



Production Elements in Film

Transcript

Narrator: Film may look like magic, but actually there's a lot of hard work behind it. These production elements, including camera technique, lighting, mise-en-scène, acting, sound and editing, all come together to create the cinematic experience. So let's look at some of these key production elements by comparing and contrasting two Australian films, *The Dressmaker* and *Animal Kingdom*.

Camera technique helps establish the tone and mood in a film. There are many different camera shots available to the filmmaker. Wide angle, medium, close up, and point of view. In *Animal Kingdom*, a gritty, urban crime drama produced in 2010, there are lots of tight shots and close ups, giving a crowded, claustrophobic feel.

Smurf: Morning, baby.

J: But he was good to me...and to everyone else.

Baz: Wanna juice? Smurf's juicin'.

J: Hi Uncle Darren.

Darren: Seriously, you gotta stop calling me uncle, it gives me the creeps.

Narrator: Camera movement, zooming, panning or tracking, for example, can be used to reflect emotional aspects of the narrative or direct our attention.

Craig: Can hear your fucking dogs!

Narrator: Handheld is used here to create a sense of uneasiness and tension. We can't settle.

Dacinta: What's going on?

Richard: I don't know, I don't know.

Narrator: While in *The Dressmaker*, a revenge comedy drama produced in 2015, wide shots are used to create a sense of isolation.

Don: We've exaggerated the use of wide angle lenses quite brilliantly I think. It's -- I'm doing endless shots that Hollywood would never ever let me do.

Narrator: Camera angles set mood, establish relationships, and reveal information to us.

Tilly: Do you remember him?

Ms Harridiene: Left, right, left, right, left, right!

Tilly: He was Ms Harridiene's favourite.





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- Stewart: Ms. Harriene! She stained me! She stained me with the ink!
- Narrator: In these flashback sequences from *The Dressmaker*, we get high angle camera shots that get the sense that Tilly was persecuted and helpless at the mercy of forces she couldn't understand as a child.
- Tilly: Help! Help!
- Stewart: Stand really, really still Dunnybum, or I'll come 'round to your house tonight, and kill your mother.
- Narrator: And the use of tilted angle shots to illustrate the confused and vague nature of her traumatic memories. Close ups are used, reminiscent of the highly stylised Spaghetti Westerns. But they were careful not to let the cinematography become too distracting from other important narrative elements.
- Craig: Spoken to Cath?
- Smurf: I gotta go, hun.
- Craig: Huh?
- Smurf: It's okay to cry, honey.
- Adam: We basically did decide to try and simplify things, because there's so much crime drama out there that I think the danger is to try and make something that might seem boring interesting by, you know, doing a big dolly move or something, you know, making the lighting super theatrical or something. So, because there's that fear that because there's so much of it that it's going to seem boring, but I think we just sort of decided to try not to fall into that trap.
- Narrator: Lighting helps set the mood of the film and former attitudes about characters, sympathetic or otherwise. *The Dressmaker*, a comedy drama, typically uses natural lighting of the dry landscape to contrast with the striking brilliance of the costumes.
- Muriel: Who's that?
- Roger: I said I'm going keep the colours very subdued and the shapes, you know, basically unattractive, so that your shapes and forms of costumes and colours really jump out.
- Narrator: Tilly does, however, arrive under the cover of night, to establish mystery and intrigue. And romantic scenes are softly lit when things heat up between Tilly and Teddy. And the dark, foreboding red lighting in this scene stands out from the rest of the film. It employs a production element from the horror genre, and we know something bad is about to happen.





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- Evan: Pet. Are you ill?
- Marigold: I was ill, Evan. You were making me ill.
- Narrator: *Animal Kingdom* also uses naturalistic lighting for the majority of the film, with the colours slightly washed out. Choice of location and time of day a scene occurs can affect lighting and, in turn, character.
- Sgt Leckie: We'll speak to you again at a later time when you're ready.
- Pope: I might, um...I might have some information for you about those two murdered police.
- Narrator: When the character of Poe first appears on screen, he emerges from the darkness, an elusive, dark and disturbing figure.
- Baz: Hey!
- Smurf: Are you alright, love? J?
- Poe: Okay, tell 'em, tell 'em!
- J: I'm all right!
- Narrator: Similarly, the evil moment of killing the two police is shrouded in darkness. The police arrive, their headlights the only light in this overwhelming darkness. After the murder, Poe and Darren, shadowy figures, disappear back into the darkness. The darkness fits the narrative logic. Contrast this with the murder of Baz by police in broad daylight. They are the law and untouchable.
- Baz: Aw, shit guys, you just missed him!
- Detective: That's all right, I like you better. He's got a gun!
- Narrator: Mise-en-scène essentially refers to what is put in the scene and framed by the camera. What we see is determined by the production crew working behind the scenes in collaboration with the director.
- Liz: Coming back to character, and coming back to story and drama, and not sort of going into obtuse visual styles for the sake of it, is very much grounded within the reality of the world of the film.
- Craig: Yeah, c'mon, c'mon.
- Smurf: Whatcha doin' hon'?
- Craig: What's it look like?





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- Narrator: When we first meet the Cody family, there are lots of tight shots. The mise-en-scène is crowded. There's lots of clutter.
- Craig: What the fuck is going on? Who said you could bring that noise thing into my house?
- Smurf: It's yours!
- Craig: It is not!
- Smurf: Yes it is! I found it under the sink. Do you want a juice?
- Jo: My criteria is always that the actors in their environments are where the audience would expect them to be, and there's nothing about the environment that they would be distracted by.
- Narrator: There are hard lines vertically and horizontally. Characters heads are deliberately cropped by the frame. While in *The Dressmaker*, the mise-en-scène is used to highlight the contrast between Tilly and the town she grew up in. Molly's, and now Tilly's, home looms ominously over the town. Tilly, the outsider, is casting judgement over the townspeople. Tilly's costumes also separate her from the townspeople she feels superior to. This is heightened in the mise-en-scène through stunning outfits.
- Margot: No matter what film you work on, you know, costumes is always important because it depicts a character and it gives the audience a sense of who this character is.
- Sgt Farrat: Genius!
- Teddy: Ah. Don't look at her. Eyes on the ball!
- Sue: Because of course Tilly is an outsider she has a different sensibility and a different look, and her look is informed by having lived and worked in Paris in Europe for many, many years. So, she looks exotic at all times and particularly exotic in the setting of Dungatar, this little town in the middle of nowhere.
- Tilly: I wish we had a better mirror for you, Sergeant.
- Molly: There's a mirror tree outside.
- Narrator: And as Tilly has an impact on the people around her, the colour flows out across the town.
- Kate: This incredible colour and beautiful fabrics that Tilly brings from France, endlessly being delivered in tea chests, into this town. And it really does something very, very striking to the visual image of the story. They go from looking sort of pale and a bit tea-stained to looking like they're walking down a red carpet. It's really quite striking.





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- Narrator: In *Animal Kingdom*, costume is used for a very different effect.
- Capri: So we wanted to try and treat dressing the characters as just real, average, suburban next-door neighbours, which kind of made them a little bit more sinister, in some ways. So we sort of ruled out tracksuit pants, no one wears tracksuit pants in our film except for some extras in tiny roles, but none of our key cast. And every time, we just tried to...played it right down.
- Narrator: At its most fundamental, film is the combination of sight and sound. Sound is incredibly powerful in communicating mood, tone, character, point of view and story. There are two categories of sound. Diegetic, which occurs within the narrative world, and non-diegetic, which comes from outside the narrative world.
- Gertrude: Could you please play a love song?
- Narrator: This scene in *The Dressmaker* uses music played by the dance-hall band, diegetic sound, to echo Gertrude's transformation as she makes her grand entrance in her new dress.
- William: I was just about to go...home.
- Actor 2: (singing)...be my sunshine or my grief.
- Narrator: This scene in *Animal Kingdom* uses non-diegetic music to suggest they're a normal, happy family. There's motherly concern...
- Smurf: Oh, darling, are you alright to drive? You're not drunk are you?
- Darren: Nah, I'm ok. I'm fine.
- Smurf: Come and give us a kiss!
- Narrator: ...who happen to be criminals, hinting at the indistinguishable line between the criminal world and regular society. But the non-diegetic sound in *Animal Kingdom* makes us uneasy, creates a sense of foreboding and ramps up the tension.
- Narrator: Editing the vision and sound is equally important to film narrative. Editing sets the pace, tone and mood of the film. Editor Luke Doolen talks about the edit of *Animal Kingdom*.
- J: Why'd you bring me here?
- Sgt Leckie: For your safety.





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- Luke: I think the challenge with this, for me, was taking something that's part of two worlds, it's a suspenseful-thriller thing, but it's very slow but then you've got this nice character drama and trying to find the balance between the two. It doesn't move like a thriller, it doesn't sort of have these great peaks of action or anything, it's all -- everything is very slow and very measured and...it's -- I hope my intention, and I think Dave and I's intention, is that it balances between those two genres of a, you know, just a simple character drama and a dark crime thriller.
- Narrator: Editing is also used to juxtapose action that's occurring simultaneously. It may further the story and provide us with information including emotional insight. Such as the juxtaposition of the police being murdered, while James scrapes the blackened covering from his toast. Seemingly a mundane act, it illustrates the sense that he is being corrupted by the criminal world he exists in. He is trying to remove the darkness, the stain on his conscience.
- In *The Dressmaker*, a series of quick edits is used to establish the pace and rhythm of a comedic sequence. As Mr Almanac careens down the street, the police call in intercut with him being set in motion and the non-diegetic music reinforces the humour of the scene.
- Una: Whoa there! Gotcha!
- Narrator: The combination of production elements, of sound, camera, movement, lighting and acting, convey the action, violence, humour and pathos, which make for a great film experience.

