THE EFFECTS OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN CINEMA: ‘A NEW FILM LANGUAGE’

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ABSTRACT

Delving into the digital world and technical development beneath it, the applications on communication have appeared as a promising source for transformation. Rapid progressing internet technology has turned the previously underdeveloped visual communication into an important domain as it is a needed practice to consider the means of communication in conjunction with the content and as far as the image in visual media is concerned, the question of how digital visual communication process is effected emerges. Beginning in 2000s, developments in digital communication technologies have led to a change in the perception of the film language in cinema. Processes dedicated to film-making such as dramatization, visualization, editing and distribution have gone through significant transition. A major contributing fact, DV (Digital Video), has made filmmaking available to amateur shooters which had before been dominated solely by professionals. Amateur filmmakers have begun shooting films of reasonably low costs and sharing them through internet platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo. The unexpected recognition by the audience and considerably high box office earnings have drawn attention to the language used in those films. The experiences and developments in digital communication require academics to correctly interpret the recent changes in filmmaking. Therefore, in this study, it is aimed to discuss the characteristics of the somewhat revolutionary ‘new film language’ introduced by amateur filmmakers and the effects of digital communication technologies in cinema.

Keywords: Visual communication, digital visuality, ‘a new film language’/‘amateur video’

INTRODUCTION

The popularization of digital means of communication has brought about changes in the forms of communication too. This gives rise to the emergence of new communication practices in each one of the forms of communication. Therefore, the entire process from the production of content to the conveyance and presentation thereof undergoes changes depending on the technological developments experienced in the digital communication environments. Cinema, the leading audio-visual

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communication type, takes its share from the characteristics of the ‘digital communications’ from the standpoint of benefiting from both the other art branches and the hybrid use of the other means of communication. Especially, it is observed that the formation of a new time and space perception in the digital universe as a result of the nesting of the real and virtual worlds influences the development of the film language in terms of content and format. The social networks and social media that emerged thanks to the digital communication technologies have changed the production and consumption dimension of the communication types. Particularly, the production types of the means of communication such as cinema, television, newspaper, and magazines, the visuality of which is also important, undergo a change and this, naturally, affects the professional practices and simply makes the production formats and types, which conform to the communication formats introduced by the new communication technologies, obligatory. Accordingly, the methods of receiving content by the audience of the said media also change and even the professional process practices for the production of content in the media in question are affected, while the qualifications of the content producers and the content produced, as well as the qualifications of the content itself, gradually move away from the formerly applied or known traditional formats. All of these developments in the digital communication lead to the questions of “I wonder if the visual era ends and if a new ‘postvisual’ era commences?” Because, it is now undeniable that we are in a digital era and the “digital visuality” is now very different in terms of know-how and aesthetic perception. In today’s communication media, the main means of expression is based on visuality, but the continuity/systemness/linearity are out of the question in the digital visuality. The digitally recorded images are very far from the production and they have mostly been only recorded. These image recordings are instantaneous and shared. Then, it is necessary to review the basic facts that we have had so far for communication in order to understand and correctly interpret the ever expanding digital world. For this purpose, making efforts to understand the ‘new film language/ amateur video’ examples by reviewing the basic concepts from the standpoint of digital communication and digital visuality in terms of visual communication and film language will be a more advisable approach.

**VISUAL COMMUNICATION**

This is a type of communication that is defined as visual information exchange. Namely, it refers to the conveyance of messages to the target audience by means of a photograph, film, picture, cartoon, various symbols, etc... visual materials. Therefore, expression of an emotion, thought, or concept by means of images and symbols instead of words is also accepted as a way of visual communication. As it is the case with all of the ways of communication, visual communication also has certain constituents. The constituents that form the visual communication or an image are the concepts of point, line, format, depth, movement, hue, color, ratio, tissue, mass, measure, and direction. Pictographic expression/visual communication cannot exist without these elements that also underlie the visual arts, since the message is given to the audience with these concepts either visually or by means of motion videos. In the picture composition in general for the purpose of visual communication, the basic aim is to direct the attention of audience to a certain object or subject and to emotionally impress the audience (Künüçen, 2007). These two points are specifically attached importance in cinema at the phases of the dramatization and visualization of a subject.
by making a story out of that subject. For the purpose of both directing the attention of the audience visually to a certain object or subject and emotionally impressing the audience, cinema applies the expression elements of its own language.

ELEMENTS OF EXPRESSION THAT CONSTITUTE THE FILM LANGUAGE

The art of cinema exists with the aggregation of a large number of elements as a language such as scenario/story/narration, acting, lighting, camera angle, framing, camera movements, shooting scales, setting, makeup, costume, editing, music, and so forth. Consequently, the most important characteristic of the art of cinema in structural terms is the fact that it encompasses both the technical and aesthetical elements from the design phase to the production and presentation phases. The basic characteristic of the film language is the presentation of a story/narration model to the audience. It is aimed to capture the audience with this story/narration model by creating an expectation in the audience for what will happen in the next scene. The structure of model of narration not only creates the development model of a film story, but also the basis for the audience’s experiences relating to the story. As a matter of fact, one of the aspects that make a story attractive is the human inclination to perceive the development models and the whole story, yet the wholeness that encircles a narration/story and the harmony inside it will be credited by the audience. This, in turn, provides the audience with an experience that involves wholeness. Another aspect is the capability of audience to be affected during the dramatic moments of the story, to feel themselves inside the events, or to integrate with the characters of the story. The audience takes part in the films by means of the characters and the thrilling atmospheres that they are in. And, while being contingent upon the strength of the dramatic interest in the story/narration, this is possible by ensuring the harmonic togetherness of shootings and the elements of expression such as lighting, camera movements, shooting scales, setting, costume, makeup, sound-music, acting, editing, etc… that constitute the film language in the scenes/sequences (distinction) and that are created as a result of shootings. Namely, it is possible by providing the technical, aesthetical, and audio-visual integrity or, in other words, with continuity. Continuity/uninterruptedness in the film language can be achieved with an effect created by the editing system. The major characteristic of this editing system, which underlies the classical film language that has been known so far, is the identification of the audience with the hero disregarding the fact that they are watching a film and, at the end of the film, the emotional reaction desired by the director.

THE EDITING SYSTEM BASED ON CONTINUITY

Basically, the motion pictures create illusion and they maintain this illusion throughout the film. This illusion is interrupted when the audience is distracted while watching a film. Here, illusion in a film is ensured only with sound continuity/uninterruptedness. The continuity or uninterruptedness is the presentation of a subject, which is visualized in a motion picture, in a continued and reasonable flow. Therefore, the success or failure of a film is determined with its characteristic of being continuous. Especially, the most significant criterion in the appreciation of a film with the flawless continuity/uninterruptedness is that it has a realistic narration language. The realistic narration-shooting of events means the continuous resumption of every edited scene, since a motion-picture is the recorded images of an incident, edited
reality (!) after having been produced in an imaginary way. Even these scenes mirror a world that has been created with inspirations based on reality. When these scenes are accompanied by sounds (dialogues, natural sounds, music, sound effects), an audio-visual harmony is achieved. Thus, the audience is affected from the presented visuality to a larger extent and believes it. While watching a film with sound continuity/uninterruptedness, the audience immerses himself/herself in the relevant story. The basic purpose of a film, whether a feature or documentary film, must be formed with such an understanding that it serves the continuity and it must aim at capturing the audience attention from the very beginning until the last frame. In order to achieve this, there is a requirement for a dramatic structure and visuality that can pull the audience into the story. Where, while watching a film, the audience has to make sense of a causeless shake in the camera movement, a discrepancy, defective image or trapezoid framing, and discordant images in the movements of actors/actresses or in the flow of the event, then the spell for the film's uninterruptedness and reality will be broken.

**CINEMA AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES**

All of the technological developments in the field of cinema are the outcomes of efforts to make films more ‘realistic.’ These are led by the number of frames displayed per second (Frame Per Second/FPS). Among the first inventions relating to cinema, Kinetoscope, invented by Thomas Edison, Cinematograph, invented by Auguste-Lois Lumiere Brothers, were the efforts to acquire the first motion pictures, while the first silent films, the first thematic silent film (also the first example of science-fiction) A Trip to the Moon/La Voyage Dans La Lune (1902), shot by George Melies, and The Jazz Singer (1927) shot as the first sound film (a part of it contains sound recording) by the end of 1920’s were the steps taken towards capturing the reality in the number of frames per second with the technology of the silent era. In the period, films could be shot with 16 frames (16 fps) and; unfortunately, this rate was far from providing the expected perception of reality. As the scenes shot with 16 frames per second due to the technological inadequacies could be widely screened with 18 or more frames, it was possible to watch them as accelerated motions. Therefore, there was no way to acquire the perception of reality, since these images of films used to create a very different/far reality from real life. The viewers of the rapid flowing events with these accelerated images were conscious that the screened scenes had not been creating any perception for real life and the accelerated images that they watched in these films were attracting more attention as an invention or amusement.

The technological developments continued over years and in consequence of the challenges and trials for the number of frames to be displayed per second by providing the most realistic perception without tiring the human eye, it was understood following the domination of the era by sound films from the year 1929 that the optimum value was 24 frames where the sound and image could best match. Accordingly, the standard value in cinema was considered as ‘24.’ The number of 24 frames is also adopted as the standard number in modern cinema technology. As also mentioned by the French director Jean-Luc Godard, “The cinema is truth 24 frames-per-second.” The illusion achieved with the audience in cinema is now one-to-one overlaps only with 24 frames (24 fps). ‘24 frames’ flowing per second in cinema is the value of flow that enables the flow of images in films just as in real life.
At the present time, all of the innovations introduced by the digital era have also affected the cinema, the perception of ‘reality’ for both professional and amateur directors did not remain limited with only 24 frames, and this perception went further and different reality initiatives have been launched to adopt the possibilities provided by the new technologies in cinema. The new film production opportunities introduced by digital technology and sharing the films produced with this technology again by means of the digital media have brought an utterly different production and presentation dimension to cinema.

The developments experienced in digital communication have caused a change in the perceptions on the classical film language for the film productions as from 2000’s. The professional or amateur directors that possess the digital cinema technology have begun shaping the future of cinema by making use of these innovations and changes. Among these changes, especially the two innovations invented in 90’s and 2000’s have given rise to a radical change in the perceptions relating to the film language. The first one of these inventions is the “DV” (Digital Video) technology and the second one is the website named www.youtube.com. Thanks to the Digital Video (DV) technology, the film production process has provided an accessible environment and convenience for anyone that is interested in cinema, while “YouTube” website has provided an environment for sharing. As a result, the phases (dramatization/writing the script of an event/subject by making a story out of them, visualization, editing, etc.) of the production process of a motion-picture and the phases of delivering to/sharing with the audience these films, which are produced with the digital cinema technology, have undergone considerable changes. The major reason of this is that the film production, which was dominated by professionals until the invention of DV (Digital Video) technology, has been made available also to the amateurs thanks to DV (Digital Video) technology. Thus, the amateur filmmakers also have had the opportunity to produce low-budget films with their own budgets and to share them with audience through online websites such as YouTube and Vimeo. This freedom, introduced by the digital communication to cinema, has enabled also amateurs to produce films and; furthermore, has led the audience to appreciate these films. The possibility of amateurs to shoot low-budget films and to share them on online websites thanks to digital video (DV) technology and the ‘new film language’ used in these productions, which are both high in number and have a different language than the traditional film language that has been known so far, are of such a nature that they can shatter the rules that have been well accepted so far in the film language.

‘NEW FILM LANGUAGE’/ ‘AMATEUR VIDEO’

Opportunity of amateur filmmakers to produce low-budget films with their own budgets, to share them with audience through online websites such as YouTube and Vimeo, and the considerable appreciation of their films by viewers thanks to the availability of DV (Digital Video) technology also to amateurs require us to have good understanding of this language that we name as the ‘new film language/amateur video.’ Because, the large number of the ‘new film language’ or ‘amateur video’ examples, which are made with low budgets, have brought about a change in the viewer’s perception of reality that is presented on display/screen. Moreover, these films have given rise to the discussion of the basic information relating to Film
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Theories, Picture Composition and Aesthetics, Camera and Lighting Techniques, and Shooting and Editing Techniques that are taught in the schools of cinema. The ‘new film language’ that has been created by the amateurs making their own films by means of digital technology without implementing the editing system based on continuity has given rise to the emergence of a new and different perception of reality in consequence of shaking camera movements, low lighting, low quality images-noisy images, and jump-cuts. As a result of the fact that these low-budget films received considerable appreciation and that they managed to get a higher than expected box office return despite all of the academic and theoretical knowledge that exists in cinema, we have observed for the first time in cinema history that the ‘new film language’ is being consciously selected also by the professional filmmakers. Uploading these films that are produced with the ‘new film language’ to the digital media in a video format and the substantial increase that is observed in their rating (Wikipedia, 2014) have also encouraged the Hollywood production companies to make the films where this language is used. Actually, an interesting point draws attention here; the theoretical, technical, and aesthetical knowledge, which existed until the formation of the ‘new film language,’ was serving a method of narration to ensure the audience’s unconditional acceptance of the truth reflected on the screen. However, the movies that are now told with the ‘new film language’ have gained a place in the horror, science-fiction, and fantastic film types and themes as the hardest ones to achieve the perception of reality from the standpoint of audience. The large number of amateur filmmakers and their ability to share their film through internet and the emergence of a ‘new film language’ that is different from the generally accepted and conventional film narration language methods should not give rise to a perception that the amateur filmmakers have begun to make films for the purpose of creating a new language. The basic purpose of amateurs is to convey their stories to audiences just as all of the other film producers. But, it seems that the amateurs’ lack of knowledge in principle regarding the phases of a professional filmmaking process and regarding the professional shooting methods and techniques has lead to the use of a different language by them. This language that is used by amateurs in telling their stories has created its own perception of reality. And this perception of reality stems from the fact that the produced film can be made by the audience too, rather than the identification in the conventional film language. In other words, the attempt of an amateur to shoot a film at home with his/her own means creates a personal perception of ‘……so then it can be done.’ Consequently, this has given rise to an achievement of these films as the examples of the ‘new film language’ after attracting considerable attention in terms of ‘reality’ and persuasiveness. The professional filmmakers aimed, for the first time in the cinema history, at making use of this perception of reality by using this language and at reaching large groups and they succeeded in this. The five films, which are produced with digital cinema technologies, make great contributions to the formation of the digital film language that we name as the ‘new film language,’ have common type and language characteristics, and are successive in terms of their production years as given below, are the most typical examples of the ‘new film language’ in 2000’s. The films that are selected in this study for their common characteristics and that were discussed in the academic studies (Künuçen&Olguntürk, 2012a; Künuçen&Olguntürk, 2012b; Künuçen&Olguntürk, 2013; Künuçen&Olguntürk, 2014) prior to this study under the title of the ‘new film language’ are the films named Blair Witch Project (1999), Paranormal Activity (2007), Cloverfield (2008), and District 9.
(2009), Apollo 18 (2011). Being professional productions, these films feature the entire characteristics of the 'new narration language.' For example, trapezoid framing, shaking camera movements, low lighting, low-quality and rough images, the preference of medium and general/long shots by very infrequent use of close-up as the scale of shots, jump-cuts, sudden fade-out of the screen for a couple of seconds while the film flows, unclear background sounds, occasional unintelligibility of sound effects or dialogues, color distortions, subjective camera angle shooting for the majority of scenes, disconnections in the sequence of subject/events, inexistence of a linear flow of events, missing connections, only recording of images rather than producing them, and specially inserting the continuous scenes that leave the impression of watching the images recorded by an amateur on the daily life can be listed among the most prominent characteristics of these films. These characteristics create a different perception of reality that cannot be used in the conventional film narration language unless there is a very special goal and that is made with an understanding where the narration model refuses the technical and aesthetical facts.

In a film that is made with the traditional film narration language, the visuality means the existence of an intelligible narration model that has beginning and end. The visuality is the visualization of an event/subject. For this, certain technical and aesthetical narrations methods can be preferred. The events are apparent and although there are surrealist compulsions depending on the types, there is a harmony and time limitations in the flow of events. There are main characters and the development of main and secondary characters determine the development throughout the film. Time and space are linear. This status basically contains a literary narration that follows a certain storyline just as a novel and story and that follows a certain developmental flow starting from a certain point. The logic behind the use of technical equipment always aims at positively supporting the visuality and reality of the story in terms of quality. Unclear images, rough and trapezoid-disproportional frames, a scale of shot outside the generally accepted scales, and the imperceptible images that are subject to color distortion are never used. Every image is created in line with the picture composition and composition rules and the random composition is not even a matter of discussion. Each successive image during the picturization has the aim of serving the whole film.

At this stage, it is observed that this information leads to a comparison if the ever-increasing opportunities offered by the developing digital communication technology increases the perception of reality in films or not. However, the global cinema industry’s big producers that possess the digital cinema technology and the professional directors that use this technology as the basis of their films are also now making efforts to deliver a more realistic cinema experience to the modern audience by using the higher shooting values (48 fps and 60 fps) offered by this technology. The most important point that needs to be emphasized on this revolutionary ‘new film language’ that has been created by amateur filmmakers is the fact that the recorded images are shared thanks to the digital media. These images have not been produced, but recorded and there is a reality that is created by leaving the instantaneous impression. This impression is dominant even in the images that are systematically and consciously produced by professionals.
CONCLUSION

Based on the insight that the way/method preferred when conveying a subject to audience in cinema as a visual communication type requires also the practice of considering the way of presentation and the content together, in this study, we tried to present and discuss how this affects the process in cinema when the modern digital communication technology comes into question. We observe that just as what happened to the art of painting upon the emergence of cinema as an art is happening to cinema now. And it has become necessary to consider not only the arts of painting and photograph, which serve as the basis of cinema, but also the art of cinema as an outdated technological production due to the new technologies.

In conclusion, we are witnessing that the means of digital communication or digital image outpace the art of cinema. And it is beyond doubt that this is the result of the technological developments. As we have already mentioned in this study, the art of cinema has been in close relation with technology from the very beginning and technology is providing the structure of cinema as a language with new means of expression in every period. We are of the opinion that it will be more advisable to focus on the opportunities created by this situation for cinema artists rather than debating if digitalization has been good or not in this sense.

In this study, we focused on the innovation and change experienced in the scientific process and content especially in cinematic production within the scope of digital communication applications. Thus, we tried to focus on developing a better understanding for the ever expanding digital world by drawing attention to the fact that the digital cinema field is creating a new world with its own dynamics.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


