Sequence shots in Films

Introduction

British War Film (1917,2019) won the Best Achievement in Cinematography and Visual Effects in Academy Awards ('92nd Academy Awards', 2021). Before 1917 came out, American comedy (Birdman,2014) also won the Best Achievement in Cinematography and the Best Motion Picture of the Year in Academy Awards ('87th Academy Awards', 2021). These two films have two things in common: epic sequence shot and praise widely. The audience can hardly identify the editing point throughout the whole film. These kinds of films can be called "one-shot" films ('One-shot film', 2021). This essay is based on the examples of many sequence shots in films and discusses the evolution of sequence shot and their reasons from time, space, and narrative perspectives. This basis analyses the limitations of the current sequence shot creation in films. Finally, it explores the changes and innovations of sequence shot under the background of the era of the digital graphic in combination with traditional sequence shot in films.

Methodology

Wikipedia compiled a list of critically reviewed "one-shot" films covering many famous films. This list plays a crucial role in my investigation. I spent more than ten hours watching the typical cases in this film's list, noting these films' narrative methods and camera movement. Analyze how sequence shot work by combining the narrative methods learned in the course, such as camera, mise en scene, editing. Refer to the analysis and evaluation of these classic films from the books in the library. Learn about the theories and skills of some famous directors and artists in the past. Combine the above and summary the innovation and development, advantages and disadvantages of sequence shot from the past to the present. Explore the possibilities and challenges of sequence shot in the future graphics industry.

Investigation

Dealing with the boundary between picture and reality is essential for developing sequence shot. Starting from the earliest public showing film (Train Pulling into a Station,1896), which is also the earliest "one-shot" film, the innovation of sequence shot has never stopped. The development of sequence shot can be divided into two angles: Space and Narrative.

The time and space in sequence shot

Traditional sequence shot
Space is a superficial visual performance of the narrative and is always discussed with time. The early picture *Train Pulling into a Station* and the first real motion picture (Exiting the Factory, 1895) that looks crude today used lenses' focus to tell the scene's depth. Workers in the front of the crowd are clearer than those behind. Space can only be recorded truthfully by sequence shot. A case in point is a psychological crime thriller film (*Rope*,1957) directed by Hitchcock. The

traditional sequence shot in *Rope* have similarities with "stage play" and drama because of the limitations of camera technology which is noted by A year of Hitchcock (2009, P. 194). The method of sequence shot to tell spatial information is also relatively single. However, Hitchcock's innovative dolly zoom in *Vertigo* brings a new expression of spatial data for sequence shot ('Dolly zoom', 2021) (*Vertigo*, 1958). Compared with the early "stage play film" *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, *Rope* does not exist verbose and tedious shots (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*,1928). There are two main reasons for this improvement: topic selection and invisible cut points. Topic selection means these "one-shot" films are used to pick scripts suitable for sequence shot. For example, it wasn't until 2019 that the massive scene "one-shot" film *1917* appeared. What is more, "one-shot" films are used to have a limited number of actors, even *1917* is included. More actors mean more difficulty in mise en scene. But experimental historical drama film *Russian Ark*, which the director experienced three times not good, has massive locations and background (*Russian Ark*, 2002). Over five hundred actors and actresses joined this show. *Russian Ark* is an actual unedited "one-shot" film.

Innovation of modern sequence shot
Experiments of *Russian Ark* did not cut the sequence shot, which made this film unbelievable but not revolutionary, but cut the time and space that made *Russian Ark* a critical film in film history. Alexander Sokurov, director of *Russian Ark*, set different rooms in Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg. Audiences will encounter various real and fictional people from multiple periods in the city's 300-year history in each room. Sokurov summed up more than three centuries of history into 90-minute sequence shot, making the recording time and the showtime completely coincide. It can be seen from the sequence shot experiment (*Russian Ark*) that compared with the sequence shot of the Hitchcock era. Advanced medium storage technology at this time can already meet the long recording needs in 1999, according to the Conference (Herley, C., 1999). And digital technology innovation has dramatically extended the time and quality of sequence shot, making it possible to achieve perfect sequence shot.

Discontinuous space or time in sequence shot
Russian Ark realised the leap of time and space through the different mise en scene of different rooms. Characteristics of montage can be found in discontinuity time and space because the audience can Imagine the missing part when time and space are discontinuous, just like how montage editing works. On the one hand, sequence shot match Bazin's realist aesthetics, according to Bazin (1997), and satisfy the audience's desire for voyeurism. On the other hand, Montage combines fragments to achieve an efficient narrative.

Give sequence shot a montage effect
The Kuleshov effect should be a film editing (montage) effect, but it has been used in *Birdman* to hide cut points and create discontinuity-time and space (Prince, S., 1992). The protagonist in *Birdman* was watching the broken vase, and the camera pan from the protagonist's face to the broken vase and back to the protagonist again, whin which a time gap created.
From the perspective of space and time, contemporary sequence shot tends to merge with montage to enhance the narrative. The combination of VFX and the film industry also makes it difficult to distinguish the boundary between sequence shot and montage. The sequence shot

in *Lord of War* is a case in point (*Lord of War*, 2005). The camera shows a bullet's angle of view, manufactured in an arsenal, and plugged into a child's brain. It can be seen that adding the trick of montage editing to sequence shot not only reserve the sense of documentary and realism but also superimposes the montage's narrative effect and visual impact on the sequence shot.

The narrative of sequence shot

Thanks to the development of modern CGI technology, tricks to hide cut points are far more and more accessible than those in the Hitchcock era. But regardless of whether time and space are continuous, the more critical thing about films is narrative.

The narrative of traditional sequence shot

Traditional linear narratives often use a single positive sequence or reverse narrative. Non-linear narration deliberately interrupts or cuts the entire narrative to add some fragmented time segments. The film style and topic determine the choice of linear or non-linear narration. However, with the development of the film industry, the film's narrative has turned into a more complex logical time narrative, with serval timelines intersecting and increasing the story's appeal.

The narrative time required by traditional sequence shot coincides with the time of the story itself. A case in point is Hitchcock's *Rope*. Breaking down the story development in the *Rope* can find the direction of the story development and timeline is unchanged. Sequence shot are like a short story (the sequence shot in *Lord of War*), so for "one-shot" films, the linear narrative brings a unique sense of reality to the film, which is only seen in some documentaries. The visual effect of this type of film will not be too epic. This is one of the shortcomings of sequence shot; just as mentioned above. "one-shot" films are not suitable for all scripts.

Sequence shot have more narrative methods

The definition of a non-linear narrative above is not comprehensive. Compared to a linear narration, it is breaking the order of time. The story's development does not follow the traditional narrative methods of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, but presents a trend of co-development of multiple storylines. The development of the non-linear narrative of Sequence shot is mainly attributed to the emergence of CGI technology. Through CGI technology, the director can easily break the continuous narrative. Make the long narrative of traditional sequence shot compact. What seems to be a linear narrative film (*1917*) is a non-linear narrative film composed of multiple sequence shot. The director hides the cut points that speed up the time and narrative through a slight trick of CGI. Only narratives like Hitchcock's *Rope* are real linear narratives.

Another case is Christopher Nolan's mystery thriller film (*The Prestige*, 2006). Nolan used CGI technology to perform interruptions and flashbacks through a notebook. This is like a match cut, but the matching notebook has not changed. The only change is the time and location. The non-linear narrative style seems to make the story confusing and challenging to understand, but it is still based on logic.

Imagine making Alice in Wonderland into a "one-shot" film (*Alice in Wonderland*, 2010). Only one shot was used without editing, from Alice strayed into Wonderland to Alice's return to

reality. From Alice's perspective, this is a dreamlike journey, but this journey is unreal or non-existent from a real-world timeline perspective. Then the journey in wonderland in this "one-shot" film becomes an insert shot. This technique has been used many times in *Birdman*, making the audience unable to distinguish reality from illusion, but it perfectly completes the narrative mission.

Conclusion

The immersion of Sequence shot
In the modern film industry that is growing day by day, options such as 3d movies, 4d movies, smoke, shaking chairs, fragrance, etc., have appeared to make the audience feel Immersive. These new technologies mean high budgets and restrict films to cinema. In this way, sequence shot may be a practical solution to enhance immersion. Shot sequence shot like Colin Firth's battle shots in the church in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (*Kingsman: The Secret Service*, 2014). Long sequence shot like the "one-shot" film *1917*. The former restored the chaotic and bloody fighting in the church. At the same time, the latter led the audience to experience the hardships and difficulties overcome to save 1,600 friendly allies. Maybe there are many other ways to achieve the performance effect of the above two scenes, but sequence shot must be suitable for these two scenes.

Disadvantages of sequence shot
Sequence shot are not suitable for most movies, such as superhero films (*Marvel Avengers Assemble*, 2012) or science fiction disaster films (*2012*, 2009). When the director needs to cover lots of narrative content, sequence shot will restrict the narrative efficiency. Sequence shot cameras will also lose the details in the scene, such as *Victoria* because it is impossible for the camera to switch frequently between Shot and Reverse Shot (*Victoria*, 2015). But this limitation on the camera brings the unique realism of sequence shot.

Future development
Nowadays, virtual cameras can completely simulate traditional cameras, which gives more possibilities for making sequence shot. And with the popularity of devices such as VR and AR. The application of Sequence shot will become more and more common. Soon, when computer technology allows users to truly enter the Metaverse and experience the story of a film, the research and innovation of sequence shot by the previous directors mentioned above will help future directors to give every audience a fantasy experience just like Alice stray in a Wonderland.

Points that need improvement in investigating
After finishing writing this course essay, I think there are a few places I could do more. First, due to limited words and time, it did not elaborate on the specific cases of the tricks used in sequence shot above. Second, the research on sequence shot only stays at the narrative level. It did not discuss how the director chose between sequence shot and montage narratives.

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