

The Only Negative Side to Film are the (Tangible) Negatives

The standard of cinema has changed due to the fact that the medium of film is rarely used in the industry today; this will put additional pressure on the notion of the director as singular auteur, leaving room for more informed conversations about the nature of collaboration and about the various aesthetic effects that collaborative work can produce. The first time film was ever used was in 1878 and has been the primary format for approximately 128 years. The first movie to ever be shot exclusively digitally was David Fincher's 2007 movie *Zodiac*; ever since, more productions have been shooting digitally until it became the primary medium and film became a lost art for which auteurs have to fight to use it. We are losing the classic method because newer technology is coming out; would you want a landline - a device that has reached its maximum potential, or the latest iPhone 12 with endless possibilities? Film is the same. It has maxed out on its performance capabilities, and even though its capabilities are magnificent, humanity is taught never to be satisfied. It is not that there's anything wrong with film, it is just that humans are designed to want more and that is what the digital medium provides for us. George Lucas is known for being an innovator in the industry; he was one of the first to shoot digitally when he used it on *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* and declared the rest of the films in the series would also be shot entirely in a digital format. He backed this up by saying "Film is a 19th century invention. We are at the top of the photochemical process. This is about as far as it's ever going to go." (*Side by Side*). But there are many people in the industry that would disagree with the legend such as his own compatriot, the cinematographer from *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace*, David Tattersall. Taterstall asks the general filmmaker

“Why are you going backwards? There's a lot to be said about the necessity to kind of lean back in order to spring forward.” (*Side by Side*). There are many industry professionals who still believe in the art of shooting on film and will continue to urge others to do the same because they know the enormous power it holds. The people who push this effort are among the few auteurs remaining in the industry; these are the people who know how to base a film around emotion and complete immersion into an alternate dream world. They do not care about the money they would make back, they do not care if they have an audience for the film, they do not make the film for the masses. They make it for themselves and others like them because they truly love cinema and want it to reflect in their art; they do not do it to prove something or to make money. The recent conversion from shooting movies on film to a digital format has altered cinema as a whole because it reduces auteurism in exchange for money.

When asked to name legends of the industry, we typically say Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Wells, François Truffaut, Stanley Kubrick and others by name and by their reputations' as auteurs because they have a “recognizable, recurring themes and visual queues that inform the audience who the director is and shows a consistent artistic identity throughout that director's filmography.” (Indie Film Hustle). When we try to name modern day auteurs, it becomes much harder to think of names. You may say Steven Spielberg, Quentin Tarantino, or Christopher Nolan; one thing all of these captains of industry have in common is that they refuse to shoot their movies on anything other than film. Spielberg has outwardly stated their opinions of the subject when he declares that he “...will continue to shoot his movies on film as long as it is physically possible to do so, and Tarantino has gone as far as suggesting that the pressure to make and exhibit films digitally may drive him to an early retirement.” (Beach 229). When asked

to back up their claims, they respond with the same retort every other virtuoso would: film adds more emotion and rawness to the picture. It allows each frame to be its own unreplicable masterpiece.

It is rare to find an auteur making a blockbuster today; most of them stay in their natural habitat known as independent movies or 'indies'. Thomas Price, an independent filmmaker himself who writes for the New York Times proclaims

“To say I love indie movies is to say that I love art. It is to say that I love passion and creativity. For me, indie films represent all that is good about filmmaking and all that is good about people. They are the home for those who tell stories and take risks, while being unashamed in their approach and allowing themselves to care about their work beyond its monetary value.”

With money behind a film, there are executives who are too concerned with how their money is being spent and if they will make it back. In indies, where there is hardly any money, there is a vast amount of room to play around with creative style and experiment. These filmmakers are the true auteurs because they have the freedom to do whatever they want. Having been in the first-hand position of fighting executives for creative freedom, Thomas Price knows that

“when filmmakers aren't tethered by dollar-centric studio demands and the pressure to sell to as many demographics as possible, they have the ability to make anything their minds desire. Without these obligations, filmmakers are afforded the freedom to tell stories precisely how they are meant to be told.”

That creative freedom is typically synonymous with shooting in a film format. Indies are known for capturing extreme emotion that may not be suitable for all audiences; the same purpose as

film. Indie filmmakers are so consumed with passion to fulfill emotion and they will do whatever it takes to transfer the sensation to the viewer. They are the ones who want to create art, those who want to tell stories that add to the human experience; they produce visual poetry and show moments of honest and unflinching emotion.

Digital filmmaking has been a huge contributor to the downfall of auteur filmmaking. One major foe of filmmaking is the need to outdo what has been done. People need more pixels, more effects, and less authenticity. The majority of movies in theaters today use computer generated imagery (CGI) and are shot on a solid green background; thus eliminating authentic creativity and exploration of the visual artistic style. The role of the cinematographer becomes increasingly limited because

“Digital intermediate liberates cinematographers and their crews from having to produce a perfectly photographed film during shooting. This freedom, however, is something of a double-edged sword for cinematographers: while it gives greater latitude in terms of weather and other shooting conditions, it also takes away at least some of the control the cinematographer has traditionally exercised over the film’s visual style. Aspects of the cinematographer’s craft such as the choice of lighting and of cameras, lenses, and filters will continue to be important in the production of digitally made films, but they will matter somewhat less than they did in the production of celluloid films.” (Beach 223)

Part of the heart and beauty of cinema is the aesthetic and it becomes increasingly lessened as we transfer to video formatting; film as a medium is overtly necessary in order to maintain the charm of the exquisite art form. The job of the cinematographer is harder when using film which Peter Kiwitt, a professor teaching at the film school in the University of Illinois, acknowledges when

he describes the complexities to shooting on celluloid like having the potential for opposition because producers and creative heads are constantly having to argue over art vs. money. (peter) This is an ongoing battle that every creative has to fight. Even legends like Christopher Nolan and Martin Scorsese are forced to justify their decision to shoot on celluloid. (*Side by Side*). It is always the same people fighting for the same sides: creatives fight for the use of celluloid while business executives argue that digital is the way to go. Film as we know it will die as newer alternatives emerge.

With that said, the technology of celluloid has maxed out. Digital cameras are constantly improving and will continue to do so as we have just started the exploration of this new technology. We already know everything we need to know about film, but that is why some visual stylists feel more comfortable using it; they feel as though they can rely on it to look better than something shot digitally ever could (Christopher Nolan). Captain of industry, such as cinematographer Wally Pfister who has collaborated with Nolan on several of his films, finds it much more difficult to work with video. He identifies a number of problems with the industry's shift to digital capture. Such as

“... digital capture [is] less reliable than film— especially for shots involving stunts, high-speed filming, or extreme light conditions—but it also lacks the characteristic qualities that have always marked film as an enduringly successful visual medium. “Film has this organic softness,” says Pfister, “plus the contrast to be able to handle the subtleties of scenes that are lit with candlelight or firelight.” (Beach 230)

Newbies in the industry would disagree with his statement about reliability because when you shoot on film, there is always the chance that it will be exposed, mislabeled, or simply not turn

out right. With digital, you know immediately if something went wrong and you can reshoot it in that moment or a day later. With film, you would have to wait for it to be developed before you could watch to see if you need to do reshoots. The process of the director and cinematographer sitting down to review footage they shot that day is called watching dailies. One of the main reasons people prefer digital formatting is because according to Keanu Reeves, “unlike film cameras, you don't have to wait a day to see what you've captured. They're no longer dailies, they're immediatelies.” (*Side by Side*). But as a director who has with both mediums, Martin Scorsese counters Keanu Reeves’s claim by saying “The problem for me is that I still think you need to see rushes later in order to concentrate with the performances or just the movement. I still think you need to see them at a special time.” (*Side by Side*). There are filmmakers out there who are more than willing to jump at the chance to work on film, but sadly, there are not enough for it is a dying field.

It is no secret that in recent years the film industry has been operated by those who have money rather than those who have a creative vision. The industry nowadays is all about money; who puts in the most, who brings the most, and how to have an audience so the film can make money. Back in the days of prime time cinema, 1920’s-1980’s arguably when new quality content was constantly being released, people went to go see movies not for the production value, but because they wanted to see a unique cinematic story to vicariously live a life that is not their own. Paul Bischoff of Medium.com uses statistics to show auteur films received higher ratings than sequels that were made for the sole purpose of bringing in more money. Similarly, Matthew Garrahan, a writer for *The Financial Times* argues people go to see sequels because they loved the first one, meaning, the productions make more money and ultimately do better

because they already have an established audience. But, he agrees with Bischoff that it is killing the industry because it is sucking the art right out of it. Indie films are the closest we get to true art in this day and age, but regretfully, they do not make nearly as much money according to *The Financial Times*. Furthermore, the *Washington Square News* points out that indies are the best films being made today because they are created wholeheartedly with passion and love. These filmmakers do not care about how much money they make, they do it because they love it more than anything and that is reflected in their art. When filmmakers aren't tethered by dollar-centric studio demands and the pressure to sell to as many demographics as possible, they have the ability to make anything their minds desire. Without these obligations, filmmakers are afforded the freedom to tell stories precisely how they are meant to be told. In indie films, the passion is still brimming over; they are made by those who want to create art, those who want to tell stories that add to the human experience. The technical and the creative have been butting heads for years but now it is reflected in the films.

It used to be where the highest grossing film of the year would go on to be nominated for best picture at the Academy Awards, nowadays, most of the nominees are composed by indies, some of which were only released in select theaters because there was not enough of an audience. At the 90th Academy Award ceremony, 5 out of the nine nominees were indies. *The Shape of Water* won best picture that year (2016) and grossed about \$63.86 million dollars at the box office (Watson) and was produced on a budget of \$19.5 million (Tiffany) as opposed to *Avengers: Infinity War* which was the highest grossing film that year coming in at a whopping \$2.05 billion dollars (Kennedy). The budget for *The Avengers* was an astounding \$316 million USD making it “the second most-expensive film ever made, unadjusted for inflation.” (Agar). A

big budget production grossed approximately 32% more money than an indie that won best picture. That tells us that the people of the world today want to see the newest technology rather than true emotion in art. They do not care about the quality of artistic talent, just the quantity of money. *The Avengers* is mainly created in post as opposed to through the camera lens on sight. As actor Keanu Reeves puts it, “You're presenting a complete unreality and making them feel like it's real, whereas before it was captured in reality.” This is the latest technology so they are trying to show off their money rather than worrying about the true art that is capturing raw emotion through a lens. As Christopher Nolan puts it, “There are usually two different goals in a visual effects movie. One is to fool the audience into seeing something seamless, and that's how I try to use it. The other is to impress the audience with the amount of money spent on the spectacle of the visual effect, and that, I have no interest in”. The focus of production should be on the ability of the film to make the audience sympathize with the characters, not the production value of the stunts. Even though money should be considered a thing of the past, it is all of which the future is consumed.

The practice of shooting on film is a dying art that needs resurrection before auteur cinema as we know it is done-for. As Keanu Reeves states on the opening of his film *Side by Side*, the craft has been around

“Since the late 1880s. Visual artists and storytellers have used moving images to create amazing works. Movies have inspired us, thrilled us, and captured our imaginations. Film has helped us share our experiences and dreams. Photochemical film has been the exclusive format used to capture, project, and store moving images for over 100 years. It is only recently that new technology has emerged that is challenging film's place as the

gold standard for quality and workflow. Digital technology is evolving to a point that may very well replace film as the primary means of creating and sharing motion pictures.

(Side by Side)

The power of film just does not and will ever compare to that of video. Celluloid adds emotion to every frame due to its rare image with each frame; its shadows are so much darker and more ominous and the lights flourish which sets the tone for the audience and therefore, impacts them more. In an interview Christopher Nolan is asked to explain why he chooses to shoot on film' he retorts with " I think IMAX is the best film format that was ever invented. It's the gold standard and what any other technology has to match up to, but none have...When I look at a digitally acquired and projected image, it looks inferior against an original negative anamorphic print or an IMAX one.". The best movies are shot on film because they are made by people who truly love the craft more than anything else. Film is the equivalent to love; not only is the feeling more evident on screen, but also behind it. Their passion is evident in their work and their love stems from the classics, which of whom, were shot on film. The best form of flattery is imitation so these creatives try to simulate their influences which typically means shooting on the classic format. Perhaps the most prominent and celebrated auteur of current day is film virtuoso: Quentin Tarantino. When asked about his success in his movies he responds that the secret is in fact that "you don't have to know how to make a movie. If you truly love cinema with all your heart and with enough passion, you can't help but make a good movie." (Artisan Home Entertainment Inc). That is the rule for all the great indie films; you can see the love behind the camera that made the passion on the screen. The use of film marks a great auteur; someone who loves their craft wholeheartedly and does not need money to justify their love.

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