

Single Shot Cinema: a different approach to film language

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Abstract

F.W. Murnau (1888-1931) once told that he wished to have "a camera that can move freely in space [...] that at any moment can go anywhere, at any speed: a camera that outstrips present film techniques and fulfills cinema's ultimate goal. Only with this essential instrument we shall be able to realize new possibilities". Andre Bazin (1918-1958) said "the camera must be equally as ready to move as to remain still [...]; the camera has a human quality: it is a projection of hand and eye, almost a living part of the operator, instantly in tune with his awareness". From the Sundance and IDFA award-winning trilogy Eye of the Day (2001), Shape of the Moon (2004), Position among the Stars (2010) and the newest documentary Raw Herring (2013; selected for the Tribeca Festival New York) the Single Shot Cinema (SSC) approach shows that Murnau's dream is possible. In the past, the creativity and freedom of camera movement in shooting films was limited by the size and weight of the camera, which often had to be moved on a dolly or crane. Camera movements were carefully planned and scripted, reducing the camera's role in the language of film. With SSC a new approach to filmmaking is born introducing the orbit, emotional P.O.V. and collective shot by multiple operators. This paper will hopefully lead to an interesting discussion and unencumbered exchange with other filmmakers and critics.

Keywords: Single Shot Cinema (SSC), Camera movement, Orbit, Emotional P.O.V., Collective shot.

Introduction

In this paper I will describe my SSC approach, but let me first introduce myself. I am Leonard Retel Helmrich, a practitioner and Associate Professor and Researcher at New York University and her extension in Abu Dhabi as well. My approach was partly developed at the Institute of Art in Kansas City, Missouri and put into practice and tested during my Fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies of Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but actually it was created much earlier during my work as filmmaker for years and years. The SSC approach is the conceptual model that serves as guideline for all my films. My primary starting point is everyday practice, but in addition I use a number of theories, which were written by other publishers a long time ago, namely the considerations of F. W. Murnau (1888-1931), André Bazin (1918-1958), Alexandre Astruc (1923) and Dziga Vertov (1896-1954) whose views I have processed in the SSC approach. Of course, we have to take into account that technology nowadays is much more advanced than fifty or more years ago,

so we have to put their ideas in the right perspective. Let's start with a brief discussion about the theories of these authors.

Holistic approach

First we take a look at the holistic approach of F.W. Murnau, especially the manner in which he manipulates formal aspects of cinema to establish the dichotomy between Naturalism and Expressionism¹. Furthermore I appreciate his long takes and the angles from which he was filming, especially in Nosferatu (1922). Murnau establishes formal dichotomies such as light versus dark and naturalistic vs. abstract through the manipulation of light. Given the content of the respective poles, a thematic opposition between rational and irrational is created. Murnau was the first one who introduced the subjective camera point of view, where the camera "sees" from the eye of a character and uses a particular visual style to convey a character's psychological state of mind in Der Letzte Mann (1924). It also anticipated the Cinema Vérité movement in its subject matter. The film also used the "Unchained Camera Technique", a mix of tracking shots, pans, tilts, and dolly moves.

Nowadays, we get much more possibilities as professional cameras become smaller and lighter and limitations on the camera in film language disappear. Unfortunately most professional filmmakers aren't aware of that and they still remain conservative in handling the old equipment like dollies, heavy cranes and tripods, which they actually don't need. If you are looking at camera movements in current films, you always find the same standard types of movements like dolly, follow, pan, pedestal, tilt, track, truck and the only new techniques are zoom and dolly zoom which were invented fifty years ago.

Objective reality

Another author who inspired me was André Bazin (1918-1958), one of the great champions of camera movement in long takes, believing that such shots had the potential to film the reality of the world in front of the camera more accurately than sequences constructed through editing. Bazin argued for films that depicted what he saw as "objective reality" (such as documentaries and films of the Italian neorealist school) and directors who made themselves "invisible". He advocated the use of deep focus (Orson Welles), wide shots (Jean Renoir) and the "shot-in-depth", and preferred what he referred to as "true continuity" through *mise en scène* over experiments in editing and visual effects. He also preferred long takes to editing. Bazin, who was influenced by 'personalism', believed that a film should represent a director's personal vision. André Bazin looked back in

film history and wanted to find out what is actually the essence of film. Is it art, because in those days there was a big discussion about that. Or is it just a technical thing on how to capture things? And he found that it is actually a gathering of different forms of art together forming a product. So you have sculpture, theatre, literature and paintings. All these disciplines make it into a film. According to him the movement of the camera was one of the essential points of film. Bazin's position in "objective reality" can easily be misunderstood. Hence it is important to point out that he doesn't think of "realist" films in the way of an objective documentary that – like a fly on the wall – is only observing and recording what's happening. Instead he reminds us that it's essential for film – as for any form of art – to select what it shows. "Every form of aesthetic must necessarily choose between what is worth preserving and what should be discarded, and what should not even be considered"². Yet what is important for Bazin is that the whole, the entity of what is shown is preserved and not broken apart. Discussing the Italian Neorealism Bazin said: It looks on reality as a whole, not incomprehensible, certainly, but inseparably one"³. For Bazin only this way does cinema justice to reality. So, in my opinion, you have to film everything in one shot in the right perspective, in the right angles, in the right rhythm and afterwards you can select some parts for editing, but don't shoot for the edit. Never be a slave of editing, because than you loose the whole, the entity. You have to shape the film during the recording and not before by means of a storyboard. Filming is an art like sculpturing, the essence of film is not editing, but handling the movements of the camera, these movements make the difference between art and non-art, in the movement you recognize the quality of the artist. So in film the movement is the most important part. A camera that doesn't move is non-expressive. The movement is also the continuous flow of time that for Bazin is an essential feature of reality. It's no longer the editing that selects what we see, it is the mind of the spectator, which is forced to discern by the movement⁴. Bazin is an advocate of the "a posteriori approach" instead of the "a priori approach" like -for instance- by Eisenstein.⁵

Means of expression

Discussing the French Avant-Garde in 1948 a contemporary of Bazin, Alexandre Astruc (1923) said that the cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as all the other arts have been before it, and in particular painting and the novel. After having been successively a fairground attraction, an amusement analogous to boulevard theatre, or a means of preserving the images of an era, film has been gradually becoming a language. By language, he meant a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. That is why he said he would like to call this new age of cinema the age of camera-stylo (camera pen)⁶. This metaphor has a very precise sense. By it Astruc meant that the cinema would gradually break free

from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language. [...] The most philosophical meditations on the human condition, psychology, metaphysics, ideas, and passions lie well within its province. He will even go so far as to say that contemporary ideas and philosophies of life are such that only the cinema can do justice to them.[...]" The fundamental problem of the cinema is how to express thought. The creation of this language has preoccupied all the theoreticians and writers in the history of the cinema, from Eisenstein and the Silent Film down to the scriptwriters and filmmakers of the sound cinema. But neither the silent cinema, because it was the slave of a static conception of the image (e.g. editing), nor the classical sound cinema, as it has existed right up to now, has been able to solve this problem satisfactorily. The silent film thought it could get out of it through editing and the juxtaposition of images. Remember Eisenstein's famous statement: "Editing is for me the means of giving movement (i.e. an idea) to two static images." [...] We have come to realize that the meaning which the silent cinema tried to give birth to through symbolic association exists within the image itself, in the development of the narrative, in every gesture of the characters, in every line of dialogue, in those camera movements which relate objects to objects and characters to objects. All thought, like all feeling, is a relationship between one human being and another human being or certain objects that form part of his universe. It is by clarifying these relationships, by making a tangible allusion that the cinema can really make itself the vehicle of thought. [...] The film-maker/author uses his camera as a writer writing with his pen.⁹ Astruc conceived of a total cinema in which every component part, whether already existing in the arts, like words and music, or new and specific to the cinema, like visual and spatial movement, should have equal importance.¹⁰

These thoughts of Astruc have inspired me to think about a new language for cinema, especially concerning the movement of the camera. Instinctively and from my own experience I have noticed that there must be another method to show one's thought in a film without using symbolic images.

Kino-eye

Dziga Vertov (1896-1954) inspired me as well. His driving vision, expounded in his frequent essays, was to capture "film truth"—that is, fragments of actuality which, when organized together, have a deeper truth that cannot be seen with the naked eye. In the "Kino-Pravda" series, Vertov focused on everyday experiences, eschewing bourgeois concerns and filming marketplaces, bars, and schools instead, sometimes with a hidden camera, without asking permission first. The cinematography is simple, functional, not elaborated—perhaps a result of Vertov's disinterest in both "beauty" and the "grandeur of fiction." The stories were typically descriptive, not narrative, and included vignettes and exposés, showing for instance the renovation of a trolley system, the

organization of farmers into communes, and so on.

"Cine-Eye" is a montage method developed by Dziga Vertov which was first formulated in his work "WE: Variant of a Manifesto" in 1919. Dziga Vertov believed his concept of Kino-Glaz, or "Cine Eye" in English, would help contemporary "man" evolve from a flawed creature into a higher, more precise form. "I am an eye. I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, I am showing you a world, the likes of which only I can see"¹¹ Vertov believed the Kino-Eye would influence the actual evolution of man. Vertov was a supporter of constructivism that is a theory to explain how knowledge is constructed in the human being when information comes into contact with existing knowledge that had been developed by experiences. It has its roots in cognitive psychology and biology and an approach to education and art that lays emphasis on the ways knowledge is created in order to adapt to the world. Constructs are the different types of filters we choose to place on our realities to change our reality from chaos to order. In Art as implementation of the spatial perception of the world, the artist constructs his work as the engineer building his bridges and the mathematician establishing his formulas or orbits.¹² Vertov argues that the film is a socially usable art with a social mission to organize facts about reality and to distribute it to the people.¹³ Existing "newsreels" inspire his films. No longer fiction, but the day-to-day life as a subject is central. The purpose of these films is the display and organization of the real life "decoding life as it is"¹⁵. Of great importance is that the camera doesn't interfere with the daily activities of the person that is filmed. It is for this reason that they don't use a fixed scenario, because the daily life is not to impose on the basis of a script. The film-object is a finished etude of absolute vision, rendered exact and deepened by all existing optical instruments, principally by the movie camera experimenting in space and time. The field of vision is life; the material for montage construction, life; the sets, life; the actors, life¹⁶ Kino-eye is understood as "that which the eye doesn't see, as a microscope and telescope of time, as the negative of time, as the possibility of seeing without limits and distances, as the remote control of movie cameras, as tele-eye, as x-ray eye, as "life caught unawares" etc. etc.¹⁷ After reading the theory of Dziga Vertov I realized that cinema is much more powerful than most people expect and that we didn't invent anything to widen our vocabulary, our language of film, and that there must be some other things to improve our cinematic approach of reality.

Development of SSC

During my study at the Film Academy in Amsterdam I once was forced to film without a tripod and without a storyboard. Most students were seized by panic but I discovered that as enrichment because being an artist it gave me more freedom to achieve my goal, namely a good product at the end. I also discovered that it was possible to "cut scenes" within a camera movement and that was in opposition of what I have learned. I was taught to film all the subjects in parts, in separate shots before it would be edited as one total. In those days it

was a necessity because celluloid was very expensive, but later on – when filming on video - I discovered that it was much easier to first film everything in total, than in close and medium shots and do the cutting afterwards. I also discovered the importance of camera movements in film. During my practice I worked together with Pim de la Parra, a famous Dutch director, and Jordan Klein – the cameraman from the TV-series Flipper – while filming the underwater scenes of the feature film "Odysee d'Amour" (1986). I discovered that I have much more freedom to handle my camera movements under water than above because the camera was weightless. From that moment I wanted to create a camera mount that gave me much more freedom to handle the movements just like the underwater scenes. One of my first documentaries was "Moving Objects" (1991), a documentary about puppeteers, and during that project I wanted to practice the idea of André Bazin to be a part of the dramatic event as filmmaker¹⁸. Before I shot the documentary I made a theoretical analysis of the essence of puppet play, because even the puppeteers didn't know that. In my documentary I came to the conclusion: "All players work with inanimate material but they make it look alive during the performance, so they create the illusion that something that's actually dead, is alive." That was my definition. During the performance the most essential part is the movement of the inanimate object while the puppeteer is standing still. The audience will then concentrate attention on the moving inanimate material. The artist moves the dead material around like it was a satellite yet the puppeteer seems to disappear, because the audience is focusing on his creation, the moving puppets. See for examples: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHu78xwx228> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYpullBQxMY> That insight gave me the opportunity to translate this into camera movements. If you move your consciousness in the camera you can film the subjects without using the viewfinder. Just like the puppeteer you can make yourself invisible. Another experiment I used in the film Moving Objects was using an orbit for a cinematic expression. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74Q7V6r4yAQ>. The public reacted very positively to this kind of filming, that's why I created a construction called the Mobile Cam, with which you can almost fly around even with a heavy camera that would have been impossible otherwise with the very heavy cameras in those days. You can go very low to the ground; you can go high up to the ceiling. For a demonstration of the Mobile Cam see http://youtu.be/eFvJCAoYD_4 With this Mobile Cam I shot "Jemand auf der Treppe" (Somebody On The Stairs, 1993), a performance of Orkater, an experimental artist group from Holland. I made the film in a single, continuous fifty-minute shot from within the performance itself: the 20 kg heavy camera moves through the performance space and around the performers like a lightweight handheld camera, but with more stability. Watching that film the perception is quite different than watching the performance from a distance, the critics told me. The audience sees everything through the Kino-eye and the orbit movements of the camera gives direction to the observation of the audience and unconsciously

the opinion of the audience is influenced by that point of view. They didn't watch the performance from the outside – like spectators on a show - but from the inside through the eye of the camera. So, the filmmaker can manipulate the inner feelings of the audience by the movement of the camera. With this film I won an award in Munich and then I knew that I was on the right way.

Indonesian period

After this film I went to Indonesia and in this period I made a documentary titled “Art Non Block” (1995) for the Indonesian Television about art in the Third World. I noticed that their art was less reality oriented like ours but more focused on allegories shown in the artworks – for instance a man who has been tortured – described in a different method to demonstrate injustice. They don't use words but familiar situations to send their message about human rights, so they transform “objective reality” into “subjective reality”. For me that was an eye-opener, in my next films I wanted to make a documentary in which the message will be given by images like in narrative feature films and not by a voice-over like in most documentaries. My background is actually in fiction, and in fiction you always shoot and cover the scenes from the inside. In a feature film the story and the inner message are known, “the house is already in the brick” (Bazin¹⁹) and most film makers use a storyboard to film the pre-programmed schedule, but I wanted to do it the other way round. First I shoot pictures of the reality like Bazin favors (“faith in reality”²⁰) and afterwards I select the scenes I need to make a story, so I use the objective reality to make a film with a subjective meaning without manipulating the actors because they have to be real. I found that the best thing to do is using the orbit to cover the scenes; the orbit is a fundamental camera movement in SSC.

“Position among the Stars” (2010) is the final installment of my trilogy about the struggles and hopes of an Indonesian family amid the tumultuous socio-political changes that country has undergone in the past decade. With the previous documentaries in the trilogy “Eye of the Day” (2001) and Shape of the Moon (2004) this film follows the Sjamsuddin family – Rumidjah, the grandmother; Bakti, her son; Tari, her granddaughter and other family members – as they struggle to survive in the slums of Jakarta.

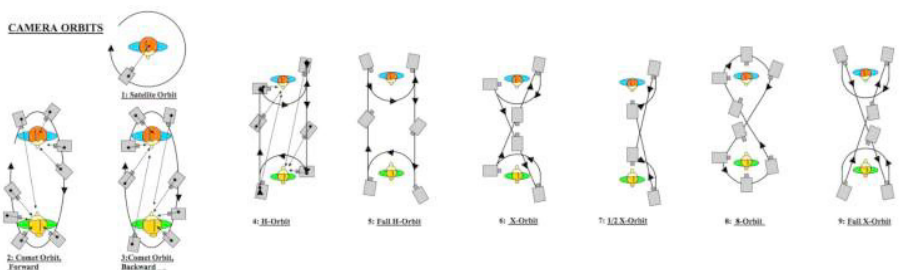
While filming I was aware that each of them represent an era of Indonesian history. Grandmother Rumidjah

represents the past, her son Bakti, the present and her granddaughter, Tari, the future. Domestic friction abounds here: Rumidjah and Bakti both pin their hopes on Tari, a bright but rebellious secondary school student, to graduate and go on to university; Bakti struggles to get by as a neighborhood manager, while spending time raising “fighting fish” – much to the dismay of his long-suffering wife, Sri, who, in a moment of rage, fries them. And Rumidjah and Bakti differ in their respective faiths. It was not easy to capture the poetry and complexity of this family drama showing the developments in politics, religion and economics of Indonesia in a nutshell without any voice-over like in other documentaries. Through the SSC approach I have made a film, which unveils both the universal in the Sjamsuddin family, and the intrinsic in Indonesian culture, weaving in several interstitial scenes. This trilogy has been highly appreciated all over the world.

Orbits

Let's watch this shot to explain what I mean with orbits: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OULvFKlWvM>

In this shot from the footage of Position Among the Stars (2010) you could see a discussion about a picture by the grandmother, her granddaughter Tari and her son Bakti (uncle of Tari) recorded in one shot during 5 minutes. Watch how it's recorded. In the art of cinema “how” is more important than “what” like in other arts. See how the orbits are used with one camera that orbits around the characters, flies in and out for close-ups and wide angles, and shoots from many perspectives, all in one shot. During the conversation I seem to be invisible, because I became a part of the whole. I used the same position like the other participants; I let the camera record without looking through the viewfinder. In SSC you hardly use the viewfinder. You can see the details, the non-verbal communication, the furniture of the room; the size of the room, the background, you can feel the emotions in the conversation. I let this noiseless digital camera run as long as possible without interruption constantly moving so that the family forgets that filming is taking place. That's what we call the holistic approach. I take the audience “inside” the family and their community, strengthening our sense of identification and understanding. The dramatic impact is comparable to powerful fiction films²¹. It looks like all the shots were taken coincidentally but not that's not true. SSC is a system.



The orbit is a significant holistic approach of reality which has never been used before systematically²². With our current small cameras, we can move inside an event and go with our camera to the right spot, at the right moment. I never use panning but I always film the actors in relation to each other so that the audience can see the total view. I am always very close to the actors and I have discovered that I don't bother them because I don't look through my viewfinder, so they are not aware to be filmed and I become one of the characters. I use what I call the temporal continuity and that's the rhythm in which the events will happen and be repeated. All the characters have emotions during the events and with my camera movement I anticipate on the next event/emotion that I can predict because I am not only a filmmaker but also a participating observer. You have to keep an eye on the whole situation all the time while using orbits to pinpoint the points of interest and the events/emotions that can happen. You can compare this with music, we can predict the next tone when listening to a tune and you can predict the events/emotions that can happen when you are a participant in a situation.

Emotional point of view and narrative function of camera movements

With your camera you can show the event from emotional point of views by means of orbital camera movements, often the orbital movements itself cause the emotional point of view within an event while the filmmaker is a harmonious part of the event without interfering. That way, you can film the event in a manner that shows your personal vision and feeling to the whole in such a way that the viewer will experience the vision and feeling as his own. You can compare the movements of the camera with tones in music. When they are done in the right rhythm you can get a direct transition of emotional feelings from the events to the audience without intermediary. Mostly the audience isn't aware the orbits, they think the camera is only recording but all these angles and all these other aspects from which the event is shot have an influence on the perception of the audience thanks to the orbits. The filmmaker gets his opinion across to the audience by using his own emotional feeling to choose the right angles and do the right orbits but the audience will experience the feelings as their own. Actually the filmmaker makes himself invisible in giving his own opinion and feeling, by the way he films his subjects, instead of words, he uses images and the way he moves his camera. The images seem objective but in fact they are more subjective than images shot from a physical point of view. They are shot from an emotional point of view. Emotional subjectivity. This is not manipulative because the images are real, and so is the emotion of the filmmaker. The filmmaker shoots reality but in the way he does that he shows his opinion about that reality in the images and orbital movements allowing him to do so. In SSC you shape the film mainly during the recording and not with thinking of editing. That doesn't mean that you can skip the editing. Editing remains important but in a fair way. Let's watch this scene for an other example of

SSC (from "Eye of the Day" (2001) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bYhOONcrg0> In this shot you see that editing was used but in the right relation to the camera movements including the orbits. In most films the proportion of editing is often overdone and that is what I want to avoid. An overkill of editing will diminish the emotional point of view. You can see that my orbits also have a narrative function.

In his review of contemporary media Daniel Miller discussed Position among the Stars (2010) and he said: "Here the director and cinematographer exercise the first orbiting steady wing shots of the film as he moves from right to left around the first woman to the second woman, replacing the positions of foreground and background in the process, but at the same time binding the two with the camera as the first woman bound them with her embrace and invitation to share the singing of the song [...]. The camera then walks with them and moves constantly, rising high above them.[...]”²³ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yflpSBxhs8>

Interrelationship

Using orbits means that you can emphasize a part of the subject without losing the interrelationship between the other parts, because in a holistic approach everything is related to each other. That's what the whole single-shot cinema is about: trying to think of the world as a kind of clockwork or machinery, with everything interrelated. The bigger and smaller things are just as important. To make these scenes possible I -at first- have invented a special device called Steady-wings²⁴. It folds underneath the camera, and when you're filming you can unfold it during shooting and you can almost fly around. Going low to the ground or high up to the ceiling is possible – you're very free and still rather steady. So steadiness and flexibility are very important in order to move your camera around. Then you can use your camera like you write; you describe the scenes with your camera movements. In this way we can compare SSC with the camera pen of Astruc, as a means of expression.²⁶ That's actually the essence of SSC – capturing the moment as much as possible in one shot since reality is always longer than you can use in your film. Then it'll always be possible to condense it in shorter scenes without having to think of editing too much; you can always cut from movement into movement. That gives you all the freedom to go over very low surfaces, high ceilings, everything.

Orbital movements emphasize one subject by circling around that subject that stands still while the camera is moving, so the background changes but the emphasized subject remains still within the frame. The effect of that will be that the audience will pay attention on that emphasized subject. You can compare that with a skater or cyclist during the game filmed in action. On the other hand the audience will pay attention to the moving subjects in the frame that stands still because the camera doesn't move. Compare the two scenes in this shot – from Position among the Stars (2010) - and see the difference: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxAc3la_Bq0.



In filming it's important to show the interrelationship between all the subjects, that's why orbital camera movements are important. Cutting the scenes will have a different effect. By means of the orbit you can make a visual conjunction of the various components within an event to display your feelings that you experience in showing the interrelationship. I will explain that in other words. Suppose that you have several persons A, B, C and D sitting in a room and you want to make a connection between A and D who are talking to each other, than you can choose a camera angle in which A and D are in the center of the frame while B and C are more on the background but still within the frame. You can do that by means of the "golden ratio" – like the traditional way of framing – but when B starts talking and becomes more important then A you can orbit the camera around B to put B in the center of the frame without losing D. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8GxC9EXhd8>

In the non-translated shot above you can see that a conversation or event always has several points of interest. The filmmaker has to keep an eye of the total to change continuously his orbits and the angles from which he wants to shoot with a running camera that stops when the conversation or event has ended. This way of filming is totally different than the traditional method in which close-ups and medium shots are used to emphasize parts by isolating them like in the experiment of Kuleshov²⁷. In SSC you use orbits to emphasize parts and simultaneously to show the interrelationship between these parts. This form of filming feels more natural to the audience because the emphasized subject remains in the frame while the camera moves. By orbiting around the subject it becomes the point of interest. SSC doesn't change the language of film but it adds an elementary point to experiencing a point of view from another angle. See this example <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYN3zIcquJk> for a different angle of filming.

Film language

Film language was for a long time quite stuck in a fixed way of storytelling, editing and framing. I think SSC can help to expand that further. The film language has evolved out of the technical changes of film equipment. And those changes are happening quicker and more frequently, so you have to be ahead of that. For any art form "how" is

more important than "what" and emphasizing "how" means that filming will be a real art like painting and sculpturing. Using editing only to show what we have filmed means that the spectators don't see the interrelationship between the subjects and are not aware of the total, so they only understand the film from a fixed way of thinking they have learned from watching films. Introducing cinematic differentiations in mise-en-scene from another more personal pattern of thought have been hard because of the current thinking pattern - based on rational means of interpretations, which do not tolerate that. SSC proposes that the camera movement gets a narrative function instead of striving for effect and that means that the filmmaker can make far better use of his talents there, because he can show his personal view in the images. The interrelations between the different parts in the mise-en-scene should be clear in case of using camera movements in a narrative way. The means by which you see the interrelations while using orbits is personal. The mise-en-scene would be influenced by the personal touch of the filmmaker, not the other way around. It's funny to see that the spectators will not see that at once. Watching a film they think that they are getting their personal vision but actually the filmmaker imposes his vision on them. There is no special word for the movements of the camera in the narrative way, so I call it "camera choreography". Let's take a look at a video shot from "Position among the Stars" (2010) to compare the theory of Murnau with the SSC approach. See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvvUIXUsg58> As you can see there are some Murnau effects in this shot like the holistic approach (everything is connected to each other), the dichotomy between naturalism and expressionism (but after all the whole scene is more impressionistic), the long takes and the angles from which was filmed (these are more expressionistic). In addition to the movement of the camera becoming the vehicle for cinematographic expression, the scene is continuous. Just like Murnau and Bazin I am all for the holistic approach, because of the movement, everything is connected. I liken this interconnectedness to the inner workings of a clock. As such, the smaller gears are of equal importance to the larger gears, and if one were to remove a single component, the clock wouldn't run. It is this connection, which binds interrelated elements into a whole that allows the viewer to travel within a scene, inside an event, to a particular spot at a

specific moment. It's also about the perception of reality. Reality is always one unity and it is not true that the whole is the sum of the parts like many people think. In the holistic point of view the whole is more than the sum of the parts. I noticed that filming is typically taught as a segregated reality, and then in editing you have to make believe that it is a whole. I think this is a mistake. You should shoot it as a whole and then the way you later in the editing segregate it is up to you. You should film the way you perceive something – as a whole with interrelated elements. As a result you can feel that everything is interrelated and express your personal feelings and perceptions of that moment. I call that the expressionistic part in an impressionistic film. In short, SSC is about how filmmakers perceive reality while filming, but not in how they finally present a film.

For me, the technique goes further than film. It's actually more a philosophy. It's a way of looking at and perceiving the world around you, recognizing that everything is connected. You can call that the holistic point of view. It may be very far off, but it's a feeling. And I want to bring across this feeling in my films. I am sure that Murnau will agree with my approach according to what I have read about him and to what I have seen in his films. In SSC the orbits are constitutive because the spectator must be motivated by the world of the story that is slightly inflected to serve dramatic actions. The orbit is the heart of the material process of articulation, to understand what is happening we must grasp how it works in its context to present and shape the film's dramatic world. Using the orbit is not only denotative, but also expressive and symbolic, because within that perspective we can explore the total network of relationships and that marks a crucial difference with the traditional method of filming. One of the advantages of using the orbit is that we can manage to place the spectator inside the scene. The movements present us with a thorough account of the emotional states harbored by the characters and of the specific questions at stake at that particular moment in the film's narrative design considering the full spectrum of interrelationships. One could say that it takes a more organic, holistic or integrated point of view, which can enrich the spectator's viewing experience of the film as a whole instead of the traditional sketchy approach by means of editing. These camera movements extend our epistemic access to the characters in relation to their emotions; the spectator can feel the psychological or emotional activity in the mind of the character.

Collective shot by multiple operators

Recently I have improved Steady-wings in to the OmniRig. Tim Haskell, Lighthouse business development manager and videography/broadcast specialist says: "This new rig has been painstakingly developed to suit the "SSC" shooting technique pioneered by Leonard Retel Helmrich. Whereas other camera supports are designed for relatively short-term, single-handed operation, or designed to be body worn by the operator, this new rig is specifically engineered for two-handed operation. Leonard's SSC' style allows long and uninterrupted takes to be filmed from multiple positions by allowing full movement freedom to different camera viewpoint positions. Unlike any other camera stabilization system the patented twin-grip arrangement we have developed allows operators to pass the camera and rig from one user to another during filming for extended multi-point takes – giving viewers a unique perspective. It's radical and unlike any other shooting style. The Omni Rig's two-handed operation creates less operator fatigue than comparable single-handed support systems, allowing longer takes to be filmed before the user needs to rest"²⁹ Using the wide-set, multifunctional handles, the camera can be easily and safely moved from one cameraman to another, and folds up to accommodate filming in or through small spaces. Watch these video shots to see a demonstration of a collective shot made by multiple operators: <http://vimeo.com/63542041> and <http://vimeo.com/63542042>



Image of OmniRig



Attributes to the OmniRig

Filming by using orbits means that you have to record your objects related to each other that the spectators could see and feel the right perspective in a whole. The flexibility of the OmniRig enables me to execute complicated maneuvers, including orbital camera movements (instead of panning), which circle around a point of interest and move from one interest point to another in one smooth flow. Often I found in video games, but not yet introduced as a dramatic way of narrating into the mainstream film language. These movements eliminate many physical limitations in camera work.

Allowing a film to be shot not based on specific facts, but on feelings revealing the facts by using camera movements that feel intuitive and natural, thus creating an intimacy unmatched in other filmmaking styles. To improve the freedom I also use rods to handle the camera from a distance. From there I can film certain subjects from “impossible” angles and as a spectator you can be surprised by that, because you normally don't see the things from those point of views but because of the interrelationship expressed by the orbit you accept that. The New York Times once called me “master of impossible angles” but these angles are actually not impossible but realistic shot from subjective, emotional point of views, it widens only our perception and according to me that's the goal of cinema. See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzpWuVxxeFc>

John Anderson and many others reviewed my newest documentary “Raw Herring” during the Tribeca Festival in New York (April 2013). In his review he wrote: “Any cinematographer worth his salt is probably already aware of “Raw Herring”, which may not sound appetizing to everyone [...] but is a miraculous exercise in the art of the camera. It may also serve as a breath of fresh air to audiences fed up with the sterile artifice of so much CGI-driven cinema [...] But he's also a cinematographic magician: In charting the course of Netherland's fishermen harvesting the year's first haul of Dutch New Herring (a traditional delicacy in Holland), Helmrich does things that seem to defy physics -- while firing the imagination about what's possible with a camera. The opening shot, of a combination fishing trawler/processing factory, doesn't draw a lot of attention to itself. But the viewer does wonder how it was shot – from water level, and the middle of the sea. What follows is a frame that fills with yammering gulls, the camp followers of the fishing world, literally flying into the lens. One imagines Helmrich's bait-covered camera, or Helmrich too, bobbing along in the North Sea. And then, things get really interesting – we see the gulls diving, and when they do, the camera follows them under water. Bubble trails and birds crisscross the image, gulls in search of fish. Then, what seems to be a shot of the gulls floating with their heads beneath the surface turns out – and turns around – to be an upside-down shot of the gulls above the surface; what we'd been seeing was a sub-

surface shot, taken amid that riot of hungry gulls. The filmmakers' approach, which they call “single-shot cinema,” involves long, intimate, and fluid takes, has been accomplished in various ways in earlier films – putting the camera on a bamboo rod, for instance, to get a shot from outside a moving train. Or dangling it off a nose-bleed inducing trestle, to capture a subject casually walking across. But the acrobatic visuals are just part of the story here, which involves a salty crew of Dutchmen, and some of their sons, competing against Norwegians, Swedes and a diminished population of herring, angling to bring back the prized fish to the hungry Dutch. The agility of Helmrich's shooting is amazing, when one becomes conscious of it, but there's other astounding stuff in “Raw Herring,” including the miles of cables, acres of net and millions of fish that come pouring out of a sea that, as the film acknowledges silently, isn't going to remain so bountiful forever.³⁰ See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdjCo_5oY58

Conclusion

All these positive reviews on my SSC approach mean that the dream of Murnau has been made possible: “wishing to have a camera that can move freely in space [...] that at any moment can go anywhere, at any speed: a camera that outstrips present film techniques and fulfills cinema's ultimate goal. Only with this essential instrument we shall be able to realize new possibilities”. I will say it again: SSC doesn't change the language of film but it adds an essential element to experience a point of view from another angle and also using orbits that's made possible by new inventions. Yet SSC is not finished but constantly moving and bringing new ideas, methods and camera support devices. It is an open field.

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¹⁸ Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971

¹⁹ *ibidem*

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²² Vittorio de Sica has used a kind of orbit at the end of his film "Bicycle Thieves" (1949). That's why I came to the idea to develop this approach.

²³ Daniel Miller, *Transnational collaborations for art and impact in new documentary cinema*, *Jump Cut* 2012

²⁴ The current name is *OmniRig* , an improved version of *Steadywings*

²⁶ Alexandre Astruc, *The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Stylo, L'Ecran Française*, 1948

²⁷ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9znxtY0OIX4>

²⁹ From www.limelite.uk.com/omnirig

³⁰ John Anderson, *Tribeca Review: "Raw Herring" is Miraculous Exercise in Single-Shot Cinema*, April 19, 2013 New York