DIGITAL CREATION OF THE MOVING IMAGE

A group of students and myself have been working on a video short through UB’s Media Study Department. Most students work on smaller-scale projects by themselves or with a partner. The amount of work taken on for this Niagara Falls project is much larger than what the average undergrad experiences. Below you will read about the technique, equipment, and skills used and learned while creating this short production, A Trip to the Falls, based on the play Wonder of the World by David Lindsay-Abaire.

Lights

A talented movie maker will be able to sculpt with light. There are many types/styles of lights, with many different shapes and colors that can be produced from them. Most indoor tungsten and fluorescent lights appear orange in hue when translated in a video or film camera. In contrast, the sun produces light that appears blue on camera. This color needs to be corrected before recording can begin. This is done with white balancing. After all lights have been set up completely for a shot, the camera man must fill the frame with something in the scene that is completely white, usually a blank sheet of paper is used. The camera is set to record this paper as “true white,” and it automatically adjusts other colors accordingly. Filming outdoors is a challenge of its own. Adding man-made lights to a scene mixes orange colors with the natural blue color of the sun, rendering white balancing difficult. Also, finding electrical outlets on-location at an outdoor shoot limits where you can record. As students, we don’t have the budget to bring generators to a shoot. Picture this to be our solution: bounce boards. By using silver and gold coated aluminum sheets, we use the sun to bounce light onto the actors. The sun itself lights most of the frame, while the bounce boards fill in the shadows. This technique of bouncing light can also be used indoors by bouncing light off white walls or foil umbrellas.

Camera

There are many elements taken into consideration when composing a frame. The many visual components include the physical space in front of the camera, the space shown on screen, the size and shape of the screen itself, lines and shapes seen in the frame, the brightness of objects in the frame, and colors seen. Movement is also paid close attention to when composing a shot, whether it be movement of objects in the frame or of the camera itself. It is with composition that a movie maker can elicit an emotional reaction from his or her audience. This is achieved with the Principle of Contrast and Affinity. The more contrast there is in a frame, the more intense and dynamic the mood. This can range from contrasting colors like black and white, hard textures in clothing and scenery. In A Trip to the Falls there is little contrast, creating a light hearted mood for the audience. Every shot is filled with color, from landscape to actors. There are rarely any shadows seen, which also aids the soft mood.

The entrances and exits of the cast were carefully thought out by a group of four students: Jerry Theresanathan, Cathy Boatman, Alex Heissig, and Max Brzozowski. Actors enter the frame in unconventional ways, creating an abrupt tone. While individual sections of dialogue are filmed together, the location changes dramatically between conversations. This creates a great disjoint in the story line, which was intentional since the story is not intended to be easily interpreted. The goal of A Trip to the Falls was to create a piece in which the audience experiences the goings on first hand, and decides for themselves how they feel about each character. In contrast, conventional narratives are composed with their goal to promote certain characters as antagonists and protagonists.

Action!

When all aspects of production are completed, the team of filmmakers bring their raw footage into an NLE or Non-Linear Editing system. In an NLE like Final Cut Pro or Adobe Premiere, the clips are logged, captured, and put in the correct sequence. Small focus and color correcting problems are also fixed here. Sound mixing and effects are edited and added using a separate software, called Pro Tools. Finally, digital effects such as transitions and titles frames are added. While most Media Study students complete all these steps alone for their projects, three students collaborated to edit A Trip to the Falls. Since it was shot on two cameras, there was double the amount of footage to watch and translate into a digital signal. In the final stages of video editing, a DVD is authored and burned.

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