

Adam Burke

Professor Reid

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*How Thor: Ragnarok Invests its Audience*

The art of cinema has come a long way since its inception over a hundred years ago. It has now evolved into a cultural phenomenon that has taken the entire world by storm, but it was not by chance that movies went down this path. Filmmakers had used the various components that go into making a movie to effectively build investment in the audience towards their movies. In order to achieve this, they had to understand how the human mind works and how to convey meaning in different areas of the filmmaking process. Five of these factors include cinematography, special effects, sound effects, music, and storytelling. *Thor: Ragnarok* is a movie that provides great examples of how filmmakers are able to use these five filmmaking techniques in order to immerse the audience into the world of the movie and keep their interested flowing along.

Cinematography is all about what the camera will pick up and focuses on the overall image of a shot or the entire movie. A common element within the craft of cinematography is the camera angle. In his book titled *The Five C's of Cinematography: Motion Picture Filming Techniques*, Joseph V. Mascelli emphasizes the usefulness of a specific camera angle, "A carefully-chosen camera angle can heighten dramatic visualization of the story" (Mascelli 11). There are a wide variety of angles that the cinematographer can choose from in order to create a

meaningful shot that captures what is important, tells information that is equally important, and is overall organized.

One example of an angle that is commonly used in movies is the long shot. These are shots that show a vast amount of space of a certain location. Mascelli states the purpose of showing this much land in a single shot, “[...] they play up the size of the setting” (Mascelli 27). They are commonly shown at the very beginning of a scene so that the setting is established and the viewer knows where the scene takes place, what it looks like, and how big or small it is. The very first scene of *Thor: Ragnarok* uses a long shot to establish Thor caged in the lair of a fiery being known as Surtur. The camera shows that Surtur’s lair is reminiscent of many cultural depictions of Hell where everything is a warm color such as red, orange, or yellow. It also has shadowy stalactites in the foreground to emphasize depth and add contrast.

Another example of a purposeful camera angle is a subjective shot used at the beginning of the film’s climax. In his book titled *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, Alexander Galloway explains how movies have influenced video games. One of those ways was from camera angles such as the subjective shot, “[...] subjective shots mean to show the exact physiological or emotional qualities of what a character would see” (Galloway 41). This subjective shot is from the perspective of the film’s villain, Hela, slowly walking towards Thor at the other end of the throne room as he sits on the throne and her shadow stretches halfway across the frame, which shows how she thinks Thor is unable to defeat her and that her power stretches far.

Special effects have been an element of cinema since the beginning. Nowadays, they have become almost omnipresent in the modern age. In the early days of filmmaking, special effects were more practical and physical. Stephen Prince offers an example of early practical

effects in his article titled “The Emergence of Filmic Artifacts: Cinema and Cinematography in the Digital Era,” “[...] cinema has been invested in its creation since the era of Georges Méliès. He used papier-mâché and stop-motion tricks where filmmakers today use computers, but the mission of this kind of imagery has remained relatively constant” (Prince 26). Filmmakers and special effects departments had to be creative when it came to special effects since there were no software to create computer generated images (C.G.I).

Now that imagery can be created on computer software, many stories that were near impossible to tell in a convincing manner were and are being told. Prince claims that this is why many superheroes are receiving cinematic adaptations, “Indeed, the proliferation of comic-book movies, including the upcoming Spider-Man 2, Blade: Trinity, Catwoman, and X Men 3, reflects technology’s ability to duplicate onscreen what before could be realized only by comic-book artists on the page” (Prince 26). Prince’s article was published in the year 2004, but even seventeen years later, countless more superhero movies have been filmed and released, including *Thor: Ragnarok*.

One common feature that many modern movies have thanks to C.G.I. is the use of green screens. Just like how C.G.I. made the creation of special effects much more efficient, it has also made the processes of set design and location scouting much easier as well. In his book titled *Software Takes Command*, Lee Manovich describes the process of filming scene in front of a green screen, “...now fully established practice to shoot a large portion of a feature film using a ‘digital backlot’ (i.e., a green screen). Consequently, most oral shots in such films are created by composing the footage of actors with computer generated sets and other visuals” (Manovich 259). Many scenes in *Thor: Ragnarok* involved the use of a green screen in order to make it seem like the characters are actually living in complex, fantastical, or unobtainable lands.

One noticeable instance of both special effects and greens screens is the climactic battle when Thor temporarily knocks out Hela with a lightning strike and proceeds to fight her army of undead Asgardian soldiers with the aid of his friends. When the characters are performing combat that is impossible to recreate with real people, they are all computer generated, but when they're performing simple attacks or aren't even fighting, they are actually the actors or stunt doubles acting in front of a green screen showing either the kingdom of Asgard or the body of water in front of it. Throughout this scene, there are many details in it that are too complex or physically impossible to recreate with physical materials or real actors, but C.G.I. has allowed scenes like these to be shown on the big screen in a non-clumsy manner.

Just as visuals are able to entice the viewer, audio has the same capabilities in both of the fields of sound effects and music. In his book titled *Sound Design and Science Fiction*, William Whittington discusses this other purpose of sound in movies, "As with sound design, there is always more to the story. Sound recordings are filled with layers of meaning" (Whittington 21). The sounds that are made should emphasize certain details in order add a sense of realism to the world of the movie, even if said world is far from reality. They should give the viewer (or listener in this case) a sense of what material an object is made of, how much it weighs, or how powerful it is. If the audience knows these details, they can believe that what they are seeing is real and get lost within the story.

An example of meaningful, informative sound design is when Thor is sitting on his father's throne waiting for Hela to fight him. He's holding a staff in his hand that he pounds on the ground to a very slow beat. The pounding staff was made to sound like it was actually made of metal and can only be carried by man of great strength. It also sound reminiscent to a death bell as if Thor is signaling to Hela that she will be defeated. The scene wouldn't have worked

well if it didn't sound as heavy or if they didn't make any needed adjustments in post-production, but that's exactly why sound design plays an important role in movies.

But the form of audio that is more effective than sound effects is music. In his article titled "Narrative Film Music," Claudia Gorbman writes about how easily a film's score can instruct the audience to feel, "Whatever music is applied to a film segment will do something, will have an effect-just as whatever two words a poet puts together will produce a meaning different from that of each word separately" (Gorbman 189). Whatever music the audience is hearing will have a strong influence over their emotional reaction to a scene; it even has the ability to override what the visuals say if there is any dissonance between them. It can even show what's going on inside the character's being as Whittington states, "[...] music became crucial in establishing narrative intent, drive, and unity" (Whittington 132). Music can communicate what a character is feeling, thinking, or intending to do so that the emotion of a scene is emphasized and can be felt by the viewer. Sometimes it can convey what a character doesn't know.

An example of music in *Thor: Ragnarok* is the scene where Thor is lead to another superhero named Doctor Strange in his base of operations in New York City while trying to look for his father named Odin. When Thor picks up a card that reads the address where he can find Doctor Strange, the viewer can hear a sitar and a harpsicord in the film's score. For those who watched Doctor Strange's self-titled, standalone movie released in 2016, these instruments can also be heard there. This choice was made to inform the audience that Doctor Strange is going to appear soon. The music also has a mysterious tone to show that Thor is clueless as to what unfolds since he has never meet Doctor Strange before.

The storytelling of a movie is crucial for its success since the story is the current that keeps the audience flowing throughout the movie; there should be very few rock and logs

blocking the way. Good stories have two main traits that keep the audience invested. The first one is a hero chasing after a desire. John Truby explores this desire that the hero has in his book titled *The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller*, “A story tracks what a person wants, what he’ll do to get it, and what costs he’ll have to pay along the way” (Truby 7). The audience will want to follow a protagonist that has a well-established desire that he actively tries to achieve. While trying to achieve his goal, the hero should also change before the story comes to a conclusion. Truby specifies what this change should be “The hero must overcome a moral flaw and learn how to act properly toward other people” (Truby 41). The hero’s goal changes when he learns what he really needs in life and tries to achieve it. This not only makes the hero more interesting, but it makes him relatable as well since the audiences have undergone similar changes in their lives; especially if it involves him becoming a better person since the hero is just as flawed as the audience is.

Another trait of a good story is a good antagonist or obstacle that makes the hero’s mission more difficult. Truby states how the villain can most affectively make the hero’s task harder to accomplish, “It is only because the opponent is attacking the hero’s great weakness that the hero is forced to deal with it and grow” (Truby 88). It only makes sense that the villain should hit the hero where it hurts the most in order to prevent him from getting what he wants. This is what leads the hero to learn what he has to do in order to still come out on top, so that the villain won’t make the same move twice.

In *Thor: Ragnarok*, Thor is trying to prevent Ragnarok (the Norse version of the Apocalypse) from occurring which will result in the destruction of Asgard. He tries to stop his sister Hela, known as the goddess of death, from possibly causing Ragnarok. When Thor and

Hela first meet, she cripples Thor's chances of success when she destroys his signature weapon: a hammer named Mjolnir. Without his weapon, Thor is seemingly powerless to stop Hela.

Later on, Thor realizes what his need is right before he strikes Hela with lightning and fights her undead army. Thor is at a low point where he thinks he will be defeated by Hela and will lose Asgard as a result of his absence. He has a spiritual one-on-one discussion with the recently deceased Odin. He tells Odin that he has failed at trying to prevent Ragnarok, but his father reminds him that he doesn't need his hammer to fight his enemies, and that it doesn't matter what happens to the land of Asgard as long as its people are fine. Here, Thor realizes that his need is to allow Ragnarok to happen rather than preventing it. He has all of the Asgardians board a spaceship, and tasks Loki with placing the crown of Surtur on the Eternal Flame in order to cause Ragnarok and defeat Hela. Thor has a desire for most of the movie that gets replaced by a need that helps him save the day, and is able to overcome his initial weakness, which both shape him into a better person as a result, which is a trait of the most beloved stories of all time.

In conclusion, the art of cinema was able to become a world-wide phenomenon thanks to its various components being able to work their way into the minds of its viewers. *Thor: Ragnarok* is an example of components such as cinematography, special effects, sound effects, music, and storytelling being used properly and working together in order to create a product that audiences will enjoy. Each of these elements should make the audience feel as if they are a part of the experience rather than have them simply watching the events unfold. Putting this into practice is what has made movies a widely beloved form of entertainment that will continue to live on as years go by.

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