

How to use ,film' language – Modeltexts

Analysis of a short video clip (1) – Two rap musicians

A sequence of camera shots has to help express the ideas of the film-maker and the speakers. In this clip we open with an establishing shot – a shot which shows us the general situation, where we are, who we are meeting, and what they are doing. This is a medium long shot of Kurtis and Davy as they start their performance.

Then, as Kurtis introduces Davy and his skills with the words “Check ‘em out”, the camera cuts to a close-up of Davy with his headphones on, and then to another close-up of his hands at work on the record decks. From there, the camera moves in further for extreme close-ups of Davy’s ‘quick-mix’ work. As Kurtis starts to rap itself, the camera cuts back to a medium long shot of the two men again, performing together as a team.

Analysis of a news report on a tornado

This local news report shows a large tornado and the terrible damage that it is causing. The film is made up of a series of aerial shots taken from the open door of a helicopter. Of course, as it is too dangerous to take close-ups of a tornado, the reporter can only use extreme long shots filmed from a distance with a hand-held camcorder. Although this means that there are none of the dramatic film techniques that we know from Hollywood disaster films like *Twister*, in fact the simple, almost amateurish camera work adds to the sense of real-life drama felt by the viewer.

Analysis of a short video clip (2) – Aboriginal Australia

The clip divides into two sections. The first part is a rather formal introduction to the story and ideas of the Dreamtime. The second part is an intimate interview with an Aborigine. In this, he explains his personal beliefs about Dreamtime – and his fears, too. The camera closely supports the two different ways of talking about the Dreamtime.

In the first section, there is a sequence of aerial shots that show us features of the vast Australian landscape as the voice-over describes how they were formed in the Dreamtime. For example, the camera tracks a winding river as we hear that it was created by the path of a snake. The soundtrack of traditional Aboriginal music adds a sense of mystery to the pictures of strange landscape features.

In the second section, the camera views the sitting Aborigine using a steady straight-on angle. The camera is about two metres in front of him, so we have a full shot of him and his hands on the ground as he uses them to explain the power in the land. The camera is positioned at his eye level, so we feel that we are sitting with him on the ground as we learn from him. We remain like this for the rest of the clip except when, just once, the camera cuts to a close-up of the man’s hands expressing the forces that are in the land.

Analysis of a TV commentary – religion

The voice-over commentary tells us about the TV evangelists’ wish for air time in the UK as we see an extreme long shot of a huge crowd of Swaggart’s supporters. The camera pans to and fro, following Swaggart as he works the crowd, cutting then to a close up of one of his excited supporters.

We start with an aerial shot into a stadium with Swaggart and his choir at its centre, leading his supporters in a hymn. This view dissolves, to be replaced by a full shot of Swaggart, still leading the singing. In turn, this shot fades out to a reaction shot of Swaggart at the piano and a small group of members behind him.