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Bachelor i Fjernsyn og Multimedieteknikk

*An analysis of the occurrence of manipulation of audience
perspective and emotional interpretation of the scene through
framing and composition*

Bachelor Oppgave Skriftlig

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	2
Cinematographer & Cinematography.....	2
Theories and techniques in Cinematography.....	3
Frames and shot sizes.....	5
Shot angles and movements.....	7
The Analysis.....	9
Implementation, results and discussion.....	15
Conclusion.....	18
Reference & figures.....	19

Introduction

Cinematography is a form of art that is considered as the most essential part in filmmaking because without it, there won't be visual storytelling to begin with. We often hear that there is a certain manipulation in filmmaking. In this thesis report, I will further discuss, investigate, analyze, and conclude on how filmmakers use techniques in framing and composition to manipulate the audience's perspective and emotional interpretation of a scene.

First and foremost, a camera is the one that captures the film, without a camera and it's lens there will be no visuals to tell the story. It is evident that cinematography plays a particularly significant role in creating a film. But what exactly is cinematography? Let us start by defining what it means and try to find out its importance. "Cinematography is the art of photography and visual storytelling in a motion picture or television show. Cinematography comprises all on-screen visual elements, including lighting, framing, composition, camera motion, camera angles, film selection, lens choices, depth of field, zoom, focus, color, exposure, and filtration." (Master class,2021). By these, we know that cinematography has different elements from composition, motion, lens to framing that a cinematographer, or also known as the Director of Photography considers to convey the intent of the scene or to tell the story. To further understand storytelling from cinematography we will go through these elements and try to understand the reason behind it.

Methodology

Cinematographer & Cinematography

What does it mean to be a cinematographer and what is his or her role in filmmaking? “A cinematographer, also called a director of photography, is the crew chief that is responsible for the camera and light crews. Cinematographers are masters of cinematography – the art of visual storytelling used in films and television shows.” (Nashville film institute, 2021). In every film, a cinematographer plays a key role in capturing a scene, without these scenes a film won't be created. There won't be a film without a cinematographer. The director usually works hand and hand with a cinematographer so that his or her vision will be achieved on the screen. “Cinematography sets and supports the overall look and mood of a film’s visual narrative. Each visual element that appears on screen, a.k.a. the *mise-en-scène* of a film, can serve and enhance the story—so it is the cinematographer’s responsibility to ensure that every element is cohesive and support the story.”, (Nashville film institute, 2021). In films, a great responsibility is put on a cinematographer's shoulder because the look, vibe and vision of the film is captured by the director of photography. A lot of big film production houses use expensive and high-quality equipment's such as a camera and lighting to make sure that the film being produced is of the highest quality. So, does this mean that equipment matters more than the skills of the cinematographer? This could be debatable because some would agree that no matter how expensive the equipment is, if the person behind it does not know what he is doing makes the equipment's just the same as the others. On the other hand, the difference in small budget to big budget films is the number of manpower and the types of equipment's they are using.

A lot of mainstream feature films we see in cinemas like the Marvel Universe are high budget films so the camera, equipment's, and manpower they use is optimal. Unlike the low budget films, equipment's and manpower is scarce and they need to make it work with just limited manpower, equipment’s, and resources. But this does not mean they can't make a good film especially if the cinematographer is skilled and can make the directors vision come to life on screen.

In a narrative film, the director of photography has a goal to transform the script and the director's vision to life on the screen. To do so, it would require knowledge and techniques from the cinematographer to make the film a visual masterpiece the best he can. Because different lighting, angles, framing, depth of field and of course movement have different meanings and intention in any scene in any given film. "A cinematographer has several major responsibilities and duties when working on a film set. The first is choosing the visual style and approach of the film, which will depend on the story and feel. The next duty is to determine the lighting for each scene. In a film, lighting creates the visual mood for the scene, so a cinematographer must use it to enhance the contour, contrast, and depth of the image to support the atmosphere" (Masterclass, 2021). The cinematographer also has the responsibility to figure out and decide which lighting suits best in the scene. When doing lighting set up, the cinematographer communicates with the Gaffer or the lighting supervisor on what light should fit the narrative and intent in the scene. Whenever there is low light or the face is underexposed, the cinematographer would tell the gaffer so he can adjust it. Exposure is the camera's best friend. Without light then pictures and videos are not visible. That is why the cinematographer works closely with the lighting team to produce the best pictures or videos in any production.

Let us dive in closely with the different techniques a cinematographer uses to make sure the narrative is translated into the screen.

Theories and Techniques in Cinematography

Composition

One of the most important skills that a cinematographer should know is composition. What is composition? "Put simply, it's all about the way a scene is arranged within the camera frame. When referring to shot composition, it is all about the way the visual elements are arranged to convey a certain message." (Jodie Francis, 2021).

One basic composition technique is the rule of thirds. You need to break up your frame into six sections, three horizontal and three verticals. Then all you need to do is place your subject at one of the interconnecting points. In this way, the subjects are positioned right, and it is well balanced inside the frame. But nowadays, people try to break this rule, especially the new directors. In Wes Anderson films, you can see that the subject is not at the intersections but in the middle of the frame.

The most notable films where you can see his composition and framing works are "The Grand Budapest Hotel" (2014) and "Moonrise Kingdom" (2012). Although the rule of thirds is common knowledge for cinematographers and directors, from time-to-time people break them to make their own style and it depends on how much the director will risk it, sometimes it pays off really well. As per Wes Anderson, it became his unique style in filming. The next one is Balance and symmetry, "The subject looking to the opposite side of the frame is also a rule of composition in film. You see, in general the framing rule sees the subject on the left side of the frame with them looking to the right.," (Jodie Francis 2021). In the old days, this was a framing guide to make sure where the actors are looking has enough space to make it more balanced. However, a lot of filmmakers today would do the opposite to challenge this rule. By this, filmmakers can help create a whole different feeling and mood. The subject can focus their gaze on the same side that the frame is, and this can encapsulate the mood of entrapment in the subject and resonates to the feeling of the audience.

A lot of Korean Filmmakers are doing this kind of framing and it works. Moreover, framing at eye-level can also be considered a rule of composition. This rule is also a common knowledge to provide a sense of kinship between the subject and the viewer, this also creates a feeling of connection and of equality. But like the other techniques, some do the opposite way. So, one can argue that a lot of filmmaker's don't stick to traditional ways of filmmaking, but to challenge it and make it a new era in filmmaking.

Nowadays, the more changes and different techniques from the usual film is produced the more interesting it becomes to the viewers. Sometimes people get used to the usual and are already wired on how movies are filmed that when they see something different from the angles, movements, and composition they become surprised. Hence, they remember it better. Next is the 180-degree rule that is particularly important to know. "This rule basically refers to connecting all of the characters that are present in the scene. The camera should be placed on one side for every shot. Meaning that the first character is frame right of the second character. This type of shot can help to maintain the continuity of the scene and ensure that the eye lines are comfortable and natural for the observer.," (Jodie Francis 2021).

I remember that our teachers are extremely strict with this rule. Of all the rules, this is the one that most filmmakers stick to. Because continuity is especially important so that the audience will not be confused or be at lost in the narrative. The moment the audience starts to question why, where and what? They start to retract out of the world you created in the film. This is the reason continuity is important in every film and significant importance is given to this by the film crew that consists of director, cinematographer and the styling/art directing team. Because as filmmakers, they want the audience to feel like they are in the story with the characters and experiencing the intentions and emotions of the characters. Like they are living in that visionary world created by the filmmakers.

Framing & shot sizes

Now we will move on to framing or known as the camera shot size. "Selecting the frame is the fundamental act of filmmaking; as film-makers we must direct the audience's attention: "look here, now look at this, now over here..."

Choosing the frame is a matter of conveying the story, but it is also a question of composition, rhythm, and perspective. (Brown,2012,s 4)

This is particularly important to planning what kind of shot you needed for the scene. Several types of shot have different intentions or meaning. “A camera shot is composed of the series of frames that are shot uninterrupted from the moment the camera starts rolling until it stops. Camera shots are an essential aspect of filmmaking and video productions, because by combining several types of shots, angles and camera movements, the filmmakers are able to emphasize specific emotions, ideas and movement for each scene.”(2020, Sept, Studiobinder). For example, extreme wide shot, long shot, or total is used by cinematographers to establish where the character is. It is important to start the scene with an establishing shot so the viewers will be aware where the character is currently placed. Without establishing shot the viewers will be searching for clues as well as be confused in response to the location of the character.

Meanwhile, medium shots are used to scenes that are more intimate or very personal scene. Because with these, can we see the characters waist and up. The most important here is the subtle gestures by the hand or some actions that are useable for subtext. With these different shots it builds up the story and intentions of the scene. Medium shots may seem like the most standard camera shot around, but every shot size you choose will influence the viewer. “A medium shot can often be used as a buffer shot for dialogue scenes that have an important moment later that will be shown in a close-up shot. If you don't use all of the different types of camera shots in film, how can you signal anything to your viewer without shot size contrast.” (Studiobinder,2020). Close up is commonly used for intense scenes, especially when a character needs to show strong emotions on the face, for example laughter, loneliness, sadness, and sudden outburst of emotions. By this, the viewers could clearly see the emotions of the character in the scene. “You know it’s time for a close-up shot when you want to reveal a subject’s emotions and reactions. The close-up camera shot fills your frame with a part of your subject. If your subject is a person, it is often their face. Of all the several types of camera shot sizes in film, a close-up is perfect for important moments. The close-up shot size is near enough to register tiny emotions, but not so close that we lose visibility.” (Studiobinder,2020).

Last but not the least is extreme close up. This type of shot is used for objects or parts of the face that need to be emphasized for the story to go forward. This is also used if something is of significant importance or connection in the story. For example, a watch represents time while a faucet with dripping water represents scarcity, or a garment that has sentimental meaning for the character is in focus. Extreme close-up shots are also used for highlighting senses from showing part of the eyes, nose, ears, and hand. By showing these parts makes the audience understand that the importance is put on the characters' senses. “An extreme close-up is the most you can fill a frame with your subject. It often shows eyes, mouth and gun triggers. In extreme close-up shots, smaller objects get great detail and are the focal point. Use an Extreme Close Up to emphasize a specific feature of your subject. “(Studiobinder,2020).

Shot angles and movements

As a cinematographer, shot angles are considered in each shot because doing a low angle makes the subject look superior while a high angle shot makes the subject inferior. By this, it helps the scene becomes more connected to the intention and what the character is experiencing. Another important technique is camera movements. Usually, a cinematographer uses some equipment to stabilize the camera movement in a scene. Equipements such as dolly, slider, easy rig, shoulder rig and tripod are essential to make sure the camera is stabilized enough to be able to make different movements. Because without it, will make scenes difficult to watch if it becomes wobbly and unstable. But of course, some use handheld camera techniques to make it more natural especially in an intense or suspenseful scene, but most of the time director chooses a stabilize shot. Dolly usually produces a certain effect that can affect the audience's emotions towards the scene. By dollying in to out we can have suspense that the audience is being revealed or introduced to the new world and by dollying out to in, the audience is being drawn into the world the filmmakers are creating for them.

Dolly and zoom are most often regarded as quite similar, but they are not. Because when the cinematographer dollies in and out, camera is closing in or moving away from the subject. While zoom just functions like a telescope from a distance and you could see the difference clearly because zoom does not change its position.

Many cinematographers prefer using prime lens than zoom for the same reason. A dolly shot moves the camera towards or away from the subject. “A zoom shot adjusts the focal length of the camera lens to "magnify" the image but the camera itself doesn't move. The differences between these two shots are more than just a matter of process, their effects on the image are also worth noting. (Studiobinder, 2020). Camera movements such as panning, and tilting can shift the audience's focus by parts which helps so the audience has a clear vision of the intention and what matters in the scene. The most notable camera movement is the Vertigo shot from the Jaws movie. “The Vertigo effect is an in-camera visual effect created using a dolly zoom. The effect produces a shot in which the foreground remains in the same position while the background either shrinks or grows depending on the direction of the camera movement.

The effect was coined after it first appeared in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1958 film *Vertigo*. Since then, the Vertigo effect has been used by a number of iconic directors such as Steven Spielberg, Peter Jackson, and Martin Scorsese” (Studiobinder,2020). This type of movement can make it seem that the world is crashing down on the character and it's heading to his or her own demise. Audience most likely will feel submerged in the scene where the world is falling apart for the character. This affects the audience emotions and makes them hooked on watching the next scenes to come.

As I discussed above, the basics of framing and composition with some camera movement all affect the audience emotional interpretation of a scene by camera techniques.

The Analysis

Now we will analyze some scenes in the movie “Parasite” by director Bong Joon Hoo and cinematographer Hong Kyung-Pyo. Through these scenes we can investigate on how filmmakers can manipulate composition and framing to inflict emotional attachment towards the viewers. On one particular scene the father of the poor family is seen looking over the metal rail windows of their basement house. The composition here affects the audience in so many ways. First, lighting inside the house and behind the character is dark, reflections of sunlight are seen in some parts of his face, and some are reflected on the glass window. By this, the contrast of lightness and darkness is evident. The audience is given a picture of the main character living in the dark entrapped world and wanted to come out. The character is also placed in the center of the frame surrounded by horizontal metal window rails. This makes the audience feel that the father is trapped like a man in a prison cell. Because there is a limited amount of natural light coming in and how the subject is placed within the frame, allowing the audience to become immersed with the character's emotional tension. The feeling of wanting to survive and the desperation to live but feels like the character is trapped like a slave in a prison cell. In addition, for framing or camera shot size they used a wide frame here to make the subject small on a wide frame surrounded by the window metal rails.

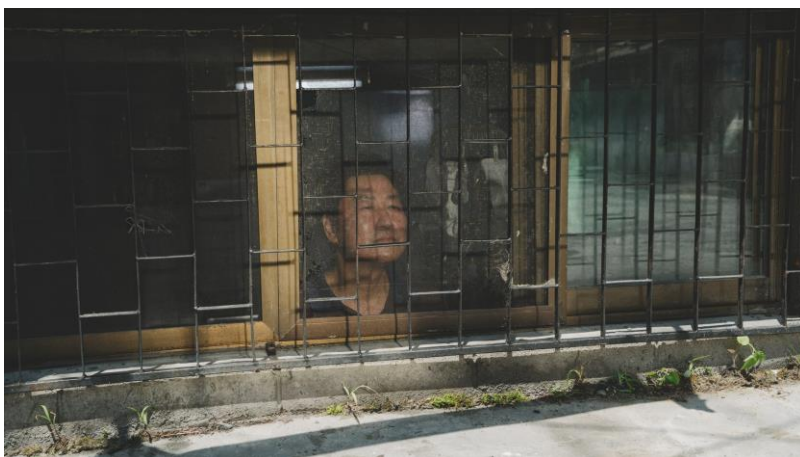


Figure 1: Wide Frame: Movie Parasite 2019

This makes the viewers be reminded on how small the character is. This projects his social status, which is from the impoverished bottom class. Moreover, the audience may feel pity and would want to route for the character to climb upward the social status chain. In the same movie, a scene where the guy living secretly in the basement of a rich family is coming up towards the surface to get some food. Here the composition is centered. The man is coming up from the center frame. Both sides have warm toned light. They use horizontal lines and square shapes to box the subject in the center, Hence, the audience's view is directed towards the subject. Just a few lights to expose the face of the subject and its surroundings. This composition evokes the feeling of darkness and fear of the unknown. Like something evil is coming from the shadows, thus creating an eerie atmosphere towards the audience. When it comes to framing, the wide shot followed by a close-up to the face makes the audience jump out from their seat. From an unknown subject coming from the dark then a big revealed of close-up of a scary face would pass as a jump scare tactic in filmmaking. In one scene towards the end of the film where the son named Ki Woo is seen looking down towards the glass window before the party is about to start. He is reflecting his thoughts and making a decision that can change his family's life forever.



Figure 2 : Close Up Shot. Movie Parasite 2019

This scene is so powerful, and it is a close-up shot concentrated on his face. Composition of this scene is planned to make a mirroring effect of his face reflected on the glass window. This is visually captivating, with natural warm light surrounding the face. The split mirrored placement of the character's face depicts what is really happening. The audience can feel his inner thoughts, resolve as well as his wants and his fears. The emotion captivates the audience because as he voices out his questions the split image reflects his social status. His dilemma which is man vs himself. Good visuals are what makes the narrative stronger. One may interpret that on the right side of the frame is the reality a poor man and the reflection is what he wants to be, a man trying his hardest to climb social class ladder. Framing choice is a medium shot for the audience to relate and provide kinship with the character, followed up by a close-up, to make the viewers dive into the emotional roller coaster the character is experiencing. We could see the subtle gestures and expression of the face, primarily the gaze of the eyes. So, the audience feels the desperation and dilemma of the character.

The next scene we will analyze is the rotating hallway fight scene from the movie "Inception" by Christopher Nolan. Here we see Arthur, played by Joseph Gordon Levitt fighting in a hallway of a hotel building. In this scene, they chose warm lights, directing lines and wide camera shots. This type of composition manipulates the audience by thinking they are the bystanders inside the hotel watching two men fighting and making acrobatic out of this world tricks. What made it more believable is supporting the composition with a camera shot called the Dutch angle. "A Dutch angle gives viewers an uneasy feeling, like something is not quite right, or something ominous is looming just ahead. This type of camera shot can create a feeling of disorientation, madness, or imbalance. Dutch angles enhance tension, generate fear, and exacerbate unsteadiness" (Masterclass, 2021).

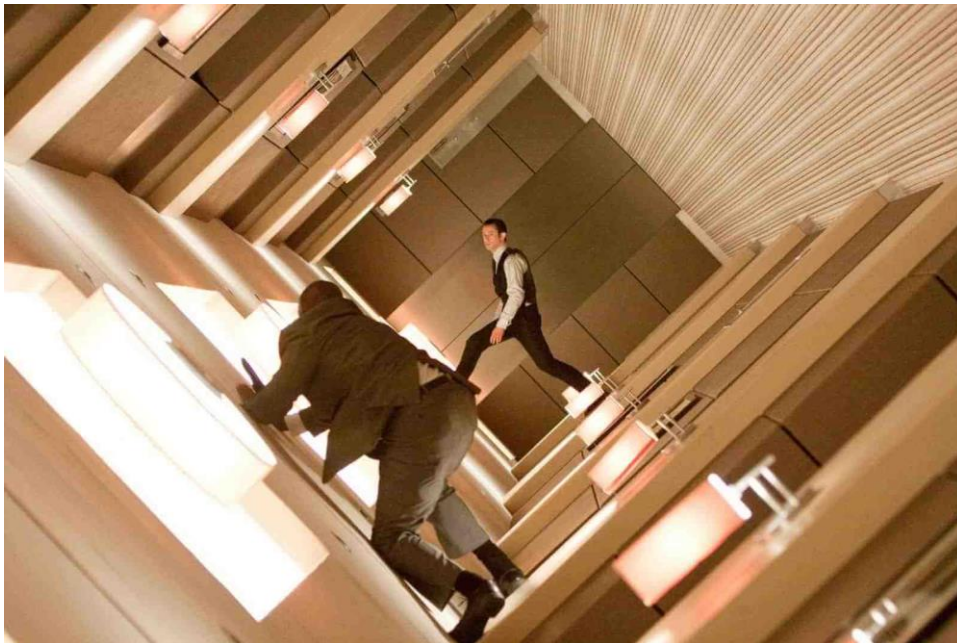


Figure 3: The dutch angle, Inception 2010

Using the Dutch angle for this unorthodox scene that no human can possibly do, is essential to make the scene believable for the viewers. As you can see from this camera shot angle and composition, the audience is unknowingly drawn into the world of dreams where everything is possible, and time and space can be bent. Hence, the set-up of the Dutch angle created an imbalance and distorted feeling out of the audience allowing them to be pulled into the story.

Another notable example is the film "Titanic" by James Cameron. A scene where Jack played Leonardo De Caprio is drawing Rose played by Kate Winslet. The composition here is using warm lights and yellow toned ambiance to project the nostalgic era of the 1900's. In addition, using the rules of balance and symmetry, Jack is usually occupying the right side of the frame looking at his left, while Rose occupies the left side looking to her right. This provides continuity, also forming emotional connection with the two characters. This composition helps the audience feel the emotional tension the characters are feeling. The subtle gestures or subtext is strong, but what made it stronger in addition to the composition was manipulating the framing of the sequence. The cinematographer changes from medium to close-up, followed by extreme close-up with strong focus on the eyes and gaze.

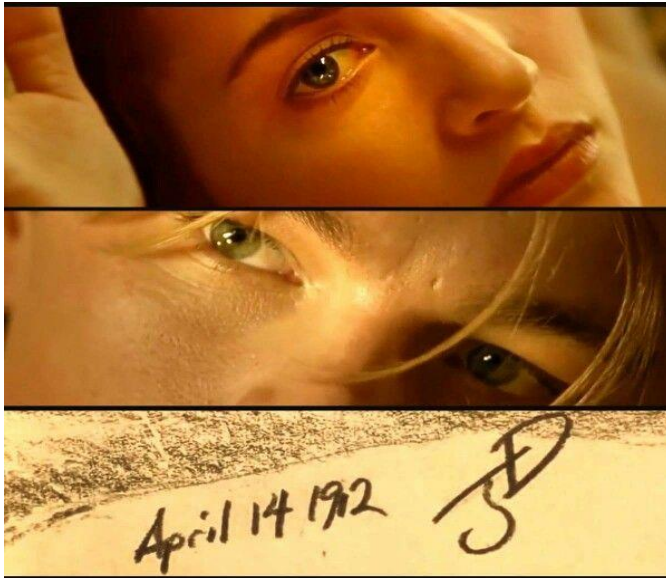


Figure 4: Extreme close up Jack and Rose, Titanic 1997

Through the close-up of Jack's face followed up by the extreme close-up focused on his eyes, the audience is brought to believe that Jack is starting to harbor desire and feelings for his counterpart. It seems like the cinematographer is reflecting Jack's emotions through his eyes where the audience is manipulated to see, hence the emotions is reflected to the viewers watching the character. "The close-up was that intimate tool to help relate the story back to the audience. In a way, the close-up shot is a mirror the filmmaker holds up to the audience. We see ourselves reflected back in the characters. We see the world and the events of their story through their eyes. Or they can help us understand a character's frustration with the moment. We can use the close-up to identify when someone has lost their mind" (Studiobinder,2020). Another good example of this type of frame shot is the iconic scene from the horror film "The Shining". Where Jack Nicholson, who has lost his mind, is seen looking out from a hole in the wall. The frame shot was a close up on the main character's face. The intention is to evoke fear to it's audience. Until now, this scene is remembered by many.



Figure 5: Close Up shot, The Shining 1980

If for example, the scene is made in a different angle, probably won't have the same strong effect as the close-up. One reason is the eyes are more visible in a close-up frame shot. Eyes alone can express different emotions, that is why the main intention is to manipulate the audience to look at the eyes of the character. Thus, enabling the audience to feel what the character is feeling at the moment.

With all the theories, data, information, and resources gathered about manipulation through camera techniques, I took everything into account while I was doing my bachelor film "Estrella". This short film tells the story of a girl who grew up in poverty, with a struggling mother and a narcotic father. She aims to live by her name Estrella, which means stars, because her mother had high hopes for her to be someone that can take them out of poverty.

Implementation, Results & Discussion

Estrella

As an ambitious and a dreamer, she faced a lot of circumstances and challenges preventing her from accomplishing her goal. With this story in mind, I tried to test the hypothesis by tapping on human emotion.

"Because many films transmit ideas through emotion rather than intellect, they can neutralize the instinct to suppress feelings and trigger emotional release," said Birgit Wolz, a psychologist focusing on movies as therapy, and author of "E-motion Picture Magic." "By eliciting emotions, watching movies can open doors that otherwise might stay closed.", (Braff,2011). In making each scene, I tried to think from the perspective of the viewers. This brought me to think of questions, like what is the intention of the scene, what kind of emotions should the audience feel, what do I want them to think, understand and feel in this particular scene? These are examples of questions that are needed to make the scene more effective. Now I will present different scenes from my bachelor film utilizing composition and framing to manipulate the audience's perspective and emotions. The opening of the film, I intentionally composed it that the character is on the right side of the frame, she starts moving from the right to the left. Moreover, the busy environment with the cars passing through. The intention of this scene is to let the audience feel that the character is going somewhere and there's a bit of uncertainty of where she is heading to make it more suspenseful. I used a lot of extreme wide angle, long shot, top view, and drone shots to make the character small in the world full of uncertainties and the last frame is from extreme wide to wide shot. I tried to manipulate the composition to create emotions of uncertainty towards the audience and through framing I wanted the audience to feel that the character is small and is lost in the world she is living in.



Figure 6: Extreme Wide shot, Estrella 2022

When the main character was reminiscing about her childhood. To depict loneliness and entrapment through composition, I placed the character in the middle of the frame supplementing it with a wide shot, thus enclosing her inside the walls. In this perspective, the character is trapped behind two walls walking alone in the narrow road that can convey emotions of loneliness and entrapment. In another example where I wanted to test my hypothesis. In the scene where the main character is finding means to earn money to bail her dad and help her mom by providing financial support. The main character is talking to Arman that she did not know was a pimp. The composition here is a little bit dark, with just practical lights to project the main character's situation which is hopeless and desperate. I made use of the window metal rails to box both the characters Arman and Estrella.



Figure 6. Close up, Estrella 2022

The intention and emotions being projected here are the feeling of being caged inside a box and could not get out like what Estrella is feeling at that moment. There is no better way to compose a shot than making use of metal rails that are commonly used in jail and imprisonment. In addition, placing the main character at the end of the rails or when she was talking and was framed facing a brick wall to provoke more emotional tension of entrapment towards the viewers. Moreover, it reflects the term facing or hitting a wall when the character has no more options but putting her in that situation for desperate measures. There are many more scenes where I manipulated the composition and framing to bring out necessary emotions from the audience, to further enhance their viewing experiences. I also validated my hypothesis and asked some of the viewers how they interpreted it. I asked them what emotions they felt when they saw a particular scene. Their answer is what I intended it to be.

Conclusion

From the theories I read, to the research I gathered, combined with my own experiment to test my hypothesis through my bachelor film. I therefore conclude that manipulation of the audience's emotions through composition and framing is therefore existent in the world of filmmaking. "The Filmmakers that we have come to know, and love force us to look at our world differently. Their wizardry combining art and science, of architecturally building a shot with lines and shapes, of forced perspective to have a powerful, psychological impact on their audience is the reason we love film, the reason we queue outside cinemas".(FILMMAKERS ACADEMY,2020). It is necessary to perform these techniques in narrative storytelling, because without it, the audience will not be taken on a journey and understand the characters' intentions and emotions. I believe that as filmmakers we have the duty to project the characters' emotions to our audience, because without emotional connection a story won't be powerful, therefore has no value.

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Figures:

Figure 1: Wide Frame: Movie Parasite 2019

Figure 2 : Close Up Shot. Movie Parasite 2019

Figure 3: The dutch angle, Inception 2010

Figure 4: Extreme close up Jack and Rose, Titanic 1997

Figure 5: Close Up shot, The Shining 1980

Figure 6: Extreme Wide shot, Estrella 2022

Figure 6. Close up, Estrella 2022

