4.4 Key light only.

STYLES IN LIGHTING

In the traditions of motion-picture lighting, it is possible to distinguish various stylizations, just as in the work of the great masters of painting. The three most pronounced styles used by cinematographers are high-key (such as in the paintings of Turner, Whistler, and some of Degas), low-key (such as in the paintings of Rembrandt and Caravaggio), and graduated tonality (such as in the paintings of Ingres).

A high-key scene is one that appears generally bright. It is best achieved in cooperation with the art director, as the sets and costumes should be in light tones. The lighting for a high-key effect will often employ much soft, diffused illumination with relatively few shadows. It is important to include at least a few dark areas to indicate that the highlights are not simply overexposed.

If, on the other hand, only a few areas of the frame are well lit and there are many deep shadows, the effect is low-key. There is a popular fallacy that to achieve a low-key effect one has merely to underexpose. In fact, it is the ratio of dark shadow area to adequately lit areas that creates a low-key effect. Here again the art director can help, this time by providing darker sets and costumes.

Graduated tonality is intended to produce a tonal effect of graded grays. It is often achieved by soft light evenly illuminating the scene, creating weak shadows with the tonal gradations often painted onto the sets or created in the actor's costumes and makeup. Sometimes artificial shadows are painted on.

These three stylizations by no means cover all the approaches to lighting the film.

Long before shooting, the director and the cinematographer should discuss the style or approach to be taken in the film. This will depend to a great extent on the mood and character of the story, or perhaps of each scene. For example, a drama is most often done in a low key while a comedy is usually more effective in a high key. All sorts of films could be done in graded tonality. There are no set rules about what style should be used with what type of film. It is all up to the director and cinematographer.

LIGHT FUNCTIONS

In creating and maintaining a style, the haphazard approach is bad. We have to know exactly what each lamp is doing for us and why we are putting it in a given spot. To simplify things, a terminology was developed, naming the functions of the lights.

The key light is the main source of light for a given character while at a certain place in the scene. (If the character moves around, he may have several key lights, one for each of his locations.) There are no set rules on the placement of the key light. A traditional starting place is 45° from the camera and 45° off the floor, but the mood or location of the scene usually leads the cinematographer to put it elsewhere. Another rule of thumb suggests that the key should come from "outside the actor's look." That is, if the actor is looking off camera, which is usually the case, the key should come from the other side of his line of sight so that he is looking between the camera and the key light. This means the downstage side of his head will be in shadow, giving his features a pleasant three-dimensionality, but this rule, like the 45° rule, is very frequently ignored. It is very interesting to note that many of the masters of painting most frequently use a "key light" coming from the left side of the canvas. A cinematographer rarely has so much freedom. The final position of the key light will depend on the mood, the actor's features, the set topography, the supposed time of day, etc. The key's position will determine the shadow pattern on the face.

Fig. 5.16.


4.3 Key light "outside the actor's look." The actor's sight line runs between the camera and the light.
Aside from the limitations of power and space, the third major interior location problem is dealing with the mixed color temperatures of light sources (daylight, tungsten, fluorescent) and the exterior-interior lighting situation. We have already discussed the filtration solutions for mixed color temperatures. Let’s now look at scenes where the outside world is visible through the window and the exterior light level will most likely be a few stops higher than the interior.

This situation creates the problem of a brightness range wider than the emulsion latitude is able to handle. There are a few ways to solve this problem. If we are already applying color-correcting gels on the windows, and still more light attenuation is needed, neutral density gels may be added. Unfortunately, multiplying the gels will augment the problem of light reflection, wrinkles, and rustling noise. Happily, not all is lost, because combination gels, composed of #85 and neutral density, are available in three densities (#85N3, #85N6, and #85N9). Another way to darken the windows utilizes Rosco Blackscrim, a perforated plastic that works like a net. When the windows are seen in a long shot, this scrim appears invisible, but close-ups shot next to the window would unfortunately reveal the texture.

It is often desirable to have the exteriors slightly overexposed for a sunny, hot feeling, or actually bluish for a rather cold effect. But a difference larger than three stops between the interior and exterior may, on color negative, completely "wash out" the recognizable exterior by overexposure. Replacing a #85 gel with a lesser color correction, such as Rosco #3408, Roscosun Half CTO, or Lee #205 Half CTO, will leave the windows slightly blue. Overly hot sky can sometimes be helped by "dressing" the outside with green plants.

**Exterior Location Shooting**

When planning to shoot an exterior location scene, scouting the location is essential. On such occasions a magnetic compass should be on hand so that it can be used to predict the sun’s position at different times during the day. With this knowledge the order of shooting can be planned.

All the long shots will need to be shot in close succession to create the same lighting angles. They should be scheduled for mornings or afternoons, to avoid flat midday light. Shots can also be staged in a more convenient time under a "butterfly" scrim, using an arc to create sunlight that comes from a logical angle. Butternets or larger overhead textile materials have exchangeable screens, such as white silk, black net, and solid black, depending on the character of light required.

Direct sunlight is generally too harsh for the human face. If we wish to use it without any diffusion, then it is best used as three-quarter crosslight or direct back light. Such an angle of light makes the background appear more interesting. One can, for example, introduce a smoke effect that will lend a marvelous three-dimensionality to the scene.

With the sun as a back light or a three-quarter crosslight, we need to provide adequate fill, either from the reflector boards or from daylight balanced lamps. Traditional, silvery reflectors known as “shiny boards” reflect light that is generally too harsh for faces but serves well when pointed at bushes or buildings. Much softer is light reflected from white surfaces such as foam-core or large white plastic screens made of Griffyn.

When more light is needed, HMI lamps are often employed. Unlike carbon arcs, they run on AC power. This makes it sometimes possible to plug them into adjacent buildings.

**Shooting Sunsets**

When exposing for a sunset, we have to make judgments based on the understanding that a reflected light meter is calibrated for medium-gray. We do not want the hot sky, and particularly the sun, to be represented as medium-gray. We want it hotter, but not to the point that it will lose its color. When shooting on color negative, overexposing the sun 2½ stops will also preserve some of the orange hue. But when the sun is small in the frame, then the sky density becomes more important. We now want the sky to be hot, but not to the point of blending with the sun. Certainly not more than three stops over medium-gray.