

# Film Form and Genre

## Assignment 1

Give a detailed commentary on a sequence, or sequences from a film of your choice in terms of two of the any of the following: mise-en-scene; editing; use of colour; lighting; sound; special effects.

The film I have chosen is 'Goodfellas' directed by Martin Scorsese in 1990, based on the novel by Nicholas Pileggi 'Wiseguy'. The reason for this is that it gained many awards for the cinematography used and partly through personal preference.

The scene I have chosen is called 'Cast of characters; Tommy's a "funny guy"'. This is the post-transitional scene from when the lead character was an adolescent to becoming a young man. The purpose of the scene is basically to establish his friends and the social community in which he associates with. The main influence as to why I chose this scene is that of the cinematographic content and technical structure in relation to the film narration.

I have chosen to discuss the sound elements of the scene and mise-en-scene. I chose sound as it is a key element in the structure of the narration and form of the scene. I chose to discuss mise-en-scene as the relationship of each element involved has important significance to the cinematography. The sequence is set in 'Sonny's Bamboo Lounge', a lounge bar and a regular mafia 'types' hang out, in down town New York, 1963.

## Sound

There are three main types of sound in the world of cinema and I will be looking at them individually but some in more depths than others. The three types are dialogue, music and sound effects. All the sounds you hear in the sequence are parallel, which means that they are parallel to the context of what we see.

The majority of the dialogue we hear during the sequence is that of the lead character Henry Hill, and is in the form of narration, or so it seems. There is minor dialogue from the supporting characters but does not play a significant part in the construction of the film narrative or sequence in question. A copy of the original draft of the script can be found in the appendix.

There is music playing all the way through the scene. The music is relevant to the time period the sequence is constructed in and is significant in the role of setting the mood.

Diegetic sound is any voice, musical passage or sound effect presented as originating from a source within the film's world. Diegetic sounds included in the sequence are broken down into specific

categories, which include dialogue, narration (although narration is considered non-diegetic sound, in this particular scene the explanation would suggest otherwise) music and some sound effects.

The music in the scene is represented as coming from a source within the sequence and therefore is regarded as diegetic sound. But at the same time it acts as background music because it adds to mood of the lounge bar, it is the type of music you would expect to hear in a New York lounge bar in that era. The music plays throughout and mutes for the narration of the lead character when required. This is purely for communication purposes and that as viewers, it subtly suggests that we listen.

The sequence takes place in a bar lounge, filled with people so the constant muffle of people talking can be heard throughout. The significance of the muffled background talking is that it gives logic to the setting of which we see. We would expect to hear this kind of noise if we were in a lounge bar, filled with people. With the use of sound and vision we create logic in our heads that is taken on subconsciously. This technique is present in the sequence.

The narration is represented as an internal diegetic sound. This is evident through the actual meanings of the terms. Non-diegetic sound is sound, such as music or narrator's commentary represented as coming from a source outside the narrative. The narration of the scene comes as a direct commentary from inside the narrative and also crosses over with the combination of dialogue. Internal diegetic sound is represented as coming from the mind of the character within the story space. Although the character and we can hear it, we assume that the other characters cannot. Narration means, the process through which the plot conveys or withholds story information. The narration can be more or less restricted to character knowledge and more or less deep in presenting characters' mental perceptions and thoughts. The point where the narration and dialogue interact is highlighted below;

Henry Hill – Voiceover:

~~And my two wives, who go  
mad because the scene is  
twice. Like "you can go get  
pictures, get pictures."~~

The reason for the use of this technique in the sequence is to put the viewer in the head of the character. It creates a 'point of view' impression. This is also achieved through the use of cinematography, which will be discussed later.

The sound in the sequence is notably simultaneous sound, diegetic sound represented as occurring at the same time in the story as the image it accompanies. It is also known as synchronous sound as it is

matched temporarily with the movements occurring in the images, as when dialogue corresponds to lip movement. This is simply to retain the logic of sound and vision coming together. If sound and vision did not correspond, you would represent a different perception of the film's narrative.

The lead character Henry Hill, who maintains a certain speech pattern throughout the scene, conducts the voiceover. The pace of his voice is seemingly a fraction slower than average, it seems to be in sync with the camera movements, which enhances the effect of the 'point of view' technique. The tone of voice creates a sense of relaxation by sounding quite muted and monotonous. The volume of his voice remains low and constant throughout the sequence, which adds to the creation of mood and tone. There is no emotion in his voice, but it sounds descriptive which is what the character is doing, describing his associates.

Sound effects include the clinking of glasses as people toast, background noises such as people talking in muffled voices and as the voiceover is underway, the music plays the role of background music.

Sound perspective in this sequence is in relation to vision perspective. You hear the sounds you would expect to hear i.e. glass smash 3 feet away from you, high volume; glass smash 30 feet away from you, low volume.

Sound representation in this sequence is used to its potential in relation of setting the mood and establishing narrative form.

The voiceover technique used is very effective in achieving the goal of creating a 'point of view' position for the viewer. This is attained through the use of techniques discussed above. The combination of sound and vision in the sequence is used successfully to achieve the effect of establishing mood and atmosphere, relative to the narrative form.

### Mis-en-scene

The setting is in 'Sonny's Bamboo lounge'. It is a Hawaiian style lounge bar with tables and chairs and a bar with stools. The mood is low-key and the atmosphere is relaxed. It is filled with mainly men and men accompany the women that are there. This is typical for the kind of establishment it is and the people who frequent there who are mainly gangsters and 'mafia types'. There are also waiters walking around carrying trays of drinks and taking orders.

Props present are characteristic of a lounge bar such as an abundant amount of small tables with low-light lampshades. There are bottles and glasses of drink all around. There is superior attention to detail,

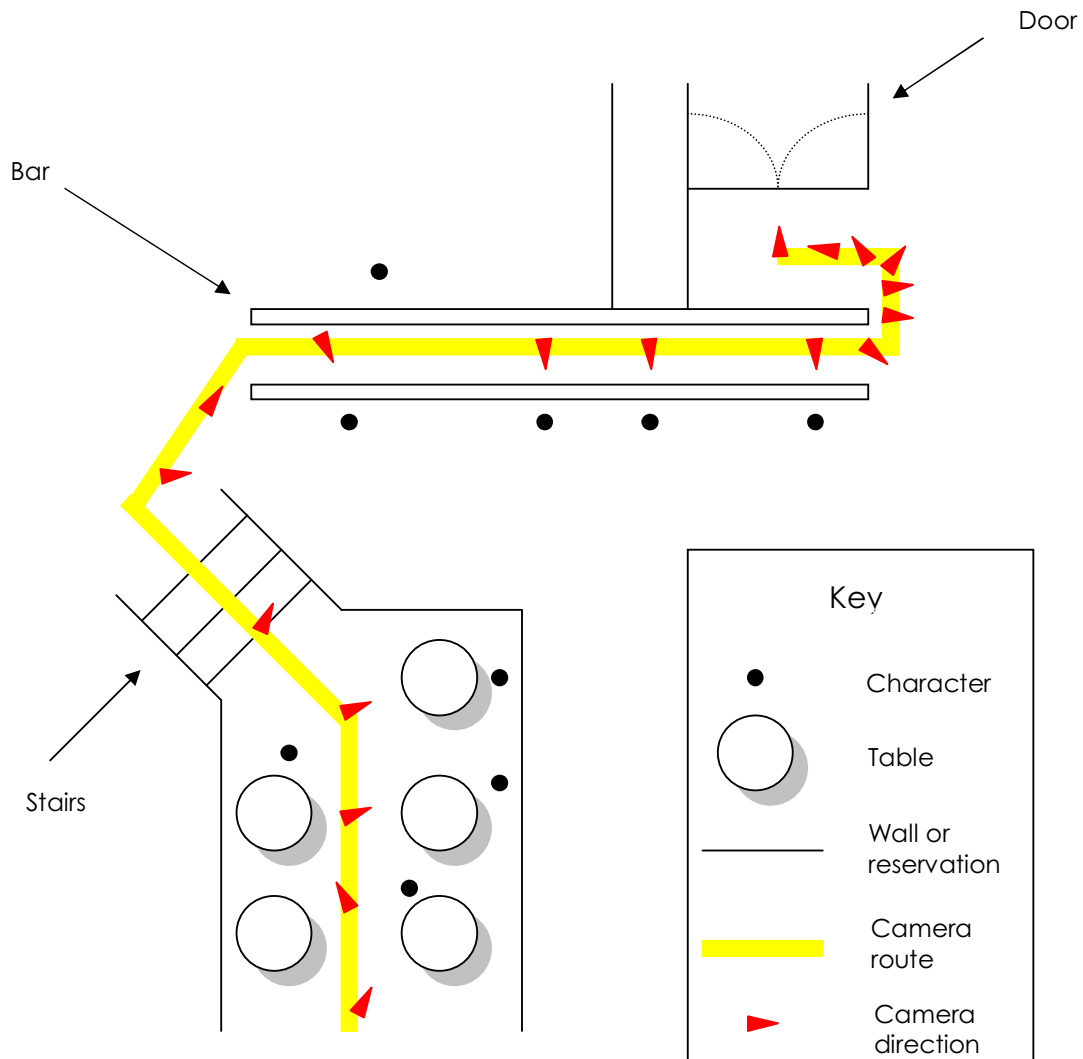
down to fire extinguishers on the wall and health and safety signs on the doors of the kitchen.

The costume of the characters is representative of the era and community in which they associate with. All the men seen are wearing suits and ties and the majority, white shirts. The suits are in dark shades of colour, are narrow and have a slim fit; some of the shirts have narrow collars that meet at the points concealing the knot of the tie. This was an American-Italian fashion amongst the gangsters of the 60's. The women that are present are dressed in 60's style evening dresses with pleats and floral patterns, another fashion amongst women in the particular era. The waiters are all dressed in the same Hawaiian style shirt with white coloured trousers and a 'garland' decoration around their neck.

The majority of men are sitting down at tables and movement is to a minimum. This is representative of a lounge bar because as a customer, you were encouraged to stay seated and let the waiters serve your table. The few men that are walking and moving are doing so in a cool fashion, which is in parallel to their attitudes and social values and morals, this is represented in the way they dress and talk. This in turn is relative to the narrative form and genre of the film. The waiters are walking around in a normal fashion, basically doing their job, walking to and from the bar with drinks, bottles and empty glasses. The contrast in the movement and body language of the two collectives of individuals present, highlights the performance of the actors and this is evident in the sequence. The movement and body language of the waiters highlights the way that the 'mafia types' behave.

Lighting in the sequence is low and visibly dependent on the lighting of the lounge bar, which includes table lights and minimal wall lights. This amount of lighting is an intentional technique because it creates mood and atmosphere relevant to the narrative form. The lighting in the sequence could be closely familiarised to film noir, due to the low-key style. The lighting in the sequence is also limited due to the nature of the camera work and cinematography, which will be discussed next.

The camera shot throughout the entire scene is one long take, also known as plan-séquence, a French derivative. The camera motion is slow and definite and remains at eye-level at all times, point of view shot. The entire sequence is shot with a shallow focus format, leaving the background out of focus. The motive behind using this technique is to enhance the sense of being in the characters' shoes (point of view). The diagram following, illustrates the movement of the camera in a three-dimensional format.



You can see from this diagram the difficulties the film crew may have had with incorporating lighting techniques. The diagram also highlights how the camera pans around to achieve the shots of establishing each character.

The screen-direction in the sequence has been evaded by filming a three-dimensional sequence. This is unconventional in the sense of the 'axis of action' or 'fourth wall', this is an imaginary line which divides the viewer from the action on screen.

The entire sequence strives to give the impression that as a viewer, we are walking through the lounge bar meeting the characters for ourselves. It is successful in achieving this objective through the use of technical means, style and form.

## Bibliography

▲An Introduction to Film Studies – Second Edition

Jill Nelmes

Routledge, 11 New Fetter Lane, London

## References

Course notes and handouts

John Whitehouse

## Appendix

Following page.