

VIDEO GENRES AND CODES GUIDELINES

FILM THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Pudovkin said montage psychologically guided the viewer. He was therefore expressionist. He identified contrast, parallelism~ symbolism, simultaneity and leitmotif in montage. But concern with the shot also made him realist and he wanted narrative to support realism. For Eisenstein new reality was created by a 'montage of attractions' involving the audience thinking. Later he suggested a dominant attraction amongst others, Bazin was interested in the psychology of the close up and micro-dramatics

Bazin said film is important for what it does (functionalist). A film realist, this concerns mise en scène. He preferred deep focus and the sequence shot involving the observer in an ambiguity of reality. Film form is spatial. Astruc believed that film was as flexible as other arts (camera style). Truffaut pushed the personal 'auter' style. Thus cinema moved from design to communication.

Jean Luc Godard believed that mise en scène could be as untruthful as montage, montage need not be bad faith, and the issue becomes the filmmaker's intellectual honesty and good faith. The signifier is as important as the signified (as in language). He also promoted the equal place of sound. The main point is the effect of film on viewers.

Umberto Eco defined four stages of film understood as semiotics.

Overvaluation of the linguistic code (too close).
Complexity, not so simple.
Semiotics of making and production
Semiotics of consumption (how we knew what we see; from 1975)

A fifth: Academic pastime of semiotics.

Christian Metz went from semiotics to problems, concerned with narrative and the difference between denotative and connotative meaning and between syntagmatic (before and after) and paradigmatic (within scene) meaning. He developed a theory of code sets, shared with the culture, theatre, borrowed, or specific to cinema with its subcodes (e.g., lighting). Much of below comes from Christian Metz. Later he looked at perception and used Lacan.

Cinema discussion is now dialectical and not about finding a language.

Basic Theory

We learn to see three dimensions in two. We see:

physiologically: we only see in front so we must look around.
ethnographically: calling on cultural codes and conventions
psychologically: assimilate meanings into personal experience.

Sign consists of the signifier and signified. In video, these seem the same. Denotative meaning means signifier and signified are the s&me. But video has connotative potential. These depend on codes of meaning which are found in video, film, theatre, the general culture.

The icon: the signifier represents the signified by its likeness.
The index: inherent relationship of the signifier to signified.
The symbol: arbitrary relationship of signifier to signified.

The index naves us from denotative neaning to connotative using either:

Metonymy: associated detail represents an idea.
Synocdoche: part stands for the whole.

Mise en scène literally means 'putting in the scene'. It concerns framing and seeing along planes, proximity, lighting, focus. Diachronic shots concern changing state (movement, distance, focus, angle, point of view) and ways of exploiting codes to bring out connotative effect. It is linked with realism.

Objective (consumer ambiguity):	Deep focus, wide angle, still camera, open frame, long shot. Context over drama.
Subjective (producer control)	Shallow focus, zoom, moving camera, closed frame, close up, Drama over context.

Montage is the editing process which builds extra meaning. Découpage classique held to rules of establishing shot, narrowing down, reverse angles in dialogue, relevant jump cuts to reduce dead time, and ending a scene shortly after the climax of a diachronic shot. Editing joins two shots but also can determine the length of a shot. Either a film segment is autonomous or not, chronological or not, descriptive or narrative, linear or not, continuous or not, or organised or not in its syntagmatic setting.

DETAILS OF USE

BASIC ELEMENTS

Reconnaissance:

Permission	If necessary seek authority to video.
Notes	Write notes, script and storyboard.
Site	The different camera positions for mise en scène and montage.
Lighting	Outdoors check the sun position at the time of day. Indoors check lighting opportunities and problems.
Power	Batteries should be charged or check availability of sockets.
Sound	Listen for ambience. Sources of extra noise that will be noticed may have to be included on opening scenes so that viewers will be familiar with them.

Devices:

Storyboard	Series of mise en scènes with narrative montage.
Script	Words and full directions. Maps For camera positioning.
Crawlboard	Tilt for moving titles
Clapperboard	For editing. Appears at the top of a shot showing scene number, take number and name. Clapped at the beginning it marks the start of the shot and can link in separately recorded sound.
Curtains	Simplify and soften background.
Seamless paper	For a neutral background.
Large drawings	For varied backgrounds.
Standing foreground	Foreground framing effect.
Mirrors	Alternative views and details.
Filters	For colour change and background.

Title cards Macro or close up and titling work in editing.

Camera stability:

Shoulder level	Feet apart. Use a car roof if outside. Lean against a wall. Use a tripod.
Kneeling	Support on left or right knee.
Chair	Use the back as camera support.
Near ground	Support the back. Use a tripod.
Floor	Lie down.
Added movement	With support as above, move camera smoothly. Avoid zoom.

SOUND

Place:

Actual	Connected with the image.
Commentative	Off the image.
Synchronous	Source within the frame.
Asynchronous	From outside the frame.
Parallel	Actual and synchronous.
Contrapuntal	Commentative, asynchronous and opposed to or in counterpoint with the image. Speech, music or environmental.

Opportunities:

Omnidirectional	For all round sound.
Unidirectional	Selective direct sound.
Windshield	Against wind popping.
Dubbing	Separate after sound track.
Separate recorder	Use clapperboard. Keep scenes short and edit afterwards.

Effects:

Horses on road	Coconuts on hard ground.
Horses on grass	Coconuts on wet towel.
Glass breaking	Metal dropped on to a hard surface.
Snow	Treading on tape.

MISE EN SCÈNE (STATIC AND DIACHRONIC)

Lighting opportunities:

Key light	Main front light.
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Video Genres

Fill light	Reduces shadows from key light.
Back light	Highlights hair and edges.
Background light	Lights background and separates subject from background.
Reflector	Fills shadows by reflecting main light back,
Indirect light	Bouncing off another surface to soften light and reduce shadows.
Shade and light	Stand darker subject in light, lighter subject in the shade.
Subject contrast	Subject contrast Avoid widely contrasting clothing.

Distances:

Extreme long shot	Establishes wider scene.
Long shot	Establishes place of subject.
Medium shot	Subject dominant.
Close up	Activity centred.
Extreme close up	Detail of activity. Psychological.
Macro	Camera close to still object.

Camera Focus:

Deep focus	Foreground, middle and background in focus. Gives objective feel.
Shallow focus	Subject only in focus (using zoom).
Follow focus	Follow central subject in shallow focus.
Rack focus	Change shallow focus.

Camera viewpoint

Down angle	Establishes view, makes objects short.
Level angle	Medium to close shots.
Eye level	Normal view of subject.
Up angle	Gives authority, increases height.
Over the shoulder	For conversations and looking at subject's view.
Reverse angle	For response.
Three quarter angle	For variation on direct view.
Subject movement	Stay the same side of line of action.

Movement:

Still shot	Movement in frame only.
Slow panning	Slow change of scene, alternative to cut.
Swish panning	To change time and place. For use in later editing
Tilting	Vertical movement.
Zooming	Change from whole to distant detail.
Tracking	Alternative and more natural to zoom. Depth enhancing.

Framing codes:

Frame plane	The only real plane. The screen.
Geographical plane	Flat level land plane.
Depth plane	Distance.
Perspective:	Rules of convergence, relative size, density gradient, overlapping.
Closed frame	The eye is forced into central subjects.
Open frame	The eye can leave central subjects.
Height and width:	The bottom is more important than the top, left comes before right, the bottom is stable, the top is unstable, diagonals move up from bottom left to top right and vice versa.
Double action	Mise en scène mimics montage with two actions in the same frame.
Within frames	Use verticals, horizontals and curves to frame within a frame.
Thirds code	Eyes or centre one third down from the top of the screen. Subjects third in left and right.
L composition	Eye movement into the L and then to the disappearing point.
U composition (two Ls)	Eye movement into the larger L and then to the smaller L before moving to the disappearing point.
Pairs	Close together, using thirds.
Groups	Avoid lines. Use diagonal grouping or informal line.
Movement codes	Movement should stay in the same direction. Space in front of where subject is looking and moving. Diagonal movement across the screen.
Cut off points	Avoid cutting image at joints. Cut at intermediate points.
Height code	Cut height differences in frame.
Conversation codes	Over the shoulder or joining sides of a table.

Background code	Avoid interference with the foreground.
Edges code	Avoid important details at the screen edges. Keep titles away from edges.
Foreground objects	Conceal the camera. Depth framing or rack focussing. Pan around foreground objects in semi-circular fashion.

Shot Length codes:

Normal length	Five to fifteen seconds.
Extended length	For detail or continuous action.
Reduced length	For dramatic montage narrative.

MONTAGE

Starting, connecting and ending:

Fade	Time change, section of film ends.
Iris	Diminishing hole to end.
Inter-titles	Moving on the narrative.
Blank	To pause.
Focus shift	Out or in.
Dissolve	Themes connected by superimposing

Titles:

Anarchic	Varied sized letters stuck on a board.
Rubdown lettering	Commercial and good quality.
Stencils	Purchased or made, coloured over.
Caligraphy	Specialised handwriting.
Blackboard	The texture of chalc on black.
Whiteboard	Coloured pens on white background. Can show the words being written.
Graffiti	Brick wallpaper sprayed upon.
Sand	At the seaside or in a sandtray.
Computer	Desk top publishing, presentations, paper or screen.

Decoupage classique and choice of narrative codes:

Beginning	Opening scenes giving purpose and basic theme.
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Video Genres

Middle	Bulk of the narrative and thematic development.
End	Short climax and ending of loose ends.
First pictures	Titles.
Second pictures	Preparatory scenes (e.g. historical photographs, interview comments),
Third pictures	Introductory establishing scenes (long to medium shots).
Fourth pictures	Main narrative structure.
Fifth pictures	End scenes (completion of narrative).
Sixth pictures	End titles.
Shot editing	Each shot should be cut just after its climax.
Dialogue shots	Use reverse angles.
Dead time removal	Use jump cut (smoothly within a scene).
Difference	Do not replicate the previous shot. Create sufficient difference.
Accelerated montage	Progressively shorter alternate shots to heighten impact and climax.
Parallel montage	Two stories blended.
Involved montage	Shots edited out of time order.
Flashbacks/ forwards	Narrative jumps.
Fast reactive edits	Montage mimics mise en scène.

Syntagmatic shots (Christian Metz):

Autonomous shot	Still shot, no relationship around.
Parallel syntagma	Two events intercut with no time difference implied.
Bracket syntagma	Examples of same reality without chronological implication.
Descriptive syntagma	Spatial shot, establishing shot.
Alternate syntagma	Like parallel but with time implied.
Scene	Continuous event portrayed.
Episodic sequence	Discontinuous organised sequence of shots each with its own identity.
Ordinary sequence	Discontinuous disorganised sequence.

GENRES

Productions:

Video Genres

Staged	Detailed planning and careful control, thorough scripting.
Documentary	Allow for the unpredictable.

Purpose codes:

Entertainment	Fast moving, humorous and colourful. Maintain style and theme throughout.
Information	Well framed, close ups, graphics, titles, well detailed, logical order to shots. Maintain theme throughout.

Subjects and settings:

Babies	Avoid distractions. Warm and comforting settings. Close shots. Scenes of parent and baby interactions.
Toddlers	Keep them unaware of the camera using the zoom. Use foreground objects to hide and frame. Toys create action.
Children	Act without inhibition but can look at the camera. They use imagination.
Teenagers	They either overact or do not act in front of a camera. May like to help.
Adults	Self-conscious about appearance. Little direction needed.
Senior citizens	Light to lessen many skin shadows. Unobtrusive camera work. Consider shots for later editing against pauses.
Pets	Close ups and low eye level. Keep the animal large in frame. Get action.

Audience perception:

Young	Short attention span, fast moving, colourful, lively sound, simple story.
Older	Longer attention span, avoid duplicating commentary and picture. Complex story.

Events genres:

Weddings	Follow narrative of brides preparation, arrivals, ceremony, travel, reception and departures. Use some candid shots.
Baby naming	Close up shots for wetting the head. Introduce baby before and show after.
Public ceremonies	Good sound~ zoom lens work, open iris.
Debates	Front and (for two people) over the shoulder work. Medium to close up shallow focus framing for psychology.
Classwork	Establish work being done, close ups for concentration and interaction.
Parties	Long shots and medium shots, light for ambience. Fast moving and short scene durations. Emphasise colour and action. Show a cake before it is cut.

Video Genres

Sport	Keep movement one way. Use high angle and side to side, except tennis (one end), gymnastics and show jumping (low angle). Zoom for reactions. Keep an overall view of all the action.
Travel	Deep focus long shots of scenes. Avoid zoom with distant backgrounds (track instead). Watch strong shadows (unless wanted). Low angle in woods, mountains and high rise buildings, high angle for panoramas.
Tours	As travel but research the defined area. Use macro rostrum shots of historical photos to illustrate the area in the past.
Nature	Close up and macro work. Zoom for shy animals. Use foreground object to hide. Medium shots for human experts and commentators.
Funfairs	Establish scene with long shots. Shoot from the rides. Tilt from the ground to hold known subjects in view.
Parade	Shoot from one side only. Deep focus long and medium shots (close up for facial reactions)
Fireworks	Tilt upwards with the rockets, close ups but wide angle for displays.
Photographs	Macro shots and rostrum movement.
History album	Overview of scattered photographs and period documents. Macro and rostrum work for each photograph. Commentary links each shot and an interviewee may be shown handling the items. Simple camera work is best.
Scrapbook	Video scenes without narrative structure from one shot to the next. Commentary for each shot.
Candid	Deep focus long shot initially; zoom, shallow focus, hiding behind foreground.
Erotic	Opening stripteases may reduce actors' inhibitions and establish eroticism. Use medium shots and close up detail. Build in reaction shots. Emphasise warm flesh tones. Use subdued and back lighting. Close microphone. Minimal commentary. Possible accelerated montage at climax.
Art	Precede with wide angle of the work area. A roaming camera around the studio. Use zoom and macro to art objects; close up face shots for concentration. Cut aways of tools and materials. End with view of finished work.
Training	Understand sport/subject before videoing. Close ups for detail.
Interview	Research questions and the topic. Video questions afterwards and edit them in. Take a separate sound track. Use nodding heads as cutaways for editing answers down (but avoid suggestion of approving the answers). Long shot to show conversation, medium shots for responses, close shots for reactions and hand movements. Edit in visual subject supports.

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