

Film Production Reel/Pages

IB Film Standard Level

M2019

gyx389

<https://youtu.be/bSJES1aCOQY>

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Film Production Role 1: Director

Clip 1 - Genre Production (2:07)

Rationale

A director is not only the main force behind a film, the drive that keeps the gears turning; they are also the creative hand, the person whose vision, ideas and personality are transmitted through the film. They are praised when a film is good, and blamed when it is bad. In essence, they are the face that goes with the movie, the person relied on when all goes wrong, but ultimately, the person whose soul is transmitted to the audience.

As a director, my main aim for “Genre Production” was to create three different shorts with similar storylines but of different genres. To accomplish this, I was inspired by the way classic movies from these genres, such as “Dark Star”, “Night of the Living Dead” and “A Bout de Souffle”, and the signature ways in which they conveyed the genre through editing, sound, cinematography, etc.

Inquiry

As a director, my main aim for this film was to create an atmosphere that would be immediately recognizable for each of the genres that I chose. I decided to go with Science-Fiction, Zombie Apocalypse, and French New Wave because they all, in my opinion, have familiar elements to them, such as sounds, shots, camera movements, etc. which make them easily identifiable. Science-Fiction was for me an already very familiar genre, so research for that was barely necessary; however, I was very strongly influenced by John Carpenter’s “Dark Star”, for instance in its use of special effects and light. A parallel can even be seen in the anatomy of the control room of the spaceship in that film and in mine (Figure 1).

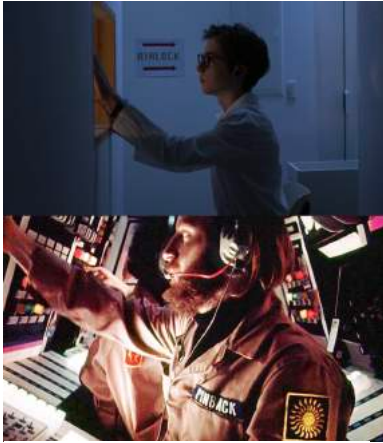


Figure 1: The control room.

For the zombie apocalypse genre, I re-watched “Night of the living Dead”, as well as looking at stills from more modern ones to try and capture the look that was given to them. I also researched more about the behavior of zombies in movies, which I thought would help capture the zombie character.

Finally, for “Le Temps qui Passe”, I studied some excerpts from “Les Quatre Cent Coups”, “A bout de Souffle” and “Pierrot le Fou” in an attempt to capture the behavior of characters in these movies and camerawork. The obvious conclusions were careless characters and *caméra à l'épaule*, but I also noticed long, uninterrupted shots and, especially, awkward cuts and editing.

Action

As a director, I decided to keep the setting minimal for the science-fiction portion of the film. The effect of being in a spaceship and meeting an alien would instead be created through the use of foley and music - I therefore collaborated with the sound designer to make sure the effects were coherent with each other and the music would complement the visuals of the film. He also created a score for the three films; one of them used GarageBand, and this was for a total of 27 seconds.

On-set, I applied what I had learned from my zombie research to the film. As seen in Figure 2, I worked closely with the makeup artist, set designer and costume designer to make sure the characters' looks fit with their settings and situations. Additionally, I communicated with the actors as to how they should behave, giving their characters backstories and referencing to other zombie-genre films.

Because I wanted each film to have its own 'look', I decided that each's color scheme and grade should be different. “Le Temps qui Passe”, for instance, was shot in monochrome, to set it in its time and apart from the two other films.



Figure 2: Applying my 'zombie research'.

Reflection

There were a few things with which I was unhappy when the film was completed. For instance, one of the shots in “Undead” was badly lit (Figure 3), and I failed to call it out on the spot. This meant having to raise the exposure a lot in post-production, which resulted in an ugly image. I decided this shot should be cut as short as possible, but it still got significant screen time due to its importance for the plot.

During the first trials for animating the spaceship, I found that it looked too much like it was flying in front of a flat surface. To solve this I decided we should create a second layer of stars that would move slightly slower than the first layer, therefore adding a perspective effect.



Figure 3: Bad lighting on face.

Overall, however, I was pleased with the result of this film. My intentions, creating shorts which copied each genre and in some ways parodying them, was met successfully. I also found that the three films interacted well, as although their themes were completely different, their common storyline created an interesting coherence. I do think that I could have developed the plot-line more interestingly visually, as I relied a lot on acting and not enough on camera work; this is something I will try to address in my next film.

Clip 2 - Dinner With my Husband (0:53)

Rationale

For “Dinner With my Husband”, I aim to create a gritty and comical atmosphere while telling a silent story about murder. I wish to communicate an engaging plot using only visuals; and for this, I will look at Alfred Hitchcock’s use of visual clues in “Notorious”, but also learn to rely less on dialogue by basing myself on the use of image and light in films from the German Expressionist era.

Inquiry

One of my aims as a director for this film was to create an engaging story without using dialogue, relying instead on camerawork and pacing as storytellers. For this, I was inspired by multiple Alfred Hitchcock films, but in particular by the scene in “Notorious” where the camera reveals the presence of the key in Ingrid Bergman’s hand, introducing suspense. In my film, I planned to use the same idea of visual reveals, but rather than introducing suspense, I wanted to build up a story, keep the audience’s attention by adding visual clues one by one.

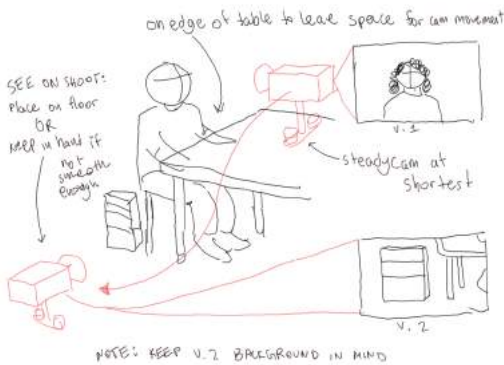


Figure 4: Blocking the SteadyCam shot.

As a director, I wanted to make sure that the blocking for each shot was perfect, because most of the meaning would be transmitted visually; this meant that, if a shot or character was out of place, the meaning could be lost and the entire film would be ineffective. I therefore carefully planned out how each shot would look (Figure 4 being an example) along with the cinematographer, who helped with composition and light planning.

Good sources for telling visual stories are, of course, films from before the advent of sound in cinema. While watching a selection of these, I noticed that the use of light was very pronounced, possibly also due to their shooting in monochrome film. This was particularly apparent in German expressionist films, such as Robert Wiene’s “Das Kabinet des Doktor Caligari” or F.W. Murnau’s “Nosferatu”. I therefore decided to film in black and white, and made sure the cinematographer paid particular attention to his use of light to convey meaning.

Action

Because I wanted each shot to truly serve a purpose and convey a meaning, I was quite strict on set as to which ones we would keep and which one we wouldn’t. I stuck very closely to the storyboard, in which we had already laid out the visual guidelines for every shot or move. The cinematographer and I had assigned a meaning in each image’s composition which helped to advance the story forward, as exemplified by the adjacent stills: by adding movement and using the rule of thirds (Figures 5 and 6), we added tension and discomfort to the story.

Although seemingly simple, the actress’ role was not so easy to play as it required an ironic undertone, a transformation from the friendly housewife to the vengeful widow. I tried to help her convey this by instructing her on slight changes in attitude and movement, going from an exaggerated happiness and affection to a more natural satisfaction. I find that this works quite well, as her attitude seems to guide the plot towards the sordid end reveal.



Figure 5: Movement and use of the rule of thirds.

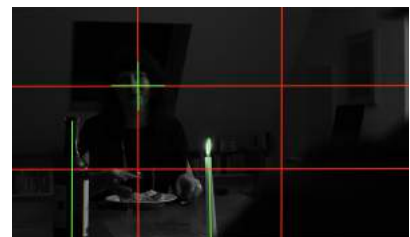


Figure 6: creating discomfort with composition.

Reflection

A problem I realized we had in the visuals was that the two characters were much too far apart to be able to cling glasses, and that if edited and shot incorrectly, this could become apparent. I therefore made the decision to shoot two different motions, one where the glasses touched, and one where the female character simply raised her glass. I would then decide which one to use in post-production. To minimize the visual confusion of the glasses touching, I decided to ‘surround’ this shot with two others which looked like they were sitting close together; i.e., one shot where they look close, the glass shot, and then another shot where they look close. This minimized the contrast in distance between them, and was a result of careful blocking beforehand.

Overall, I was quite happy with this film; I was happy to be able to develop more of a storyline, which I wasn't able to do in previous productions. The comedic aspect of the film was well supported by the music, which, made on piano and drums in collaboration with the composer, was meant as playful background music while still accompanying certain moments in the story. Guiding a plot without using any text was something I had never done before, and I feel that it has impacted the way I will use the camera in future productions.

Film Production Role 2: Editor

Clip 1 - Chase Sequence (1:28)

Rationale

An editor is one of the most important people on the production of a film because of their control of the mood, rhythm, and structure of a film or plot. Although their impact seems to act in a more subconscious way on the audience, they ultimately have control over the last stages of production: they have the metaphorical 'last word'. This shows the importance of their collaboration with other production roles to ensure that all visions are truthfully conveyed in the final film.

For this film, I want to create an exciting, fast-paced action sequence while keeping continuity and logic. To achieve this, I imitated the cutting style of modern action scenes and tried to re-create the whip pan in Edgar Wright's "Shaun of the Dead". Through the production of this film, I hope to gain a wider understanding of how such sequences are edited, and to examine the potential impact editing can have on action sequences.

Inquiry

In the preparatory phase of this film, my main concern as an editor was to research interesting cuts and transitions that I could include, but also to examine how fast-paced sequences were edited. I also knew I needed to make it seem like there would be a chaser and a runaway, even though there was only one actor. When trying to solve this, I came across a scene in Edgar Wright's "Shaun of the Dead" where the camera whips and Chris Dickens hides a cut in the motion blur. I decided to use this in my film to 'clone' the actor. I therefore made sure the cinematographer would include this effect in the correct shots through storyboarding and assisting on set.

When researching fast-paced editing, I decided to concentrate on a chase scene that I had (re-) watched lately: the chase scene at the beginning of Martin Campbell's "Casino Royale". I noticed multiple things: first, Stuart Baird cuts his shots very rapidly, like short sentences during a thrilling moment in a story. No shot lasts more than five seconds. Further than that, however, I noticed that still shots were very sparse; there was almost always some sort of movement in the shot. Finally, I noticed that all the action seemed to be happening real-time, that there were no jumps forward in time, to keep the audience constantly at the edge of their seat. Those are all points I kept in mind when storyboarding, helping on set, and, of course, editing.

Action

Because we wanted a coherent, logical chase, I participated in pre-production by storyboarding the film (Figure 7). I then communicated with the cinematographer to make sure everyone's artistic vision was respected and that no technical mistakes had been made. During the shooting of the film, I concentrated on making sure that the progression of the shots were coherent, especially for difficult cuts. An example of this was for the shot where I fall down the building; since I had to cut between the fall and the landing to pretend that I had really landed safely, I had to make sure that the two moments had the same color, that nothing had moved, etc.

When preparing the film, I had planned to include many more intercut still shots of the runners throughout their chase; upon editing, however, I realized that this deflated the excitement. I therefore kept the core structure of the chase, and decided upon which b-roll I would include during post-production, trying to use it to reduce rather than add confusion.

Reflection

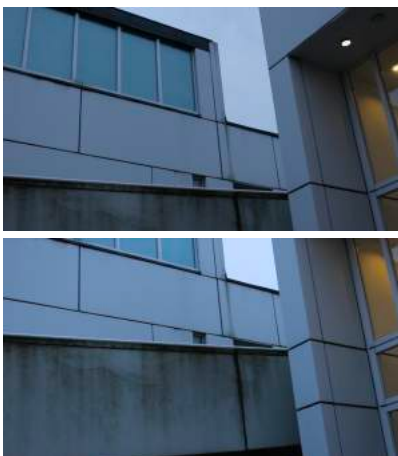


Figure 8: The two shots which were supposed to match.

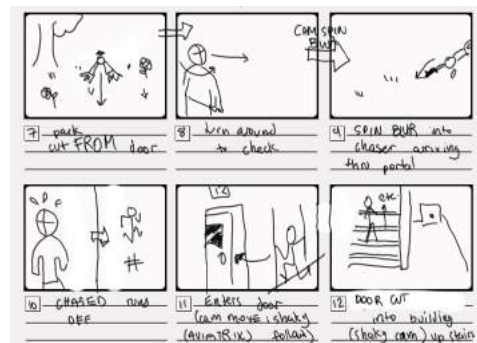


Figure 7: Storyboarding.

One of the cuts in this film was quite problematic (Figure 8). This was the one at 00:56s, where the chaser emerges from behind a wall to shoot the hacker. When re-watching the rush, I realized that not only the light had changed, but also the position of the camera which had tilted slightly. I therefore had to keyframe the clips in order to create artificial zooms and pans, in order to gradually align the clips at the cut. I also performed slight color correction.

As an editor, I am used to cutting rather slowly, letting each shot take its time; for this film, however, I had to break this mindset and keep a quick pace, like in "Casino Royale". This was interesting as it made me reflect on how the way I edited truly impacted the mood and message of my films, and that in this way, it was just as important as cinematography, sound, and even acting.

Something which I wasn't able to do as an editor for this project was to edit sound. Indeed, only the music (made by the composer with synthesizers and a beat looper) and a few sound effects can be heard. However, I would have liked to explore in more depth how sound affects the mood of a sequence, and just how much impact it can have on the quality of a film.

Rationale

In “Sound Exercise”, my attention was not so much on the story as on logical editing and editing to sound. I wanted to create a comparison between a simple visual edit and one with sound editing included, and see what effect good sound had on the quality of the clip. For this, I examined the concept of intercutting by using the same situation as in “The Bourne Supremacy”: an onlooker viewing a person through binoculars. This scene was also a key inspiration on the use of sound and ambience in my film. With this project, I hope to gain an understanding of how to effectively use editing to accompany dialogue, ambience and foley in a film.

Inquiry

For this film, I wanted to examine the use of sound and intercutting in a sequence, and so used the concept of the spy tradeoff with a third character observing it through binoculars. As inspiration, I watched various movie binocular scenes, including “The Bourne Supremacy” (Paul Greengrass). In one scene, Matt Damon communicates with a woman while examining her through a scope. At first, the camera is on Matt Damon; but before switching to a shot of the woman, we first see her through the scope view, therefore introducing her from Damon’s view (Figure 9).

As a film editor, editing non-diegetic sound was not part of my job; however, I did work with the ambience that came with the images. The scene from “The Bourne Supremacy” helped me understand how sound should be cut in these scenes: shots of the subject include the subject’s sound and its location’s ambience, while both the onlooker shots and shots through the binocular view should have the onlooker’s sound and ambience.

Action

The production phase went with relatively few problems. As an editor, I was present on set not only to supervise and confirm each shot from an editor’s point of view, but also to make sure sequences with more complex cuts were adequately filmed. As I would be working closely with the sound designer in post-production, I also helped supervise the capture of ambience and foley. One problem that did arise was that there was lots of wind every time we tried to capture exterior ambience. This can be heard in the non-edited versions of the exterior clips. After multiple tries, however, we managed to find about half a minute of exterior ambience, which, with a bit of editing, was usable in the final cut.

A concern on set was that, to stick with the streamline scene approach, the sound designer had to find non-diegetic sound effects that could create emotion without bringing too much attention to themselves. To help decide what sound would best fit with the images, I made sure to have edited a rough cut of the images by the time the foley was being recorded, so it was possible to immediately try and fit it to the images. This gave them on-set feedback as to what they could do next or how they could change certain sounds to better complement the images.

A great part of creating a buildup in tension is with a score. I therefore collaborated with the composer in the final stages of the edit, who created a menacing, worrying score on his synthesizer, but that didn’t protrude or disturb in the overall mix. He therefore made something less melodic and more ambient, but still punctuated to create a rhythm and build tension. For this collaboration, my edit of the images had to be very close to final, so that the composer could follow the dynamics of the film’s mood without them being moved afterwards.

Reflection

In my previous project as an editor, I had had to edit a blur cut, or hiding a cut in the image’s motion blur. In “Sound Exercise”, I had to do this again, but this time, twice consecutively and with the camera changing positions each time. To make the result as successful as possible, I took multiple precautions. Firstly, I advised the cinematographer on-set to make the shutter speed quite slow. This would result in more motion blur and would therefore be easier to edit. Additionally, I made sure that there was some sort of tying element between the two frames where the cut would be; in the case of Figure 10, this was the color of the trashcans.



Figure 9: Binocular view cuts.



Figure 10: Tying the two frames together with color.

A problem which I had to overcome for this film was the initial awkwardness of the binocular view shots. Since we had filmed the base clip with a tripod, and I had added a homemade binocular template above it, there was no movement in the shot. This seemed unnatural, as when one looks through binoculars, it is very rare that one is able to fix a point while being completely still. I therefore decided to add movement in the clip itself, which looked as though it was the onlooker who was moving. This made these views look more organic, and therefore more natural.

Although perhaps not so interesting as a final product, this project was immensely helpful in my exploration on how the editing of images to sound (and vice-versa) could impact the quality of a scene. I realized that the ambience in many scenes has to be re-created completely from scratch, with every movement re-created through foley and most seemingly diegetic sounds having to be created as effects. This will definitely prove useful in my future productions, as it will have given me a better understanding of how to collaborate with the sound designer to achieve a natural blend of sound and images, and therefore a successful finished film.

Film Production Role 3: Cinematographer

Clip 1 - Japan Trip (3:00)

Rationale

The cinematographer's role in a film is to take care of how each shot looks, implying a use of composition, but also of light, depth of field, movement, exposure, and more. This means that, on set, the cinematographer will be in charge of both the electric and camera departments. They should be deeply knowledgeable and reliable technically in their fields; however, cinematography is much more than only a technical job. Through camera language, they play a major role in setting the tone and conveying the message of the film. For these reasons, I find that cinematography is one of the most interesting and important of the production roles.

For this film, I wanted to enclose the protagonist in a secure, enjoyable bubble, only to break it later on. To do this, I took on this production role and found various ways, such as shallow depth of fields, to isolate the character, a technique also used in Spike Jonze's "Her". Later in the film, however, I wanted to show the protagonist in a claustrophobic, trapped situation. To achieve this goal, I was inspired by Julian Schnabel's "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly", particularly in its use of POV shots.

Inquiry

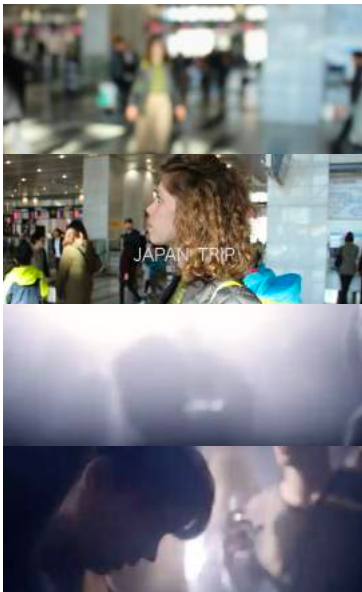


Figure 11: Focus rack for introduction.



Figure 12: Shallow DOF follow shots.



Figure 13: Trying to keep relatively constant lighting behind the subject.

As a cinematographer, I wanted to find a way to introduce the main character in a short amount of time. To do this, I watched the opening scenes of many films, and found that Sebastian Schipper's "Victoria"'s focus rack onto the protagonist by Sturla Brandth Grøvlen was an extremely effective means to visually introduce a character, singling them out almost randomly from a crowd of equally complex and interesting people. I decided to try and recreate this in a completely different crowd environment for this film (Figure 11).

Throughout the first portion of the film I wanted the viewer to feel close to my character, to experience the same things as her, but without using POV shots, which I found were too unnatural at this stage. In parallel, I wanted the protagonist to look isolated, alone in a foreign environment. This effect is also present in Spike Jonze's "Her", and is in part accomplished with Hoyte Van Hoytema's use of follow shots with shallow depths of field, separating the characters from their environment. I used this effect in the first shots of my film (Figure 12).

Because I had rarely shot a handheld, run and gun shoot, a great part of my research was to make sure to get the best images as effectively as possible. I decided against a shoulder rig or steadycam due to the inconvenience of transporting them and instead used a lens with a built-in stabilizer, achieving an image with organic movement. This also fed into the feeling I wanted to put across: the viewer seemingly walking alongside the protagonist.

A lot of my research for this production role was aimed to develop a better understanding of how to use a green-screen effectively. As a cinematographer, I wanted to be able to solve any problem we might have with it during the shoot, but more importantly to know how to get the best possible image with our limited equipment. The best resources for this turned out to be watching YouTube tutorials, simply because they would usually be geared towards the use of similar equipment as mine. I learned multiple valuable things from these videos, such as keeping on a low, native ISO when filming, setting the shutter angle high to avoid motion blur, keeping constant lighting on the greenscreen around the subject (Figure 13), and avoiding having too much free hair in the image.

At the end of this section of my film, I wanted to convey a sense of isolation, or of being trapped. To achieve this, I was influenced by the film "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly" by Julian Schnabel, in particular by Janusz Kaminski's POV shots which underline the main character's immovability. I therefore decided to use this technique to shoot B-roll for the final long shot, which would also give the editor the opportunity to cut into the action in case any problems occurred.

In the original script for this film, most of the shots were exterior, with the protagonist sitting at a bus stop. However, when planning these shots, I realized that this meant I would have to use a green-screen in natural light. This seemed like a very bad idea, so I spoke with the director and we decided that it would be better to instead shoot indoors, as the setting wasn't key to the story anyway. This gave me much more control over light, both on the subject and on the screen.

As a cinematographer, I wanted the images to underline the contrast between the protagonist's fake life and her real life. To do this, her environment as an old woman had to be stark, impersonal and medical. I therefore planned to shoot on a plain, white background behind the subject, as well as dim, cold lighting, removing any organic aspect to the image.

Action

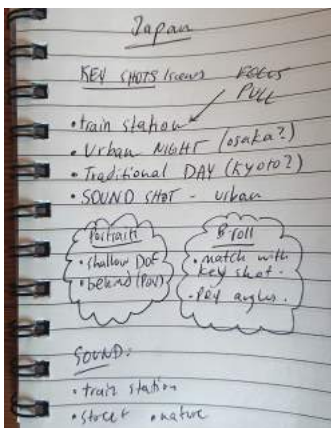


Figure 14: Guidelines for shooting in Japan.

Because a fully fixed shot schedule was not possible when shooting in Japan, I decided to instead only create a list of key shots for which I planned and set fixed lighting and equipment. For the others, I wanted to capture a variety of images of Japan, and therefore decided to keep their creation more spontaneous. This meant preparing guidelines for those shots, such as the shot types, lenses and equipment I would use (Figure 14). The setting in which I shot them was simply inspired by what we saw during the day; when I saw an image I liked, I was able to shoot it quickly thanks to my pre-planning.

Shooting inside went very smoothly and effectively, because of the precise planning we had done in order to capture all the footage in a very limited timeframe. A technicality I hadn't pre-planned, however, was the fact that the position of the character and the light on each fake jump cut, or the cuts from green-screen-black to real-black and vice-versa, had to be perfectly matching for the



Key light for face Side lights pointing at each other to avoid lighting the background

Figure 15: Lighting the darkness shots.



Fig. 16: A warm, comfortable image.

The final scene of the film was shot twice. This is because I was unhappy as to how the first one had turned out. For this, we had gone to a retirement home in Berlin and shot with multiple elderly ladies. However, multiple problems made the clip unusable. The main one for me as a cinematographer was that the location that we chose in the home turned out to be too comfortable and cozy looking (Figure 16), while what I had envisioned was a bleaker, more hospital-like location, with colder lighting and a simpler background (Figure 17).



Fig. 17: Colder, bleaker surroundings.

Because we didn't want the final scene of the film to look disappointing, we decided it would be best to shoot it again, this time in a better chosen environment. For this, I payed attention to the background, the lighting, the composition, etc., knowing what I had done wrong the first time. Because the content of this scene was pivotal for the effectiveness of the film, I wanted to keep as much attention on the action as possible. I therefore kept the camera movements natural, staying still for the main shot and providing minimal, organic shake to the b-roll.

Reflection

Multiple problems arose in the production of the Japan shots. For example, when the protagonist took a picture of herself with flash, the rolling shutter on my camera caused the flash to appear on only the bottom half of the frame (Figure 18). To fix this, I had to work with the editor so that he would place the bottom half of the previous frame over this one to hide the flash, and then recreate it artificially. Another difficulty was that although we stayed at a hotel and the sound designer was able to record hotel door sounds, the room itself wasn't visually satisfactory. I therefore had to dress my room as a hotel room and use that. However, I later realized I had badly lit and framed the image. Because we couldn't re-shoot, the editor had to do significant color and light adjustments as well as a minor crop, thereby decreasing the quality of the image.



Figure 18: Problem with the rolling shutter.

There were also things, however, with which I was particularly happy. For example, the montage sequence keeps a certain amount of continuity while showing quite exceptional images of Japan, which was a key point in my filmmaker intentions: to show that the protagonist lives an almost overly successful and enjoyable life.

One specific problem I had when shooting against the green-screen was that a light I had used to light the green-screen had accidentally reflected on the protagonist's head-towel. This made the jump from normal background to black background less believable. I therefore told the editor about this, and he fixed it by taking a piece of the towel from above the exposed spot, placing it on the exposed area, and keyframing it so that it would move with her (Figure 19). Although the result wasn't perfect, it was good enough to go unnoticed and make the image look more natural.

Despite a number of small problems like that, I was nevertheless pleased with the overall result of the second portion of the film. The worrisome cuts turned out to look natural, and the precautions I took to light and film the green-screen shots helped make the final keys as good as possible. Whatever still felt slightly unnatural after post-production, however, was again reduced by the three pieces of music made by the composer: an upbeat dance track for the Japan montage, a calm, playful, elevator-music type score for the bathroom scenes, and a menacing score for the dar scenes, all made with a synthesizer, percussions and a looper. This provided a mood to the scenes, removing the attention from the awkward cuts.

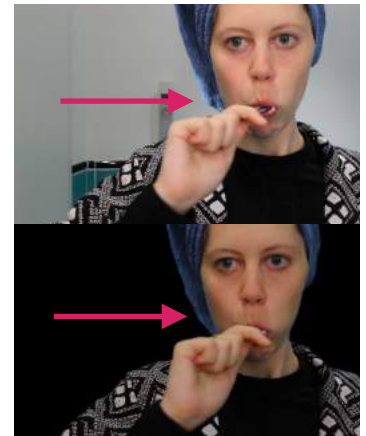


Figure 19: Removing the light's reflection.



Figure 20: Fixing the b-roll.

Although the mistakes I made in the first shoot for the final scene set us back a lot in terms of time, it was ultimately a positive experience for multiple things. First, it served as a guideline for what not to do in the second shoot, therefore ultimately improving the quality of the film. Beyond this, however, it was a good lesson in teaching me to logistically deal with my mistakes, like having to organize unplanned shots in an already tight schedule.

The second shoot went very smoothly in comparison. A problem that arose was that, when watching the rushes of what we'd shot, I realized that the b-roll, or close-up of the woman's hands, didn't match with the main shot in terms of lighting: it was too warm and saturated (Figure 20). I therefore worked with the director and editor to rectify this through color grading.

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