"Basic Cinematography for Animation"

Pre – Requisites: Read "On Directing Film" by David Mamet, read "Cinematography" course pack, watch "Visual Storytelling"

<u>The Big Idea</u>
   We want to construct a visual language that 1) communicates to the audience and 2) heightens the sense of dramatic tension evident in the story material (this applies to Comedy as well as Tragedy)

   THE TWO SHOT SEQUENCE: almost any scene-sized dramatic idea can be *communicated* in TWO SHOTS.

   a. SHOT 1: "Master" shot (aka "Establishing" shot); this "establishes" the spatial *relationship* between the characters and the *geography* of the scene; in this case, it comprises almost the entire screen-time of the scene in question;

   b. SHOT 2: "Close Up" (CU) shot; this is reserved for the *key reaction* of the scene. To problem-solve this, we ask ourselves two questions:
      i. "What dramatic beat does this scene build to?" The answer to this question tells us *at what point in time* we need a CU;
      ii. "From whose point-of-view (POV) do we experience this beat from?" The answer to this question tells us whose action and/or reaction we need to capture at that moment.

   With these two shots we can ensure that we will at least keep the audience abreast of the story's movement. Whether or not we entertain them, however, is another matter.

   <u>EXAMPLES[*]</u>:
      a. Kings – "Ruining Solitaire's Cards" Sequence
      b. Threads – "Mei finds dead Oyon" Sequence

   THE FIVE SHOT SEQUENCE: this is the foundation of any good director and cinematographer's approach to

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[*] It is difficult to find examples of the Two Shot Sequence because most filmmakers avoid this method of scene construction, especially in animation.

dramatically telling a visual story. They may embellish this paradigm or add flourishes, but for the last century, the Five Shot Sequence is how nearly every competent filmmaker has approached the building of a scene. For our purposes, we will limit the visual language of this sequence to five simple shots.

   a. SHOT 1: the Master

   b. SHOT 2: "Over-the-Shoulder" (OTS); camera adopts a partial POV of Character A by looking over her shoulder *at* Character B. This is Character B's shot, as it is his face we will be focused on;

   c. SHOT 3: "Reverse OTS" (Reverse); the reverse of the previous shot: looks over Character B's shoulder *at* Character A;

   d. SHOT 4: CU of *key reaction*;

   e. SHOT 5: "Insert" (aka "Cutaway"); an inserted shot of the *key object* or *key image* of the scene; e.g. the killer's knife; the blood-stains on the boot; the philanderer's wedding ring; etc. Generally precedes or immediately follows *key reaction*;

With these five shots we not only ensure that the story communicates, but that it communicates *visually* and *dramatically*. We are able to bring the audience close to the performances, and tell them where to look and when (e.g. "Blood-stains?! Oh no! He's the killer! But will she see it in time?! OMG she does!!!" etc.)

PROFESSIONAL EXAMPLES:
   a. The Incredibles – "Insurance Office Sequence"
   b. Finding Nemo – "Mt. Wanahakalooghi Sequence"

STUDENT EXAMPLES:
   a. Kings – "Conflict" Sequence (partial)
   b. Threads – "No More Medicine" Sequence

APPLICATION: The examples in the following sequences were taken from the original drafts of your stories. It will be part of your assignment to take into account how your stories have developed since these original drafts, and to apply that interpretation to the methodology I illustrate in the below:

1. The Two Shot Sequence:
   a. Using Step 3 from "Pie a la Bang", illustrate the two shots that would *communicate* this plot point. To start off, you will need to include the following information: "one year", "his friends", "him", "Fourth of July BBQ", and the *key action* "to convince".
      i. *Master*: Where do you want to frame this shot from? How wide or far away do you want it to be? And who is important to include in it? Bear in mind that this shot will likely require several boards to render a series of actions.
      ii. *Close-up*: Who does this scene belong to? The Chef? Or one of the Chef's Friends? And from where should this person be framed? And *at what point* in the action of the scene, should this shot occur?
   b. Using Step 3 from "The Fish Who Followed", illustrate the two shots that would *communicate* this plot point. To start off, you will need to include the following information: "one day", "the school", "a fish from the school", "the loner fish", "decided" is important but not visual so you will you have to resolve how to *show* this, and the *key action* "to invite".
      i. *Master*: Where do you want to frame this shot from? How wide or far away do you want it to be? And who is important to include in it? Bear in mind that this shot will likely require several boards to render a series of actions.
      ii. *Close-up*: Who does this scene belong to? The Loner Fish? Or the other Fish? And from where should this fish be framed? And *at what point* in the action of the scene should this shot occur?

2. The Five Shot Sequence: Note that none of the work you did for the two shots in the previous exercise need be thrown out. You may excise a few boards for those actions you decide to cover in the OTS or Insert shots, but by and large there is no wasted work.

a. Again, using Step 3 from "Pie a la Bang", illustrate the *additional three shots* needed to dramatically flesh-out the visual language of this scene.
   i. *Over-the-Shoulder (1)*: "Whose scene is this?" generally answers the first OTS query.
      • For example, if we assume this to be the Chef's scene, then this would be his action/reaction.
   ii. *Over-the-Shoulder (2)*: "Who is reacting to the primary character?" answers the second OTS query.
      • For example, if we assume this to be the Chef's scene, then perhaps this is when the friend propositions the Chef.
   iii. *Insert*: what is the *key object* or *key action* of this scene?
      • The *key object* of this scene might be a calendar or a particularly large stockpile of fireworks -- or something else that you find to be the critical object or action-beat.
b. Again, using Step 3 from "The Fish Who Followed", illustrate the *additional three shots* needed to dramatically flesh-out the visual language of this scene.
   i. *Over-the-Shoulder (1)*: "Whose scene is this?" generally answers the first OTS query.
      • For example, if we assume this to be the Loner Fish's scene, then this would be his action/reaction.
   ii. *Over-the-Shoulder (2)*: "Who is reacting to the primary character?" answers the second OTS query.
      • For example, if we assume this to be the Loner Fish's scene, then perhaps this is when the other Fish notices the Loner Fish.
   iii. *Insert*: what is the *key object* or *key action* of this scene?
      • The *key action* of this scene might be when the other Fish waves the Loner Fish over to the school. Note: common sense dictates that

since they are fish, we assume
                              them to not be carrying or using
                              "objects"; we can then rule out
                              there being a *key object*.

<u>Disclaimer</u>
        Understand that the power of the visual medium of film
(comics fall under this to an extent as well) is the
malleability of its foundational concepts. The order and
the exact details of each of the shots described here may
not always meet the needs of the story. And it is your job
as film-artists/animators/storytellers to understand this
distinction and adjust accordingly. Always ask yourself,
"How can I make this shot, or these two shots, or this
sequence, or these sequences -- more compelling, more
exciting, more suspenseful, etc." Always *ask* that. But at
the end of the day, always *remember* that your ideas must be
subservient to the story.

Once more, with feeling…

BE A SLAVE TO YOUR STORY AND YOU WILL BE ITS MASTER.