UNIT 15: "ON FILM" (EXTRACTS FROM *ELEMENTS OF LITERATURE*)

UNIT STRUCTURE

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15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- identify film as an art form
- describe the film making process
- explain the various components of a film including film production
- discuss the major components of the editing process of film

15.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit will help you understand film as a form of art that has borrowed a great deal from other forms or art such as paintings and drama. It has a close affinity with novel as it contains a narrative, has a story to tell and follow the linear method of telling the story. Its resemblance with drama comes from the fact that some of the actions shown in films seem very theatrical. Film has also similarity with poetry in the sense that it presents certain details in a metaphorical way. Film also has resemblance with essay.

15.3 FILM AND ITS MECHANISM

A film is a series of moving pictures recorded by a camera and shown in cinema or on television screen. To understand how a film is created and how this art form works, one needs to be familiar with the mechanisms of a film. The process of film making involves the following components apart from having a theme and something to be photographed:

- Camera
- Film
- Editing equipment
- Laboratories
- Projector
- Screen

All these constitute what we call as fiction of film making. None of the above-mentioned aspects is visible to an audience except for the screen; they all remain at the back stage. The shots and images are captured by using a camera, and edited in film laboratories to create the final film.

A film comprises the following elements - narrative, cinematography, sound, mise-en-scene, and editing. Together all these elements constitute scenes and the essence of a film. A scene is a dramatic action consisting of one or more shots that takes place in one location at a time.

15.3.1 Shots and Images in Film

A shot is a series of images or frames that are recorded continuously from the time the camera starts to the time it stops. Shots are unedited and uncut strip of film which are later edited and aligned to make a film. A film is made of successive shots. Shots are usually divided into various types based on distance between a camera and the object:

- close-up
- extreme close-up
- medium close-up
- medium shot

- long shot
- medium long shot
- extreme long shot or distance shot

Another component of a film is image that represents the people and objects as we see them in our everyday life. The reality represented by the images is shown in a film with the help of camera and technology. When it comes to record an image faithfully, a lot depends on the camera and technology used. The images reproduce the realities that we see around us.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Does film have any affinity with novel?

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Q 2: What are the elements of a film?

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Q 3: What is a shot?

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15.3.2 Reading the Images Shown on Screen

With the help of a camera, anybody can capture images or shots and develop a film and play the film on a projector. This is the finished product that we watch as film, but there is a complicated fictional process involved in it which is invisible to us. The reader also needs to understand the complex process that runs in the back and read or analyse the images that we read or analyse in other forms of art.

Images play a major role in film making. The shots out of which a film is made are nothing but a series of images derived

from our everyday life. Now, how do you respond to an image in a film, or how do you read it?

The essay called "Elements of Film", throws light on the importance of understanding the factors that lies behind the surface level of an image in films. We need to read the image the same way we read an image in a poem to find out the symbolic meaning associated with a scene. Film reproduces a reality through images, but for the reader, the most important thing is to find out multiplicity of meaning associated with a scene through proper analysis. For example, when we see a scene of traffic moving on the street, we accept it as it was traffic moving on the street without questioning or analysing anything. But, the audience need to read the images carefully in order to understand the reality as well as the process that functions behind the screen.

To highlight the difference between the manner of representation between a word and an image, the author has given the example of D.H. Lawrence's *The Rocking Horse Winner*. The example is that of a Rocking Horse as a word and as an image. The word "Rocking Horse" in a page of fiction usually refers to a literal rocking horse having a metaphorical meaning. However in a filmed version, the image "Rocking Horse" would represent a visionary vehicle and have physical immediacy.

In a film, images are framed in a scene that serves as a receptacle– an empty space that demands to be filled by images. The frame enables us to place the image in a central position. Frames refer to the borders surrounding an image; it is the smallest compositional unit of a film's structure.

Images in film must be centralised so that they have better visibility and the spectators don't get confused. In the 1950s, almost all films were shot in a controlled format of 1.33:1. Now, spectators are accustomed to a standard format of 1.85:1. Images mostly move towards the centre and all people - be it the director, cameraman or

spectator, they all look at the centre of the image that is placed on a single planned horizontal field. Later, the images are interpreted with the help of culturally inherited perspective of audience.

The tendency to look at the centre of the image has been strengthened over the years by the tradition of perspective that originated in paintings and drawings of the 19th century.

The essay also talks about deep focus when it comes to represent an image. It is a technique used by directors or cinematographers to make the image appear more realistic. It uses lighting, relatively wide angle lenses and small lenses apertures to render sharp focus both in close and distant planes. The composition of a shot comprises several planes such as foreground, middle ground and background. The conventional images used in traditional films are focused with sharp outlines.

15.3.3 The Idea of Verisimilitude and How It Works in Film

Verisimilitude or fidelity to reality is about establishing the truth or reality of a fictional creation. In film, verisimilitude is achieved through camera that represents the realties with the help of images.

Usually, in a traditional film production, multiple cameras are used to shoot each scene placing the camera at different positions. Actors enact the same scene many times unless the director finalises it. Also, each scene is recorded using different camera positions. Out of all shots recorded by the camera, certain shots are selected and assembled to a final scene. This is called editing; it is done in such way that the represented reality looks real. The final edited product may not include many of the recorded shots. Images may not always represent a reality successfully or a scene may fail to establish verisimilitude.

The camera records everything that is required for a particular scene. But when we see a scene we can't see any traces of the elements involved in an images' production such as the

director, other extra elements and people behind the scene. There is a division between what is photographed and who is perceiving it, and the camera marks the line of this division.

In order to make everything that is represented real in a film, the director often goes back to the 180 degree rule of film making. Now, what is the 180 degree rule of a film? It refers to the convention that the camera can be placed in any position as long as it remains on one side of the action. 180 degree rule is the basic guiding principle that is used to establish the relationship between one character and another/object in a scene. An imaginary line known as Axis connects the camera and the camera is kept on one side of the Axis for each shot. When the camera passes over the Axis, it is known as jumping the line or crossing the line. The 180 degree rule helps audience feel a sense of completeness, the audience does not experience any sense of spatial disorientation.

The directors have returned to the use of single shot that rotates the camera horizontally on its base in a complete circle so that we are being shown everything. When the camera moves past the 180 mark, nothing is revealed, and the shot retains the mystery of the non-presence of the camera or its invisibility. The 180 degree rule of film still retains its popularity.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What is an image?

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Q 5: What is verisimilitude and how is it achieved in film?

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Q 6: What is the 180 degree rule of film making?

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15.4 THE PRODUCTION OF MOVIE AS A UNIFORM PROCEDURE

A standardised effort to make the movie making procedure a uniform one was noticeable in 1920s. Traditionally, a film is shot using a frame rate of 24 frames per second. The screen is set in a standard ratio and the film moving through the camera and the projector is regulated at constant speed of 24 frames of film stock / print in a single second.

There was a time when certain studios directed all cinematographers to shoot everything at f1.6 irrespective of factors like weather and sun just to have standardised images. Many cameramen then use this freedom to shoot with great freedom and never revealed as to how they achieved special effects. For example, Billy Bitzer who shot movies like *The Birth of a Nation* developed footage as he shot and never told people how he managed to have certain effects. Otherwise, technicians in laboratories developed and modified the footages (a portion or sequence of a film) to achieve more uniform results and effects.

However, there were variations in movies and not all movies looked identical despite using a standardized product. Gradually, the movie making industry moved from New York and New Jersey to California as the later had clear and smog-less uniformity of the sun. And those who wanted to utilise the effect of natural light, found the climate ideal there. When film making moved inside the constricted environment of newly built studios, film making became more sophisticated and range of effects got narrower; film became a more controlled product. Some studios even tried duplicating the natural lighting of California sun shine to shape the images in an artificial way.

15.4.1 The Distance between Camera and Object

Another important thing to consider while analysing film is the distance between camera and the objects it captures. In the films recorded in the past, the distance between a camera and the recorded objects used to be about 10 or 15 feet; the camera

remained at 10/15 feet away from the object. However, longer distance was also permissible. Gradually, the close up and extreme close up shots came into existence. Initially, the moviegoers were not accustomed to close up shots, but they got used to it with the course of time. In a close up shot, the subject captured by the camera occupies the major portion of a frame and such shot is used to show more details of an object/character and its importance.

15.5 FILM EDITING

So far, we have discussed the recording mechanisms of a film. Apart from recording, there is another important aspect of film making which is editing. Film editing is about the joining together of the parts of a film after shooting has taken place. The editing mechanism of cinema functions tend to rely on the "Apelles principle" to synchronize the divisions that are mandatory in making a film. Apelles principle is named after the Greek painter Apelles who painted fruits so real that birds would consider them as real and sought to eat.

Film editing is a process of selecting and joining together of different shots to create a complete film. It basically refers to the process that runs behind the screen where a film editor select, arrange and modify the shots to come up with a finished creative product. Editing puts shots together to create a smoothly flowing narrative that should appear real in terms of theme, time and place; it helps film achieve verisimilitude. It also involves how one shot will be transitioned to the next. Editing should be able to evoke emotion in the audience and maintain continuity in terms of storytelling.

Terms used in film editing:

The Take: It refers to a single shot recorded by an uninterrupted run of the camera. It is a version of a scene taken with a particular camera set up. Every time, the camera is turned on, a take begins and when the camera stops, the take is over. For example, if we want to record the scene of a man walking across a room with a newspaper and sitting down, the scene can be recorded as many times as the director wants and each of the recordings is a take.

Long Take: A shot that lasts for an unusually lengthy time before the transition to the next shot is known as long take.

Shot: A shot is different from a take. It is an edited unit of a finished film. All shots are takes but not all takes are shots. A shot is usually selected from a number of takes.

The Cut: It refers to a potential disruption in a film - a sudden change in camera angle, placement, location or time of a shot. A cut is made at a point when the ending of one shot matches with the beginning of the next shot. It refers to the cutting down of a single shot at various points so that they can be interspersed with other shots. It is a method by which shots or screens are combined. It is an abrupt replacement of one shot by another so as to make a scene more meaningful. There are different types of cut – editor's cut, director's cut and the final cut. After the editor edits the raw footage having a clear understanding of the directors' intention, the director and editor both sit and find out whether it matches the director's intention/ vision or not. In this process, shots/scenes are removed, modified, shortened or reshot if required. The producer who represents the production company supervises the director's cut. Once, the collaboration is complete, the editor creates the final cut which is the finished product that the audience watches in cinemas.

Flashback: It is another editing technique used in films that shows movement in time.

Synchronization:

Synchronization is also a part of the film editing process. It refers to the process of arranging and mixing of images and sounds that are recorded by using different mechanisms to create the final film that should have a harmonious impact on the audience.

Maintaining harmony between image track and sound track is very important in a film. For example, if the words spoken by a character do not match the lip movements of the character or if a character speaks with a voice which does not match his physic or if sounds from the shots are heard, the audience tend to think that something is wrong with the whole

scene. Such lack of harmony disturbs the flow, and the film fails to do justice to the reality it represents. In a film, images and sounds are associated with each other in such a way that they appear to be in harmony from the beginning to the end of a film. Thus, synchronization is all about establishing a harmony between recording, editing and projecting mechanism of cinema to create a harmonious whole – the film.

Continuity Editing:

A type of editing that maintains the continuous and seemingly uninterrupted flow of action in a story. Here, shots are cut together in a linear flow without any interruption.

Optical effect and how it is achieved in a film :

It is a special effect created in film by technicians using complex optical and electronic apparatuses.Optical effects are mostly seen in dissolves, fades and wipes. Fades is a kind of visual effect created to indicate a change in time and space. Wipe is a spatial transition from one shot to another in a visible pattern where one image seems to push another off the screen with the help of a bar or line. Dissolve indicates gradual scene transition. For example, the end of one shot may overlap with the beginning of the next shot.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What do you understand by film editing?

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Q 8: What is a take?

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Q 9: What is the difference between a shot and a take?

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Q 10: What is a Final Cut in a film?

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Q 11: What is synchronization?

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Q 12: What is fades?

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15.6 LET US SUM UP

As you have finished reading the unit, you are well acquainted with 'Film' as an art form that represents the reality with the help of a series of moving pictures recorded by a camera. In a film, shots, images and sounds are captured first as footage (raw and unedited version of a shot) and edited later to make the final print. The machinery of a film contains a camera, shots, images, sound, editing, laboratories, a projector and a screen. You have also learnt that images are integral part of film making. The reality is reproduced in films with the help of images that are framed in a film. How a group of audience interprets the images in film is also equally significant to comprehend the multiplicity of meaning associated with a shot which contains images recorded uninterruptedly by the camera. In films, credibility of a scene is established or verisimilitude is achieved with the help of camera and images. In this unit, we have also discussed about production of movie as a uniform procedure, the distance between a camera and distance, film editing and its various terminologies and optical effect of a film.



15.7 FURTHER READING

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5. A Beginner's Guide to Film Editing Vocabulary (https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/a-beginners-guide-to-film-editing-vocabulary/)
6. Cinema Editing (https://www.learner.org/exhibits/cinema/editing2.html)
7. Introduction to Film and Media Studies: FILM EDITING BASICS (https://www.slideshare.net/shanovitz/introduction-to-film-and-media-studies-film-editing-basics).



15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Yes, film has a close affinity with novel as it contains a narrative, has a story to tell and follow the linear method of telling the story.

Ans to Q No 2: A film comprises the following elements - narrative, cinematography, sound, mise-en-scene, and editing.

Ans to Q No 3: A shot is a series of images/frames that are recorded continuously from the time the camera starts to the time it stops.

Ans to Q No 4: The shots out of which a film is made are images; it is derived from our everyday life.

Ans to Q No 5: Verisimilitude or fidelity to reality is about establishing the truth or reality of a fictional creation. In film, verisimilitude is achieved through camera that represent the realties with the help of images.

Ans to Q No 6: Refer to Section 15.3.3

Ans to Q No 7: Film editing is a process of selecting and joining together of different shots to create a complete film. It basically refers to the process that runs behind the screen where a film editor selects, arrange and modify the shots to come up with a finish creative product.

Ans to Q No 8: It refers to a single shot recorded by an uninterrupted run of the camera.

Ans to Q No 9: A shot is different from a take. It is an edited unit of a finished film. All shots are takes but not all takes are shots. A shot is usually selected from a number of takes.

Ans to Q No 10: Final cut is the finished product that the audience watches in cinemas.

Ans to Q No 11: It refers to the process of arranging and mixing of images and sounds that are recorded by using different mechanisms to create the final film that should have a harmonious impact on the audience.

Ans to Q No 12: Fades is a kind of visual effect created to indicate a change in time and space.



15.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1: What is the difference between a shot and a take?

Q2: What is film editing?

Q3: What are the major elements of a film?

Q4: What is a camera angle?

Q5: What is loss of synchronization in film?

Q6: What is a flashback?

Q7: What is continuity editing?

Q8: Briefly describe film and its mechanism.

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