Narration Effectivity with Artificial One Shot Cinema Using Michotte's Focal Point Framework in "Dungeons & Dragons: Honour Among Thieves"

Naldo Yanuar[1]

[1] School of Design, Universitas Pelita Harapan, Jl. M. H. Thamrin Boulevard 1100 Lippo Village Tangerang 15811, Indonesia
Naldo.Heryanto@uph.edu

Abstract. The article will interpret how narration of time depicted in a story scene can be effectively wrapped in a single take or one shot cinema based on the study case of Doric's escape scene in 2023's film title "Dungeons & Dragons: Honour Among Thieves" directed by the filmmakers Jonathan Goldstein and John Francis Daley, Cinematographed by Barry Peterson. With the evolution of cinema languages in old to modern movies, traditionals, such as cut-to-cut editing, pose challenges which takes longer screentime to tell the whole scene, including describing the character's ability, bringing out the film's vibe, and other functionality of story expositions which practically can be converted in this shorter one shot. Using the sequential focal point method called Michotte's principles, a narration of time will be explained with the objectives that it can become an effective solution by analyzing the examples from this movie scene. The scene was selected based on the findings and synchronizations for further innovation and development research through artificial continuous shot in motion picture evolutions which worked with the Michotte's movement framework.

Keywords: One Shot Cinema, Michotte, Single Take, Effectiveness, Dungeons & Dragons.

1   Introduction

Many of us will consider movie as not only a medium for entertainment, but also a form of art and aesthetic as an expression from the filmaker's views, visions and perspectives, which all of them are arranged in various mise en scene's intrepretation. This works as an instrument to put all those elements of form together to communicate the feeling and messages or the so called essential interpretation as mentioned by Youngblood [1]. We will call this shortly as "purphoses" of the film and media asides from improvisational aspects that sometimes occurred in the filmmaking as mentioned by Mouellic [2]. A good media communication in general can deliver its purphoses with the basic principles of clarity and concision. While the vibe's and audience's feeling can be build along through the pacing in the film itself, this is where effectivity in storytelling through the film scene's takes major part. A story can be build with slow pacing to depict informative plot and hit dramatic momentum of tension. This also can deliver a sense of presence together between audiences with the story characters. This

part requires camera shot and movement in today's film narrative where it is critical and stimulating for viewer to see from a unique point of view inside the camera frame as mentioned by Hart [3].

Contradicts with fast pacing, a longer story can feel continuously short to deliver certain needed information and other type of set up to give the audiences feel of excitements and evoking suspense. Other than that, effective short duration can be useful for film production which mostly required in action genre to tell a story in single scene. Or another use for a jumping narrative to conclude multiple scenes into one. To describe the use of effectivity in film narration, the storytelling can be represented by one example of supporting element, designed in a dialog during the scriptwriting to screenwriting phase. This dialogues comes from the novel adaptation called The Power by Naomi Alderman. On the story scene of a conversation between Allie, Kyle and Hunter. In this world, all women have the ability to control and generate electricity. In this scene, Kyle and Hunter is a boy, Allie is a girl who used her power to light her cigarette. Kyle says: "Heard a bunch of guys killed a girl in Nebraska last week for doing that." Allie answered : "For Smoking? Harsh". Hunter says: "Half the Kids in school know you can do it". Allie responds: "So What?". Hunter says: "Your dad could use you in his factory. Save money on electricity." Allie says: "He's not my dad". The conversation is very simple because Alderman uses exposition approach. The short conversation actually conveys a lot to interpret.

The information about Allie's personality and her situation right now, also surrounding circumstances elsewhere about the law that punishes the woman who mis-used their power. That's why Allie is expected to feel ashamed and stay low. But we know from the dialogues that Allie don't really care. Her father is a successful businessman with complex relationship with her. This dialog is a smart design of conversation to put everything that could be cliché into one scene of exposition all at once where audiences can learn and feel about it because there is a subtext involved as stated in Binder [4]. It effectively saves times naturally where Allie should explain to the audiences about her background story. Another effectivity case of example is in matter of visual this time, in Black Panther (2018) scene, there's an establishing shot in the town where Klaw has been held captive for an interrogation, the location was the headquarter for agent Ross and the scene was also to expose how the diplomacy between Wakanda represented by T'Challa and Okoye with S.H.I.E.L.D resides in the early stages of the story. Until the plot got twisted during the interrogation, Killmonger comes destroying the office wall and managed to rescues Klaw. Now here's what happened, the audience already have the cue planted as a setting before it pays off as a twist, because we already got the hint from the beginning of the establishing shot around the town as mentioned by Heiderich [5]. This is also considered as an all in one storytelling effectivity in a single scene where it represented by the white van driven down the lane during the establishing shot.

Audiences never know it was a setting up and consider it was just an opening to introduce the location town where the interrogation happened in the first place, until later it was exposed that the white van is the rescuing vehicles for Killmonger. This kind of effectiveness which not founded in the old technique of classical storytelling, really worked in a fast pacing scenes mostly in action genres to reduce the duration, and yet still gives rich information to the spectators. They all serves the purpose and

function of effectivity in narration and storytelling with available film artistic elements and forms. Whether to compress the narrative naturally, sending the vibe and feel for the audience, and establishing or assembling up continued setting and pay-off as mentioned by Reisz [6]. In order to gives clearer story expositions, during in the old classic way of film techniques, the story expositions have to be separated and put in a sequential editing which takes more screen duration. But with today's evolving techniques, they are more possible to be shortened and even gives multi-purpose additional aesthetics. There are many method and techniques including a single take with an editing to deliver more effectivity in film storytelling.

One shot cinema or a single take in filming is one of the effective way to tell a story with a real time vibe and feel for the audience to be immersed with the story. Camera movement involved in this one shot is to create broadened open spaces according to Monahan [7]. This technique was known in the past using a moving camera plane to follow a certain subject or object as the scene of story unfold without doing any cut or change of camera shot, although the camera shot can be changed within the movement transition with no cut taken. This kind of shot requires creativity relying on the director's and producers influences on the take or editing later as stated by Dmytryk [8]. One of the popular example is from Orson Wells with his mobile camera on one shot movie opening called "Touch of Evil (1958)", as mentioned by Giannetti [9] where it was first subjected to the exposition of ticking time bomb hidden in a car baggage together and ended with the character's introduction effectively in a real time sensation, without moving on from the first subject. In today's modern cinema, this one single take can be made with the involvement of video editing, visual FX, and invisible cut.

This kind of method can be acknowledged as an artificial one single take, because along the scene there are no camera cut taken or at least what the appearance looked like. The invisible cut can be transitioned with editing during the close up transition like in the "1917" (2019) by Sam Mendes or "Irreversible" (2002) by Gaspar Noe. More advanced editing with visual FX can be found in action genres such "Extraction", "Extraction 2", "Carter", "One Shot", "John Wick" and many of others includes Marvel movie franchises. The more advanced the editing, the more invisible the hidden cut takes places during in the making, process of behind the scene. It can be creatively hidden with a subject exchange, object exchange, with a blurry effect on foreground or background, with a zoom out or zoom in effect which can also cause a speed of rhythm in pacing as mentioned by Hullfish [10] or any other possibilities. It was almost undetected between the notably actual one-shot and the edited to appear to be a one-shot, but their purposes serves the same goal, that is delivering the required necessary informational story narration with the immersed real time experience to the spectator effectively.

2   Methodology

In some action scene cases, they mostly wanted to emphasize the moment by moment of action from a hero in a scene. But in further discussion, we will analyze using literature study with the one of the oldest Michotte's Psychology of Movement theory [11] as a medium of storytelling in the study cases of one shot cinema. Albert Michotte was famous for his optical disc experiments to observe how human can perceive causal relation with visual movement by only using basic elementary perceptions without rational reflection. Michotte simply represents focal point with a square, dot or a rotating disc in his experiment of visual psychology to mark the identity of a moving objects which have the similar consistency to interpret something [11]. The movement can be independent, similar direction but unitary. And as a whole, they convey a story or meaning for the audience to be processed because every interactions brings out causal effect to the overall frame, that is a story in the case of a movie scene. As mentioned earlier, our eye as the spectator works with the camera movement while focusing on the subject or objects displayed during the single take. The exchange of a subject in the foreground or the environment or another subject and object in the background are the ones that filling our gap of perception to translate whats happening in the single take scene (the same as Michotte's theory). This is where the story unfolds effectively. In the main study case, the article will discuss one of the creative one shot cinema from Doric's Escape Scene in "Dungeons & Dragons: Honour Among Thieves" released in March 29th, 2023 by Latcham-Goldner-Meyer and Paramount Pictures. Directed by John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein, the movie was a live action adaptation from the Dungeons & Dragons franchises, starred by Chris Pine, Michelle Rodriguez, Hugh Grant, and Bradley Cooper [12].

The character Doric was performed by Sophia Lillis. The major plot was the group of thieves' band together in adventurous journey to retrieves an old relic and their clashes with the opposing antagonists. In one of the scene, will be later known as the Doric's escape scene. Doric is one of the characters who have the ability to shape shifting into different kind of animal depending on the situation. Doric herself is not a complete human in the story, she is a halfling or a thief druid adapted from the fantasy from the Forgotten Realm. In this scene, the enemy witch Sofina finding out and uncover the presence of spying Doric inside the castle, therefore Doric must flee immediately before being taken captive. The challenge quite simple, can the story be narrated in a single take action scene effectively where it must expose not only what is going on, but also the emphasize on the struggles, the tension, and more of the story exposition naturally without cutting out the real time immersion. Without the realization to look at everything at once, those perceptions are already embedded within the used method. So the overall research process includes the first phase of literature study which adapting the Michotte's framework [11] into a film study cases. This framework uses focal point of perception which plays a major role in a movement, in this cases especially moving picture media such film.

The next second phase is collecting all the necessary data such the study case of the Doric's Scene content in the movie title along with the supporting content examples. This scene and this movie is chosen based on the one of the fresh states of the year

2023's examples in how to put all story expositions into one effective single take. The third phase synchronizes the framework or the key theory which is Michotte's framework for the study case [11], and finaly the conclusion resolved in the fourth last phase of the analysis result.

```
┌─────────────┐   ┌─────────────┐   ┌─────────────┐   ┌─────────────┐
│ LITERATURE  │ → │ DATA        │ → │ ANALYSIS    │ → │ RESEARCH    │
│ STUDY       │   │ COLLECTING  │   │             │   │ CONCLUSION  │
└─────────────┘   └─────────────┘   └─────────────┘   └─────────────┘
```

Fig. 1. Research Strategy Graphic (Source: Personal Documentation 2023).

3   Result

To make an emphasized statement about the result analysis with Doric's scene, the similar scenes used as comparison are scenes from featured animation "Nimona (2023)" and tv series scene "Titans season 4 episode 9 (2023)" where the character serves a shape-shifting ability delivered in two single take. In Nimona's Scene, the exposition of the character's ability while escaping is clear enough in real time, but the one shot is not enough to reveal all of her shape-shifting forms. That's why dialogue of conversation is added on this scene to help introducing her ability to the audiences while doing the one shot scene. This scene also did not focus on the environmental of the castle, because it does not serve any purposes later on throughout the story. In other comparison, Garr the Beast Boy in Titans series make a short entrance to the enemy warehouse with two single take, where it exposes his ability to shape-shift together with his fellow superhero fighting the band of military figures. The camera movement are softer with simple invisible zoom-in cut during the transformation, after that the camera just simply follows Garr action. Therefore, this two in one shot scene only serves the focuses on the action and assault while exposing hero ability to shape-shift. But in the Doric's scene, the purposes are complex.

The overall narration is Sofina the witch discovers a spy among them in the meeting room. She got angry and points out the spy is a fly which it runs immediately avoiding the witch's lightning bolt. The fly escapes into a hatch the connected to the livestock room and reveal that the fly now shape-shifting into a rat making a hideout inside an armor. Within the same time, guards are shown already doing a hunt for this spy which turns out to be Doric as soon as she transformed back into a halfling human form the inside of the armor trying to make a walk out of the room. But until later one of the guard suspect her, followed by many of other guards, they are exposed as low intellectual beings compared to Doric. Shown by their failure of grabbing the rat, collapsing down on the stairs trying to catch Doric and forcing her to shape shift again into a rat only to confirm that yes the fly and the rat is the same Doric who descended into prison lair. Continuing with stepping on the skeleton head to expose another threatening moment how dangerous and mean the situation is, which also describing the prison situation of the castle and jump out from the window still in the rat form. This exposes the

outer environment of the castle after we know some of the inner castle, and Doric now transformed into an eagle after hitting one of the castle outer pole making an adjustment in her fall avoiding arrows. This action also shows how quick her reflect is to decide her next transformation, by this time we all know that more guards are aware what Doric's ability is (so it won't be necessary to be mentioned again in other scene).

Doric hits a castle flag and dropped down into a civilian's house ceiling as a cat, where the civilians witness the cat walks calmly transformed back into Doric's original form. Now she's getting out of the house taking a cloak nearby to conceal her identity while revealing the outer environment for the final scene later in the castle market (it will not need to be exposed again in other scene). This gives another anti-climax how Doric might be done her reassured escapade, but the scene is not done yet. The chasing still going, Doric found a flock of the Axe beak Birds, and it gives her the idea to shape-shift and tag along with the flocks. This exposition gives another information how Doric can transformed not only in the form of normal animals, but also realm animals in the story, because the Axe beak Bird categorized as a fantasy animal in world of Dungeons & Dragons, just like how she is able to transform to Owl bear later on the story. During this time, Sofina the witch already nearby and suspects one bird in the flock by casting a bolt on one of the bird.

Surprised by the attack, Doric finally make another run in deer form with another exposition of Sofina's ability in fog teleportation trying to stop Doric, who finally got away passing through the castle gate in correct timing. The whole scene from the fly in the meeting room through the deer escaping the castle gate is designed with only one artificial single take and consumes around two minutes and twenty seconds of duration more or less to narrate all of the story's scene with a focus on the subject movement and perception.

4   Discussion

The psychology of movement resolves around the subject in the oneshot scene who is Doric herself as the main subject on the frames of the camera range (will be marked with a red dot). Some of the dot (refer as subject on the frame) leaves the frame for couple of seconds to plant the closures later in the ongoing scene or for further story development later in the next scenes. In further analysis, it was also discovered that direct shape-shifting does happened which is the fly to rat transformation, rat to eagle transformation, eagle to cat, and beak bird to deer transformation. But we never saw in the shot about the other transformation that involves her morphing back to her original form. Yet, we still have a full closure they are all the same character in the story in the sequences.

The effectiveness does happen without the feel of limitation to the storytelling in the scene, because viewer's eye, are directed to the focus on the dot also known as the main subject of character who act her way to escape while revealing many exposition in the background in order to pack the "needed to be delivered" additional information, while real time action still counting down. If this scene were not taken with artificial one shot, then the possible alternatives will be done with a classical approach of editing with cut-to-cut or another creative transitions which of course brings out a different set of goals to presents whether it is in a series of jump cut for a quick delivery of multiple sequences, probably a fast pacing montages, or even the same one shot, but with practical non artificial approach such a single take, but with a consistent long shot which might defeat the purpose of some direct Doric's transformation aesthetic phase. The other goal such slow burn pace would not be a perfect purpose for this kind of action scenes, therefore those alternatives might also not be more effective than the existing study case.
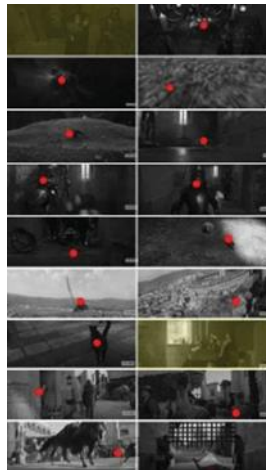
Fig. 2. Michotte's method on Doric's Escape Scene (Source: Personal Documentation)

5   Conclusion

This summarizes how Michotte's framework of movement [11] can be worked together along one shot cinema especially with artificial editing and visual fx to effectively narrate a story in an action scene while serving all in one complex functions of exposition, settings and suspense to the viewers. The narration of time still gives real time feeling to the viewers since it keeps rolling without any cut (at least the cut is hidden in creative transitions), although in reality the action in the scenes might not be possible to reconstructed only in two minutes' duration more and less. The Michotte's method [11] can also be used for media designer, video editor or film director to create a one shot cinema producing a creative scene that effectively tells a lot of expositional story information. It does not need to be a single dot movement, but can be using a multiple dots which works like a relay courier switching from one focus to another focus in partial order as

long as it maintain the closure consistently. Even improvisation can be happened with a combination of moments when the dot leaves the frame and yet the camera is still going active in passive aggressive behavior. This method also can be organized for project's team discussion about setting up the movement with the dots before the interpretation of the scene in the story developed further on, or synchronized if the story already done before or after completing the storyboard.

References

1. Youngblood, G.: Expanded Cinema: Fiftieth Anniversary Edition (Meaning Systems). Fordham University Press (2020)
2. Mouellic, G.: Improvising Cinema (Film Culture in Transition). Amsterdam University Press (2013)
3. Hart, J.: The Art of the Storyboard: A Filmmaker's Introduction Second Edition. Routledge (2013)
4. Studio Binder.: Irony Explained - The Ultimate Guide for Storytellers. https://www.studio-binder.com/blog/e-books/what-is-irony-explained-ebook/ (2022)
5. Heiderich, T.: Cinematography Techniques: The Different Types of Shots in Film. Videomaker (2013)
6. Reisz, K., Millar, G.: Technique of Film Editing, Reissue of 2nd Edition. Routledge (2017)
7. Monahan, D., Barsam, R.: Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film. W.W.Norton & Company (2021)
8. Dmytryk, E.: On Film Editing an Introduction to the Art of Film Construction. Local Press (2018)
9. Giannetti, L.: Understanding Movies; The Fourteenth Edition. Pearson (2017)
10. Hullfish, S.: Art of the Cut: Conversations with Film and TV Editors. Routledge (2017)
11. Michotte, A.: The Perception of Causality (Psychology Library Editions: Perception Book 21). Routledge (2017)
12. Cinemas Limited.: Dungeons & Dragons [Movie Release Date, Trailer, Story, Dragons & Everything Else to Know about the First DND Movie That Matters]. Retrieved from https://www.odeon.co.uk/odeon-scene/dungeons-and-dragons-movie/ (2023)
13. Ghosh, A.: Analysis of Single-Shot and Long-Take Filmmaking: Its Evolution, Technique, Mise-en-scene, and Impact on the Viewer. Techno India University (2022)
14. Pearlman, K.: Editing and Cognition beyond Continuity. Macquarie University (2017)
15. Schroeppel, T.: The Bare Bones Camera Course for Film and Video. Allworth (2015)