

## **The creation of story and character through formal opposition and disunity**

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## The creation of story and character through formal opposition and disunity.

### **Abstract**

*A series of striking visual tropes contrast with a matter of fact voiceover to create the bold formal strategy of the film-poem *Flimmer*. Sound and image compete for primacy in an interplay of dialogue and visuals.*

1. form
2. story
3. opposition
4. disunity
5. sound
6. image

‘Image and sound must not support each other, but must work in turn through a sort of relay.’ (Bresson 1975: 52)

*Flimmer* presents us with a multi-diegesis where voiceover and repetitive electronic score live independently of each other and the image. The series of images we see lacks spatial or temporal cohesion, appearing randomly without any unifying geography or timescale.

Moreover, oppositions within, and between, image, **score** and narrative **voice** create *Flimmer’s* story world of a flawed love affair between two very different people, neither of whom **is** seen in the film. “I am a cactus. My skin is blue green and my spikes are black,” declares the female narrator at the opening of the film, while concluding at its resolution “Cacti and the colour red are not compatible.”

In Shot 1 we see a low angle track across a discarded child’s doll partially obscured by long grass, the first in a number of stark compositions often juxtaposing the natural and human worlds. In Shot 2 a window onto a summer wheat field is centrally framed and surrounded by the dark interior of a dining room. Later in the film an armchair sits incongruously in a forest and a stick insect crawls over crisp white bed linen. Incompatibility and difference is perhaps most strikingly visualised in Shot 12 where we see an image of a coiled spikey hedgehog nestled in a sea of down feathers.

~~In other shots~~ The relationship between image and voiceover **often** feels dislocated and intended to challenge. The association with the lonely cactus is continued in Shot 3 **when we hear**: “*Agave Americana* blossoms only once in a hundred years,” **while we see the image of** a spent dandelion losing its buds to the wind in a darkened room.

In other shots the relationship between sound and image is more harmonious: “Meanwhile it stands naked and alone,” the narrator continues as we see the lone green arm chair framed in the middle distance and isolated in the forest. And an overhead shot of cigarettes in an ash-tray is accompanied by the line, “We met in a bar.”

Shot 4 shows picture shadows on a wall simultaneously denoting both what is and what was while the voiceover also jumps between present and past tense.

Later in the film text appears in the *mise-en-scène* so that visual and audio **experience** briefly become tangibly aligned. The narrator says “After that week I left him,” which we see spelt out in scrabble tiles on spilt milk.

In subsequent shots we see individual words plucked out from the voiceover for individual screen attention: the word ‘NEVER’ using the reconfigured keyboard of a vintage typewriter and then ‘EXPLAINING’ graphically imposed on a pond. As a sequence, the three frames literally read ‘After that week I left him never explaining.’

The fundamental differences between the two individuals are explored more fully through narrative contrasts in the second half of the film as the male lover is revealed to be an obsessive writer of love letters. “He wrote me many love letters, I never wrote back,” says the narrator.

She is physical yet guarded: “He gave me my first orgasm, but I never told him,” and “I never told anyone about our great affair. It was ours.” Whereas he is emotional and open, “Once he sent a table napkin to my parents’ address explaining he had wet dreams about me” and a romantic who keeps mementos of the affair, “He also wrote that he had treasured a ball of my hair.”

Moreover, image and voiceover draw us into a tactile world where the physical and emotional relationship is explored through the evocation of intimacy, sex, passion and love.

In a reflexive gesture near the end of the film the frame appears to burn out on the screen like a celluloid film print that has jammed in its projector, and the artifice of the multi-diegetic collage of sound and image we have just experienced is called to our attention.

In the **concluding** image we see a long shot of a shut door set out in a bleak tundra - a door closed on the world perhaps - a final powerful visual metaphor for incompatibility and aloneness.

## References

Bresson, R. (1975) *Notes on the Cinematographer*, London: Quartet Books