

What You See Is What You Get

An analysis of Mise-en-Scene in Amelie

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ABSTRACT

In the selected scene from *Amelie*, the elements of mise-en-scene play a major role in the telling of the narrative. Staging, lighting, and color are used effectively throughout the scene to help portray the emotionality and mentality of Amelie and the characters around her. Through comparing and contrasting the elements of mise-en-scene throughout the scene, a secondary narrative is constructed alongside the main narrative of the film, providing powerful content and meaning to the central narrative.

Keywords

Color, light, staging, framing, contrast

1. INTRODUCTION

This text will be dealing with a few of the concepts of mise-en-scene in the selected scene from *Amelie*: lighting, color, and staging. In the field of film, concepts of mise-en-scene are used to invoke a sense of emotion and involvement in the viewer. The specific sub-topics of staging, lighting, and color are a few of the aspects of mise-en-scene heavily used throughout the scene to develop the narrative of *Amelie* as a whole.

2. MISE-EN-SCENE IN AMELIE

In the selected scene from *Amelie*, mise-en-scene – mainly lighting, color, and staging – plays a large role in establishing the mood and tone of the part of the narrative being told. In areas where the narrative cannot be told just through acting and lines, the elements of staging, color, and light provide information to the viewer, telling the narrative in a visual way.

2.1 Lighting

Lighting plays a large role in creating space within the shot throughout the scene. A few different methods of lighting, used in the scene, serve to create an effect of isolation and individuality.

In the opening portion of the scene when Amelie walks down the staircase, a single backlight serves as the main source of light in the scene. By using a single backlight, the shot is a bit low key, creating stronger contrast and casting light shadows [2] over every object in the scene. In contrast to the traditional three-point lighting in the other settings in the scene, this particular use of lighting suggests that something mischievous is happening in the shadows as Amelie takes one of the keys from the key ring and enters the room.

As the scene progresses and Amelie enters Mr. Collignon's apartment, the lighting adapts to the mood of the scene. As Amelie is shown cutting the shoelace on a pair of Mr. Collignon's shoes, a high key front light is placed into the scene

to identify Amelie as she cuts the shoelace. In contrast to the previous shot in the staircase, Amelie's face remains lit as she commits her small acts of revenge, creating a sense of fearlessness in Amelie's character.



Figure 1: Amelie entering the bathroom (lights off)

Another interesting use of light occurs as Amelie enters into Mr. Collignon's bathroom. In the split second before the light is turned on in the bathroom, Amelie can be seen through the mirror entering the bathroom (Figure 1). This creates a bit of uneasiness in the viewer as Amelie's face is seen clearly, though no light is shining on it at this point in time. The light is switched on very quickly to break the tension between the viewer and Amelie and reveal a light that illuminates Amelie's face (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Amelie entering bathroom (lights on)

2.2 Color

Color plays a major role in assisting the narrative throughout the scene and the entirety of *Amelie*. The scene consists of a saturation of multiple shades of red, yellow, and green. The lacking of color exemplifies the fact that the world around Amelie is very bland and mundane.

Throughout the scene, a limited palette[2] of earthy tones consisting of yellows, greens, and browns surround Amelie and her red sweater, separating her from the rest of the people in the scene. Amelie and the characters closest to her all wear different shades of red to symbolize the connection between the characters. The different settings within the scene also play with color to symbolize the importance of the particular location in the setting. As Amelie approaches the key shop, we see a steadily increasing amount of red in the background of the scene until Amelie approaches the key shop, which is engulfed in red, and enters.

There is a small use of the colors orange and blue in the scene which relate to Amelie's character as seen earlier in the movie. The case of oranges being dropped on the ground relays back to Amelie's youth, particularly to her goldfish, Blubbers. The dropping of the crate seems to signify a loss of innocence as Amelie turns away from the shop and proceeds to break into the room as soon as she leaves the store after the crate is dropped.



Figure 3: A blue tint takes over the image reflected in the mirror

As Amelie breaks into Collignon's bathroom, a few different shades of blue subtly dominate the shot. In the bathroom, the mirror reflects Amelie in an entirely blue background (Figure 3) as the framing of the shot is shot almost entirely through the mirror as labels on the "Foot Cream" and "Toothpaste" serve as a symbolism of overcoming and revelation as Amelie gets her revenge.

2.3 Staging

Staging and framing throughout the duration of the scene play a major role in assisting the narrative of *Amelie* as the narrative progresses. The placement of characters and objects on the screen coupled with the selection of shot and perspective of the director combine together to create the staging of the shot, emphasizing certain aspects of the narrative.

The opening shot of the scene with Amelie in the staircase creates an interesting composition as Amelie is framed between the two doors. In this particular shot, two separate compositions are created, framed by each door and each part of the staircase, emphasized by the lighting of each one. The right side of the shot consists of the door Amelie slipped the papers under the doormat in front of, a staircase leading downward, and an overcast shadow, robbing Amelie of her individuality. As Amelie approaches the left side of the shot, her face comes into the light,

restoring her personality, emphasized by the staircase leading back up to her room, and the keys in the door. The keys in the door serve as an extension of Amelie's character, representing the idea of choice.

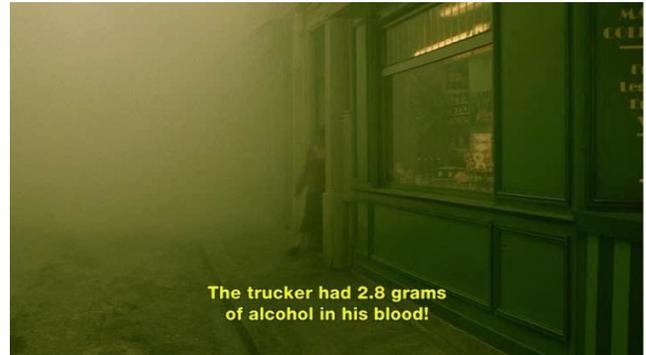


Figure 4: The background behind Amelie covered in fog

Just after Amelie comes outside, an interesting bit of staging occurs in the shot as the background of the scene is completely distorted (Figure 4). Amelie stands in the road as a thick brown fog covers the entire setting, engulfing whatever background is behind her, creating a sense of isolation. This sense of isolation is further enhanced with the use of close-ups throughout this particular portion of the scene. The framing of each of the characters as they talk in front of Mr. Collignon's shop creates its own sense of isolation as the scene jumps from a medium long shot of the three characters talking to Mr. Collignon and isolates them in their own close-up shots. As Amelie turns and leaves the shop, the shot widens out, creating a sense of freedom as Amelie has released herself from the clutches of Mr. Collignon. The shot widens even more as Amelie approaches the key shop, where she is going to get her revenge against Mr. Collignon. The quick succession of these wider shots, differentiating in style from the rest of the scene, allow the viewer to know that something outside of the norm is about to happen.

Perspective is used in an interesting manner to create a relationship between the viewer and Amelie. As Amelie enters the bathroom (Figure 2), she is seen only through the mirror until she is shown standing directly in front of the sink. The detachment from Amelie in this part of the scene plays a vital role in relation to the color motif discussed earlier. The blue hue takes over the scene at this point of the scene and Amelie's face is never seen except through the mirror with the blue tint. By detaching the viewer from the previous orientation with Amelie, the effect of rebellion and revelation is further emphasized as Amelie gets her revenge on Mr. Collignon.



Figure 5: Amélie viewed through binoculars

As the scene comes to a close and Amélie returns to sit on her bed, one final bit of staging becomes very evident in, relation to the rest of the film, as Amélie is shown entering her room through a pair of binoculars (Figure 5). The staging of Amélie entering her room through the binoculars relates the character Nino to the scene. The viewer takes on the role of Nino as he is portrayed as an omnipresent observer of Amélie. The interesting part of this staging is the fact that the binocular effect was saved until after Amélie had left Mr. Collignon's apartment, suggesting that the acts Amélie had committed in Mr. Collignon's apartment were unseen by anyone in the world around her and remained a secret between Amélie and the audience, characterized by

Amélie looking directly at the viewer at the end of the scene in Mr. Collignon's apartment.

3. CONCLUSION

The aspects of mise-en-scene in Amélie create a visual narrative on top of the central narrative, emphasizing the mental and emotional aspects of the narrative through visual cues. The mise-en-scene in Amélie is very intricate and meticulously inserted into each and every shot of the scene to provide the viewer with a connection to Amélie. With Amélie being a film that has a deeper meaning than that just of the central narrative, elements of mise-en-scene such as staging, lighting, and color, are essential in aiding the plot to achieve the full impact of the narrative.

4. REFERENCES

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- [2] Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. "The Shot: Mise-En-Scene." *Film Art: An Introduction*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008. 177-218. Print.