

Movie techniques

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Film, what do you think of when you hear that word? A motion picture is simply a series of still pictures shown quickly so they stimulate motion. But a film can be so much more than that. It can tell a story, inform people of news, or educate. A film can surprise, aggravate, and inspire the imagination. Some of the necessary skills to analyze how images are constructed, how they create meanings, and how they affect us help us to better understand film as a whole. Throughout the class we watched several films each displaying some different techniques used throughout the films.

These techniques help provide a dynamic approach to discover the different meanings that the viewer can receive from the film. In Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* made in 1924, the specific film technique that best stands out is *mise-en-scene*. *Mise-en-scene* is the composition or what's in the scene or frame. This technique includes long take, long shot, and moving camera. A specific example of a scene from the film that illustrates *mise-en-scene* is when Sherlock Jr. (Buster Keaton) is riding on the handle bars of the motorcycle that the theater manager, Gillette (Ford West) is racing around through town on (154).

Sherlock Jr. is unaware that Gillette has fallen off and he is performing crazy stunts while on the handle bars with no driver. One of the extreme stunts that he performed is when the motorcycle appears to cross a bridge that is open so it looks like he could plummet to the ground, but just as he is crossing the gap two trucks pass underneath him filling the gap and he safely makes it across. From this account, this powerful scene shows *mise-en-scene* perfectly. The camera is taking a long take which means that the camera is taking a single unbroken shot that can be moving or stationary.

In this case the camera is moving with the action which shows moving camera. The scene also fills long shot which is a shot that shows the full human body, and the camera is also showing the background behind Sherlock Jr. while he racing around town performing crazy stunts. This technique is used to help keep this silent American comedy interesting and the audience intrigued throughout the performance that Sherlock Jr. is presenting. In Sergei Eisenstein's 1926 film, Battleship Potemkin, the specific film technique that stands out is montage.

Montage is different than mise-en-scene instead of long take, long shot, and moving camera it is a sequence of quick shots, showing a condensed series of events. The individual shots put together to cause an emotional or intellectual reaction to the audience. Eisenstein believed that film montage could create ideas or have impact beyond the individual images. He wanted to represent perceptions powerfully more than emotions directly (172). A specific example of a scene that illustrates montage very well is the Odessa Steps scene.

In this scene, the Tsar's soldiers march down a seemingly endless flight of steps in a rhythmic, machine like fashion. While walking down the steps they are shooting into the crowd of town's citizens creating a traumatic massacre. There were several victims including an older woman trying to stop the soldiers but she is stabbed with a knife. The next shot is of a young boy that was killed and his mother was protesting for them to help her because her boy had been hurt, but they didn't even listen and shot her.

The next shot flashes to a mother holding onto a baby carriage but she is shot. As she falls to her death she knocks the carriage down the steps. The

camera continues to show the carriage tumbling down the stairs and then zooming in on the wheels of the carriage and it quickly plummets down the steps. During these main shots, there were quick shots of other town citizen's dying and scurrying to get away. This seven minute scene just showed complete and utter chaos.

Montage is used for the Odessa Step scene because it allows Eisenstein to manipulate the audience's perceptions of time by stretching out the crowd's flight down the steps. The rapid progression and alteration of images in the sequence gives the audience just a piece from a dreadful nightmare. This sequence of montage sets up the audience to rise up against oppression and the Tsar government. In Orson Welles 1989 film, Citizen Kane, the specific film technique that stands out right from the beginning is mise-en-scene.

As explained earlier mise-en-scene is what the director decides to put into the film frame such as lighting, the setting, costume, and the movement and actions of figures appearing within the film. The scene that shows the most powerful and significant mise-en-scene is the first flashback scene set at Charles Foster Kane's (Orson Welles) childhood home. The scene begins showing Kane in the background, while in the foreground, his parents (Mary and Jim Kane) and Mr. Walter Parks Thatcher (George Coulouris) are discussing his future.

Kane appears visually trapped within the frames of a window, foreshadowing the way in which he will be "trapped" into Mr. Thatcher's guardianship. During the scene, they show a close up of Kane's facial expression and they fade out to reveal the sleigh, Rosebud, which he was happily playing with moments before. The beginning scene of the flashback of Kane's happy

childhood being given into the hands of Mr. Thatcher illustrates mise-en-scene very well. The scene provides a great example of deep focus, which is the drama within the frame.

The director focuses on the foreground with his mother signing the papers, the father in the middle by the door, and young Kane outside the window. The use of mise-en-scene keeps the audience intrigued into who Kane was referring to when he was dying and asked for rosebud. They continue to use long take, long shot, and at the end the moving camera reveals what Rosebud was. By not revealing that Rosebud was the sled from his childhood right from the beginning, the audience stays curious as to who Rosebud really was.

In Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly's 1951 film, *Singin' in the Rain*, the specific film technique that stands out is mise-en-scene. When mise-en-scene is applied to film it means everything that is present before the camera, which includes arrangement of props, actors and sets. During the entire film, mise-en-scene was shown through performance of the main characters Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly), Kathy Seldon (Debbie Reynolds), Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen) and Cosmo Brown (Donald O'Connor). These characters would often express their emotions through song or dance.

One example of a scene that shows mise-en-scene thoroughly is when Don Lockwood performs the song, " Singing in the Rain. " The scene starts with Don Lockwood kissing Kathy Selden on the doorstep of the house. This starts off as a long shot before zooming into a close up of the two kissing and they are both under Lockwood's umbrella, which is a crucial prop for the entire scene. There is a constant rain throughout the scene, which is acknowledged

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by Kathy who states " This California dew is just a little heavier than usual tonight," before she goes back inside.

Don then waves away the waiting taxi which has been visible since the start of the scene. Don begins to sing the opening of " Singing in the Rain. " He then shuts his umbrella and begins dancing down the street, filled with a mixture of houses and shops with displays on the window. Don interacts with almost all of the props like the light pole on the sidewalk and the puddles of water on the road. Two people rush past him hiding under a newspaper, while he dances around them giving them a cheerful wave.

Throughout his performance, Don carries an umbrella as some kind of dance partner, and at one point using it as an air guitar. This technique is used in the movie to allow the audience to use the performance to perceive different perceptions and meanings of the images and sound. Mise-en-scene in this specific scene with Don creates a different effect, leaving the audience with a feel good moment. Everyone lives in a different reality and that is why people enjoy watching films. They give insight into the worlds of others.

Film directors do their best to portray their characters' lives and make them as believable as they can. They do this through the different film techniques to help describe the way that meaning is created throughout the film. Many help set up the realism with costumes, setting and performance, while others use a series of quick shots to condense space, time and information. Even though film is just a story or event recorded by a camera as a set of images, when shown to an audience the meanings created helps them to better understand the films overall.