, and to ultimately get beyond technology in order to create a more meaningful message through moving images.

KEY TERMS

- Photography (the camera as a tool to show us the world as a child sees it)
- Framing (the size and shape of the frame; the way the frame defines onscreen and off-screen space and how it controls distance, angle and the height of a vantage point onto the image)
- Camera mobility (how mobile phone cameras can become an extension of the eye)

BACKGROUND

Mobile phones with effective filmmaking technology are now readily available on the market. Many mobile phone users are often unaware of the power they have in their pockets. The workshop aimed to demonstrate to teachers that mobile phones could be used as relevant learning tools in a digital filmmaking context.

As with any new piece of digital filmmaking technology, there are benefits and drawbacks to making films using mobile phones.

BENEFITS

- the handheld nature of filmmaking with phones allows the camera operator to follow figures or moving objects
- this can create a good dynamic between the camera and actor as the camera is unobtrusive
- making films on mobiles can give unique mobile views / perspectives, especially useful when working with children

DRAWBACKS

- our sense of duration and rhythm is affected by the mobile frame
- filming can be wobbly and the image can be distorted
- this can get in the way of narrative as viewers are aware of the camera

MOBILE FRAMING – THE CONTEXT

Before delegates made their own film, we discussed these concepts:

1. The function of framing

‘...meaning and effect always stem from the total film, from its operation as a system. The context of the film will determine the function of the framings...’

(*Film Art* (pg 263), Bordwell and Thompson)

In order to understand the concept of cinematographic framing, it is necessary to examine individual shots taken from films. In order to examine the ‘shape and space’ of the narrative as a whole, however, it is important to view the film or sequence in its entirety.

Framing can be explored in terms of:

- the size and shape of the frame
- the way the frame defines onscreen and off-screen space (the meaning created when characters’ direct looks / gestures into off-screen space / how off-screen props / characters can protrude into the screen)
- how framing controls distance, angle and height of a point of view onto the image

2. The position of viewing

The position of viewing (at an angle; level as opposed to canted; from far way or close-up) has the possibility of sharpening our perception of the visual. The close-up, for instance, can bring out textures and details which otherwise might be ignored.

3. Camera movement

When the camera moves, it loses its mantle of a ‘window on to the action’ to something more subjective. We see the action through the eyes of a character – or we can even sense our own movement through the space on the screen. This can significantly change the meaning and tone of the narrative.

Different types of camera movement (fluid, staccato, hesitant) can create different perceptions of space. Filmmakers who use extended one-shot ‘long’ takes (such as Hitchcock’s *Rope* – 1948, which was shot in just ten takes) rely on camera movement to move the narrative forward. The well-crafted long take has the effect of a simulation – the audience feels more involved with the action. Long takes are often used in opening sequences to introduce the audience to the main characters and the space they inhabit (as in Joss Whedon’s *Serenity* – 2005), or for character expository as we follow two key characters ‘walking and talking’ through the narrative space. When used in action sequences, the long take adds to the dramatic effect as the action takes place in real time and we feel as if we are watching things happen as they unfold.

4. Non-narrative filmmaking

Non-narrative filmmaking can be broken down into the following four forms:

- Categorical formal system (wide-ranging subjects are broken down into categories in order to organise information)
- Rhetorical (common in all media, when the goal is to make the audience hold an opinion)
- Abstract (abstract visual and sonic qualities, such as shape, colour, aural rhythm and unusual angles are used to create meaning)
- Associational form (close to the use of metaphor in poetry, the filmmaker creates visual associations using images of unlike objects)

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CP3 AND MOBILE FRAMING – WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Aims of the workshop:

- apply the aesthetic rules of film language to digital, handheld filmmaking
- develop skills in the creative application of handheld, mobile filmmaking
- understand how film language makes meaning
- demonstrate that mobile phones with filmmaking technology can be used as creative learning tools by young people
- compose, capture and manipulate moving images in order to create meaning

As the workshop focus was on the creative potential of handheld filmmaking, we quickly established some basic 'rules of thumb' to consider before delegates were given access to their 'kit'. These rules can be applied to any filmmaking project:

- make notes as you are filming (sequences / shot lists)
- aim to get a maximum of 6–7 minutes of film 'in the can' (the finished films lasted no more than 2 minutes)
- think about the message that you are trying to convey at all times (story is paramount: finding a location is easy if the story is good)
- pre-plan, pre-plan, pre-plan (imagine shooting the film and list the possible problems)

I gave the delegates the following tips:

- film in the shade (people don't look good in bright lights and changes in weather will not hinder progress)
- plan the progress of the film in detail and try to stick to the plan – allowing for the fact that great ideas will occur whilst you're filming
- restrict your options to avoid chaos
- look after your equipment
- log the shots
- make sure that batteries are charged
- when editing, save after every amendment

METHODOLOGY

In order to get delegates to think more creatively about their filmmaking skills on a shot-by-shot basis, we examined examples of shot-types from various films. We looked at sequences from *Whale Rider* (Niki Caro, 2002) and *Pride and Prejudice* (Joe Wright, 2005) to examine fluidity of camera movement and perspective.

I deliberately steered delegates away from creating a short narrative film text as I wanted them to get straight into the filming process and I didn't feel there was time to develop a storyboard in enough detail. I also wanted delegates to get beyond the technology quickly in order to fully appreciate the creative potential of handheld, mobile filmmaking. I felt that there wasn't time to focus on developing a story as well as learning how to master the handheld technique and capture interesting shots. Delegates were asked, therefore to create a short abstract or associational film.

ABSTRACT FILMMAKING

Abstract films use interesting shapes and sounds in an attempt to make the viewer more aware of such shapes and sounds through a heightened awareness of their pictorial qualities. Abstract films often use repetitive visual motifs; they rely heavily on the graphic use of shapes, colours and movement.

ASSOCIATIONAL FILMMAKING

This form of filmmaking is close to the use of metaphor in poetry. It uses random imagery, with apparently no narrative connection, to create unlikely associations. For instance, images of hot dogs being churned out onto an assembly line juxtaposed with images of commuters filing onto a train – to symbolise the ‘sameness’ of modern life routine.

THE TASK

Delegates were challenged to make a ‘handheld’ abstract or associational film about the university campus using a mobile phone, approximately 1 minute long. I asked them to think about framing and movement with each shot. The aim was to create a film that articulated how they felt about the Leicester campus as a venue for the CP3 conference.

THE RULES

They had to capture 5 shots – 3 angles for each shot. Delegates worked in pairs.

SUMMARY

My aim was to make delegates aware of the potential creative use of the mobile technology available to them and their pupils – and to apply film language aesthetics to the images that they capture. The films that they came up with in such a short time were testimony to how much the delegates had engaged with the concept and with the technology available. The fact that they knew that they would be integrating their captured images with computers, then editing them into a meaningful context forced them to think carefully about each image that they captured. It would be interesting to carry out a similar workshop with students to see if they too would apply the same level of visual aesthetics to the images that they capture in their mobile phones.

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IMAGES AND CLIPS USED

- Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room, Alex Gibney, 2005
- Good Night, and Good Luck. George Clooney, 2005
- Brief Encounter, David Lean, 1945
- Brokeback Mountain, Ang Lee, 2005
- Casino Royale, Martin Campbell, 2006
- The Golden Age, Shekhar Kapur, 2007
- Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Tim Burton, 2005
- Charlotte's Web, Gary Winick, 2006

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U-Carmen e-Khayelitsha, Mark Dornford-May, 2005

Winged Migration, Jacques Perrin, 2001

Whisper of the Heart, Yoshifumi Kondo, 1995

Tear, Brad Ford, 2006

Mahagonny, Harry Smith, 1972

Bugsy Malone, Alan Parker, 1976

Clip1: Whale Rider, Niki Caro, 2002

Clip 2: Pride and Prejudice, Joe Wright, 2005

Julie Green is Education Director at Film Education. She has written widely on film and moving image education across the Primary and Secondary sectors, specialising in developing moving image resources for Special Educational Needs and Literacy. She started out as a Primary teacher, working with mixed ability children in Kent before moving to London to work as a full time Film Education advisor. Today, Julie's role includes creating print, digital and online film-related resources, leading teacher training sessions and speaking at conferences on all aspects of film and moving image education.

Julie is responsible for the development of Film Education's Picturacy series of discs that make the teaching and learning of film accessible and interactive and which are ideal for use on Interactive Whiteboards and over a school network. Each resource contains a wide range of clips from recent and well-loved feature films accompanied by a range of innovative, interactive exercises. Pupils will engage with the moving image, deepening their understanding of narrative and developing the ability to become creative composers.