CARTOON NOIR: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF VISUAL PARODY

A Thesis

by

BHUVANA DEVIGERE MALLIKARJUNAIAH

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

December 2010

Major Subject: Visualization Sciences

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Chair of Committee,	Louis G. Tassinary
Committee Members,	Michael L. Greenwald
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ABSTRACT

Cartoon Noir: A Comparative Study of Visual Parody. (December 2010)

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American film parody can be characterized as a distorted, comical and yet affectionate imitation of a given genre or specific work. Film noir as a genre with its distinct visual styles has been an easy target for such "creative criticism." Mel Brooks, famous for his series of successful parody films, has exhorted that the situation alone must be absurd while the actors must be serious, not funny to make a comedy funnier. He also said that funny is in the writing and not in the performance itself. Film noir through its unconventional visual styles and convoluted story lines engenders feelings of anxiety and paranoia in the audience, providing rich fodder for parody. The animated theatrical series *Looney Tunes* with its trademark slapstick style is well suited for making serious situations look absurd, affording "creative criticism".

In this thesis I first analyze canonical examples to distill the distinct visual characteristics of these two different genres. I then employ the use of parody to bring together a few salient visual elements from each of these genres, thus enabling computer-generated visual parody. Finally, still image examples of such parody are

produced by systematically combining visual elements from the two distinct genres, film noir for its expressionistic lighting and elliptical compositional elements, and *Looney Tunes* for its mischievous mise-en-scene and ingenuous characters.

To my family and friends

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I.1. Inspiration

"The light has to tell something. There's a meaning, and it establishes a mood."
"The mood of tragedy is enhanced by a strong contrast of deep blacks and glaring
whites–shadows and highlights." - John Alton

"I did things they (Disney) wouldn't do, such as exaggeration in films, wild takes,
distorted fairy tales and I laid off the fuzzy-wuzzy little bunnies. It wasn't my bag, being
along the cute lines." - Tex Avery

"The more serious the situation, the funnier the comedy can be." - Mel Brooks

I.2. Introduction

Film noir has been parodied many times in many ways. From the beginning, the

whodunit was a self-conscious form given to self-parody. A parody, in contemporary

usage, is a work created to mock, comment on, or poke fun at an original work; its topic,

author, or some other target is the subject of humorous, satiric or ironic imitation [1]. As

the literary theorist Linda Huctcheon puts it, "parody … is imitation with a critical

difference, not always at the expense of the parodied text." [2]

This thesis follows the style of *IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer
Graphics.*

Imagine the following scene: Light slicing through venetian blinds into dark rooms, and cluttered items in a dark detective office that overlooks a busy street. A lonely male protagonist - a baby photographer mistaken for a tough private detective - finds himself in love with a woman for whom he would do anything. The woman he is in love with is a femme fatale who uses her beauty and sex to entice him. Now imagine all of this with childlike characters in a very simple comical environment. Such appositions have been used in *Looney Tunes* films like *Super Snooper* [1952], and *Plane Daffy* [1944] which spoofs detective stories and World War II stories respectively. These are in color and have boisterous action to emphasize the comical aspects. In a 1971 interview, Michael Maltese, a Warner Bros. storyman mentioned that they at the studio wrote cartoons for grownups, and that was their secret. The Disney style of animations with recognizable and playful characters were routinely transmogrified by the Warner Bros. animators into hard, brassy and confrontational characters, thus creating double ententes, cartoons capable of engaging both child and adult.

It is generally agreed amongst many critical commentators that lighting style is the key element in understanding film noir and cinematic lighting. The whole purpose of lighting a shot is not just about illuminating everything that is present in the scene, and to make it look pretty, but it also acts as a key element in emphasizing the action taking place in the scene, and in setting the mood that captivates the audience. In film noir, drama is enhanced by using low-key lighting that produces high lighting ratios, characterized by dark contrasts and dramatic shadows. Unlike the regular conventions of filmmaking, in film noir the character's face maybe partially or wholly obscured by darkness, and black-and-white cinematography is one among the essential attributes of classic noir movies. Everything in film noir is done differently, and this applies to the camera as well. Dutch

angles[1], low-angle shots, and wide-angle lenses were extensively used, making them
defining features of film noir. Achieving disorientation was the goal for most of the film
noir plots, and cinematographers used this regularly to make the audience realize the
grave nature of the situation.

At Warner Bros., the animators wanted the audience to recognize their artwork as work
of pure illusion, yet believable and capable of sustaining their artifices. Tex Avery made
sure that all his characters remained in the cartoon frontier which was a unique quality of
Warner cartoons. Maurice Noble and many other animation design and layout artists
provided Warner cartoons with a unique color and design, one that always supported and
enhanced the foreground objects and characters. Wherever the focal point in the scene,
their backgrounds did not compete for attention with noisy details and unsteady shapes.
In addition, colorists chose harmonious color palates, at time using color to reinforce
traditional depth and spatial cues. Warner Bros. cartoons also employed a unique method
of communication that is seen repeatedly in many of their shorts; that is, the use of little
signs and placards which would pop into the screen, making comments on the events that
are taking place. This gave the characters a quality of self-reflection that made them
appear both interactive and sentient.

The objective of this thesis is to create 3D scenes that adapt the lighting style of film noir
with environments and characters adapted from *Looney Tunes*, and use parody elements

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[1] "In filmmaking, a Dutch angle is a technique which is used to put viewers off balance to create a feeling of disorientation. Creating a Dutch angle is accomplished by tilting the camera relative to the scene, creating a situation in which the horizon is angled, rather than straight. In some genres, the Dutch angle is overused, causing it to become a subject of mockery and criticism, but when well-utilized, a Dutch angle can be a very effective tool, as demonstrated in numerous art films." [3]

to make these distinct genres come together. Scenes from different film noir movies will be studied to understand the lighting and camera compositions. *Looney Tunes* shorts will be studied to get an understanding of the color palettes used, and also for set and character design ideas. Film noir parody will be studied in order to understand the parodic conventions.

CHAPTER II

ILLUSTRATIVE WORKS

From the beginning, parody in film has been used to situate a movie in a particular past and present, offering an alternative worldview. Parody, as Dwight Macdonald suggests, is to be enjoyed as "an intuitive kind of literary criticism, shorthand for what 'serious' critics must write out at length" [4] and film noir is a rich resource for satisfying the comical aspects of a parody film, because its own style characterized by rigid conventions and serious tones contrasts so sharply with that of irreverent animated comedy.

In this chapter a few signature film examples of parody, film noir, and *Looney Tunes™* are highlighted. These particular movies illustrate how digital lighting techniques effectively extrude the 2D characters into the 3rd dimension, thereby affording their seamless incorporation into a "real" three-dimensional scene. In addition, recent unpublished theses on related topics are reviewed to provide a more complete understanding of the lighting and camera techniques used in these movies to achieve "2.5D" characters, the transition from 2D to 3D space, and to demonstrate how to effectively reproduce film noir lighting in a digital environment.

II.1. Movie References

Hand-drawn animation or cell animation is a traditional animation technique where each

drawing, slightly different from the preceding one was photographed to create an illusion of movement. Warner Bros. cartoons also followed this technique for all of its classic pieces. Cartoon characters interacting with real people can be seen in some of the shorts from the earlier periods. The earliest was *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914), an American animated short film in which the narrator interacts with the animated landscape and the character (Gertie). In 1945, Jerry from *Tom and Jerry* series appeared in the live-action MGM musical feature film *Anchors Aweigh*, in which, through the use of special effects, he performs a dance routine with Gene Kelly. There have been many other short films between this period that showed human interaction with cartoon characters or their environment or vice versa. In most of these shorts, the cartoon characters stood apart because of being flat lit and 2D, when placed in a real 3D environment. It was Disney who was the first to introduce a full-length animation feature film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* [1988], which represents one of the most innovative technological accomplishments in cinema through its unique amalgam of elements of film noir with the wacky slapstick conventions of animated cartoons. This parody film successfully blended ink-and-paint cartoon characters with live actors in a convincing comedy/mystery noir thriller. An online film critic, Shaun Henisey, has noted that the film accomplished this by hand-drawing every frame the traditional way and then printing them on top of the film image. In addition, during the course of production some of the traditional rules were broken. For example, in this period most animation was characterized by a stationary camera and flat backgrounds. In *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, however, the camera moves all around the characters forcing them to have a depth and dimension not seen before in traditional animation. A glow around all these characters can also be observed when they are in frame with live-action actors thus making them appear to exist in the same plane as their human counterparts.

A similar innovative blending of traditional and non-traditional production techniques can be seen in the movie S*pace Jam* which was released in the following decade. This is also a feature-length film that combined large amounts of traditional cartoon animation, live-action and three-dimensional computer graphics. Co-director, Tony Cervone mentions the use of many different media in this film wherein the work process began the traditional way, that is, with pencil and paper drawings, and included some computer graphics environments.

The look and feel of the animation in *Space Jam* embraces computer-based graphics. In one of the very early scenes we find the camera panning up to show a computer generated sky, and then the Nerdluck's home planet (see Fig. 1.). From this we observe that there is a continuous transition from the realm of reality (3D) (see Fig. 1. (a)) to the computer generated sky (see Fig. 1. (b)) and finally into the cartoon world of animation, which is a 2D world (see Fig. 1. (c)).

Fig. 1. *Space Jam* 1996, transitions. (a) Real world, (b) 3D world, (c) 2D world [5].
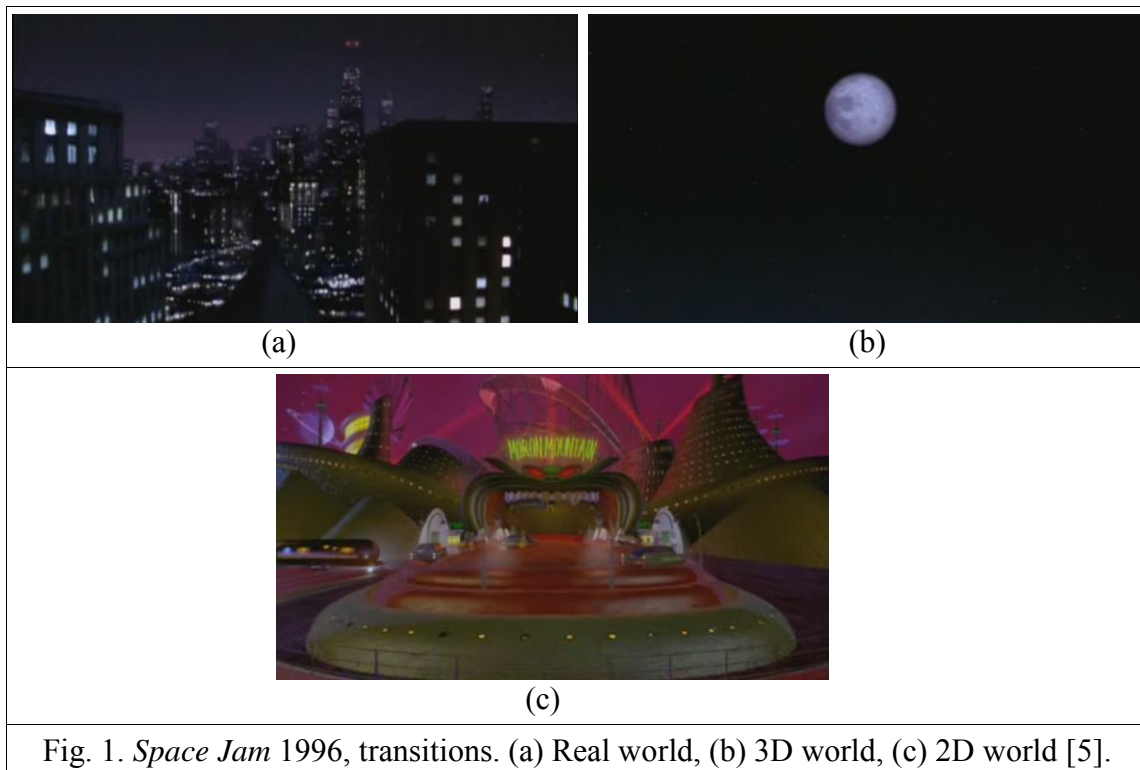
So much of the action in *Space Jam* takes place in the real world that the cartoon characters needed to look as if they were lit by movie lights. It was necessary to introduce the key light and the fill light. While the key light took care of highlighting parts of the cartoon character, the fill lights were used to provide dim lighting for areas on the characters that did not receive any light. To achieve this goal the animators created tone mattes (see Fig. 2.). Art director Bill Perkins explains, "They create hard-edged black pieces of artwork that define the lighter or darker areas on the character. The black region dictates at a later stage of compositing what kind of color is added to or taken out of that area of the character to make it appear rounded. So you'll have a piece of black matte artwork that defines the brighter areas where light is striking a character, and you'll have another that defines the darker area, where it's more in shade." [6] These mattes were then scanned into their proprietary system, and were laid over the colored animations to indicate the lightening and darkening regions of the individual characters.

Fig. 2. *Space Jam* 1996, tone mattes [5].

Finally, when it came to the stage of seamlessly compositing these animated characters with live-action characters in a single scene, various elements needed adjustments to make the entire scene look coherent. The color, the tones, the brightness, and the shadows were adjusted, depth was added to the backgrounds, for instance – building were pushed back out of focus, and the trees came up closer. Also, the tone mattes were further manipulated to get the desired shading.

Thus, the use of the computer as an aid to the artist combined with the skills of pool talented artists brought *Space Jam* from concept to reality.

After the successful release of *Space Jam*, Warner Bros. made another feature length film that utilized the same proprietary software and techniques. *Looney Tunes: Back in Action* [2003] is an even more sophisticated live-action/animated film based on Warner Bros. cartoon characters. The computer graphics technology was used to color the animation drawings, add tone mattes and shadows to the animated characters and composite them over live-action backgrounds. The use of 3D computer animation can be seen on objects such as spaceships, Wile E. Coyote's missile, the robot dog at the end,

and Bugs' carrots in the cafeteria (see Fig. 3.). Application of 3D is mostly seen on objects in some cases, while the characters themselves remained 2D is because the characters needed more dynamic movements employing immense amounts of squashing and stretching. To keep up with the boisterous actions for which *Looney Tunes* are well known for, the characters were drawn and animated in the traditional way [6].

Fig. 3. *Looney Tunes: Back in Action* 2003, 3D objects. (a) Spaceships, (b) Wile E. Coyote's missile, (c) robot dog, (d) Bugs' carrots [7].
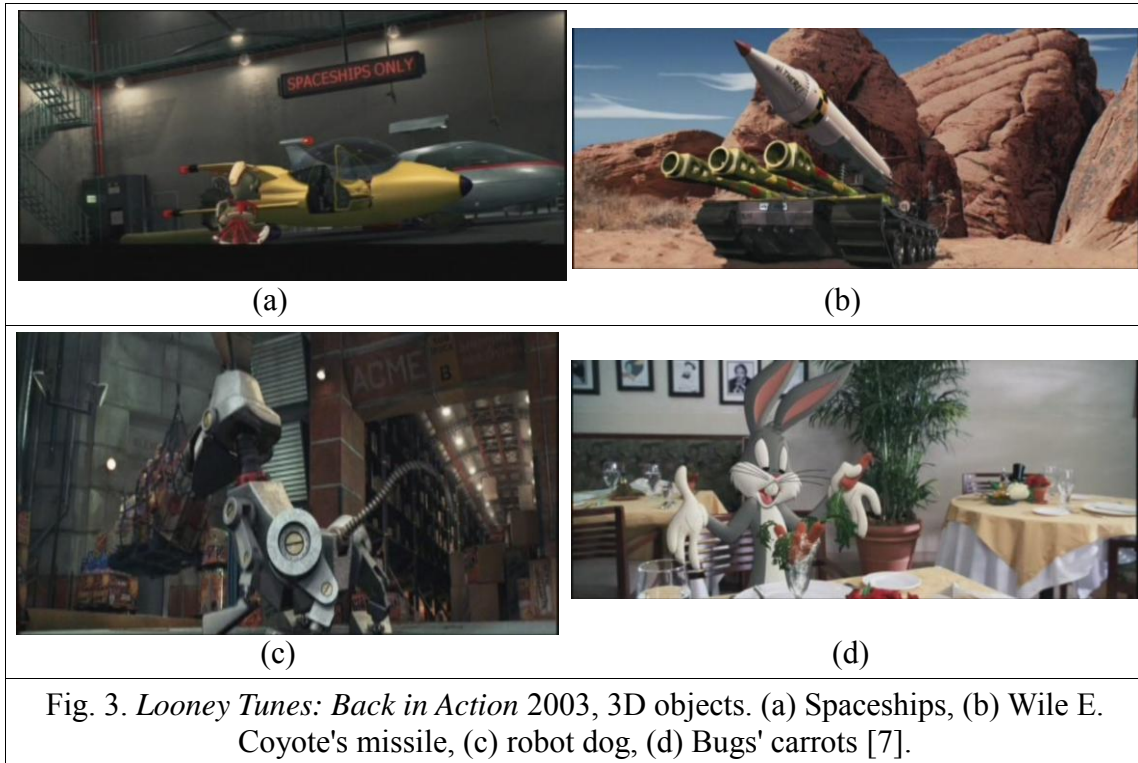
II.2. Unpublished Works

The works discussed here provide an insight into the use of lighting style in film noir and their adaptation into 3D animation.

In film noir, the most notable visual feature is the high-contrast lighting which signaled the isolation of noir hero from the society. The lighting created an intensified dramatic visual such that suspense was heightened, and the difference between the good and evil

was bright-lined. Lei Han, former student at Texas A&M University, did his thesis on designing lighting styles in computer graphics that could enhance visual storytelling. He studied and applied film noir cinematic style to his computer-generated animation. In his thesis, he explored the different lighting techniques used in film noir, and highlighted the differences between traditional lighting styles and those found in film noir. He analyzed different noir films and applied the lighting style to his animation. He has explained in detail how the lighting can be done in computer graphics by covering topics such as light shapes, shadowing, and texturing. In sum, his thesis provided a pipeline to create traditional film cinematography based lighting style using computer animation, and suggested useful film noir's lighting effects digital models for cinematographers.

Ellen Man Ngoc Trinh, another former student at Texas A&M University, analyzed lighting styles by three different cinematographers for her thesis work and adapted them for anime-style animation. In this thesis she has explained how Toland, the art director for the classic movie *Citizen Kane* [1941], created depth in many scenes by lighting the foreground subjects darker than the background subjects, and vice versa. Because the viewer's attention is directed toward the brighter part of the screen, Toland was able to systematically manipulate where in the scene the viewer would pay close attention by modulating the distribution of brightness in a manner consistent with the story line [8]. Thus, in her thesis she was able to explore characteristics of different anime lighting styles and analyze the lighting styles of different cinematographers to produce a visual CG piece of anime in 3D.

Thus, these works help in getting an overall understanding of the techniques used for digital lighting and setup.

CHAPTER III

VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS ANALYSIS

Here in this section, select characteristics of parody, film noir and *Looney Tunes* will be evaluated to arrive at a clear understanding of the essence of film parody, and the respective contributions of lighting style and camera composition. The standard props and layouts used in film noir and Looney Tunes, along with visual parody techniques, will also be discussed.

III.1. Characteristics of Film Parody

A parody, in contemporary usage is work created to mock, comment on, or poke fun at an original work. The target may be its subject, author, or some topic undergoing humorous, satiric or ironic imitation. As the literary theorist Linda Hutcheon puts it, "parody … is imitation with a critical difference, not always at the expense of the parodied text." [2] Some of the characteristics of parody that are applicable to this thesis are,

- A parody should be funny even without viewers' expertise on the subject under comic attack [1]. Its fundamental goal is, to be funny, which can be used as an educational tool, best defined as "creative criticism". One must have a thorough understanding of the subject under attack to create an effective parody. It offers insights of the subject being parodied through laughter by making the artist a student of the target genre. Thus, treating serious situations in a trivial manner becomes the main structure of this genre.

- Parody is not satire, which sometimes has been considered a lesser subcategory. In fact, Joseph A. Dane, a genre theorist observes, "The norms of parody and satire are different; parody deals with literary [or cinematic] norms (collective understanding of a text or genre), while satire deals with social norms." [9] Said differently, satire makes an assertive attack on the defective and capricious nature of mankind, while parody takes a tender path of having affectionate fun with a given genre's form or structure. The reason for the confusion between parody and satire had been addressed by parody scholar Linda Hutcheon in her book, *A Theory of Parody*: "The obvious reason for the confusion of parody and satire, despite this major difference between them, is the fact that the two genres are often used together." [2] For example, Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles* (1974) is a western spoof that makes satirical comments on racism and violence in America, while his movie *Spaceballs* (1987) makes a milder satirical attack on the mega merchandising aspects of the *Star Wars* trilogy.

- There are essentially two kinds of parodies – one of them has affectionate fun with a given genre's form as noted earlier, and other is repressed form of fun making of a genre. The second eventually leads to reaffirming the subject under attack. A good example is the John Landis' movie, *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), which achieves parody by using songs like, "Bad Moon Rising" and several different versions of "Blue Moon". This humor is interwoven with horrifying graphic violence and with realistic werewolf transformations. Here, the genre's expectations are not completely clear, and there is still parody embedded within the story without reducing the characters involved. This is

opposed to the traditional horror parody of Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein* (1974) in which Feldman's Igor character cannot be taken seriously with his exophthalmic visage and roving hump.

- Unlike other genres, parody is a genre of indeterminate time and space. The time, place and the icons that go with the chosen genre for a specific parody, become of utmost importance. Since, parody relies on prior knowledge of the viewer, of a given genre, it is necessary to establish early on the icons of the particular subject that is under comic attack. This will accent the point that parody focuses on having fun with a given structure or text [1]. Brooks, in all his parodies has been attentive to the details, such as icons of a specific genre. For his horror parody, *Young Frankenstein*, he was able to find and use the original laboratory set of the 1931 Frankenstein movie.

- A frequent additional characteristic of film parody is the explicit drawing of attention to the fact that films are about moviemaking, which is often called "genre genre" cinema or metacinema[2]. In a parody, the self-consciousness must be a compliment to the already ongoing attack on a target genre. For instance, in Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*, the parody becomes so broad that it literally breaks out of the film and first spills over into a musical being shot on another set, then invades into Warner Bros. lot and Hollywood proper. Thus, self-consciousness in parody creates a fast and comical awareness for the audience that this is indeed a movie, and thus becomes the ultimate attribute of parody. As implied by theory

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[2] "It means elements of cinema that cause the viewer to think outside the film, to the way the film is made, or the director's/ screenwriters considerations, and the like." [10]

historian Margaret A. Rose, the self-consciousness is one other way of "signaling" the audience that this is indeed a parody [1].

III.2. Characteristics of Film Noir

Film noir, in contrast to conventional films known for their predictable, comfortable, and balanced focusing, sought to develop an internal dimension, more introspective and psychological. The comfortable passivity of the audiences were challenged by the noir filmmakers who introduced intentional stress and near strangulation moods such as paranoia, fear, despair, and nihilism. To aid the implementation of these moods the filmmakers used unique visual styles.

- Claustrophobic shots: Shots within film noir tend to reveal very little of the surrounding environments where it is being filmed. There are seldom wide expansive shots of buildings, or panoramic views, even when filmed in city settings. Shots such as ones which reach beyond the close confines of a room, however, were shot through a window [11].

- Anti-traditional lighting: Traditionally, high-key lighting design is used, wherein the key-to-fill intensity ratio[3] is small. This gives a realistic image, because the face of the character is attractively modeled with soft shadows, and without

- unnatural areas of darkness. However, noir lighting is low-key lighting. Here, the

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[3] A quantitative measure of the difference in intensity between key and fill lights.

ratio of the key light to fill light is great, thus creating areas of high contrast and

rich black shadows. This leads to hiding of faces, rooms, landscapes, and can also

be interpreted as obscureness in the motivations and true characters of the people

within noir world.

Noir cinematographers placed key, fill and backlights in every conceivable

variation, so that this produced not only high contrast, but also some of the most

striking and unconventional designs. Strange highlights were often used to frame

the face of an ominous character. A "kick light" was created using a key light that

was moved to the back or the side of the actor. Most of the time, however, the

actors were shot in total shadows or were silhouetted against an illuminated

background. Moving the key light high above or below the actor created unusual

shadows and facial expressions.

Because film noir is characterized by the constant conflict between light and

dark, the small areas of light seem to be completely overwhelmed by the darkness

that surrounds them. Adding to this ambience are the strange shadow patterns,

indicative of evil, which are created on the walls with low key lit faces in dark

interiors. In addition, night-for-night shots are very common in film noir and in

order to enhance the image quality it was frequently necessary to bring in

artificial light sources to illuminate each area of light seen in the frame. This lead

to high contrast lighting with the sky being rendered jet black [11].

- Extended depth of field: In many close and medium shots, all that falls within the

  frame are kept in sharp focus. Thus, all the objects, the characters, and even the

background are clearly visible in the shot. Using the camera with intensified depth of field creates the effect of stressed characters, and encircling doom, which are characteristics pertaining to a typical noir world. This increase in depth of field is done by increasing the amount of light entering the lens, or using a lens of wider focal length. Since noir films already involve use of low-key lights and night-for-night photography, use of wide-angled lenses added additional depth of field.

In addition to their effect on depth of field, wide-angle lenses also tend to distort the faces and objects in the scene by making them bulge outwards, thus creating a potentially disturbing image. This effect often comes handy while shooting close-ups of gangsters or politicians, or even the terror on the hero's face, as it seems much more intensified than when shot with a normal lens. Wide-angle has the power of drawing the viewer into the picture, and including him in this disorderly world of noir, thus drawing out emotional reactions [11].

- Mise-en-scene: Everything that appears in front of the camera such as the sets, the actors, lighting, props, and costumes, along with their orderly placement is called mise-en-scene. Film noir employs a distinctive mise-en-scene, and is designed to unsettle and disorient the viewer, thus complementing the corresponding disorientation felt by noir heroes. The compositional balance in each frame in particular is unnerving and disorderly, which is caused by bizarre off angle composition with actors placed irregularly in the frame, thus creating a world which is unsafe and unstable. The feeling of claustrophobia is enhanced by using devices such as doors, windows, staircases, metal bed frames, and even

shadows which tend to separate characters from each other, or from their emotions and the world. For heightening this feeling, objects are brought to the foreground, thus rendering them more important and powerful than people themselves.

Noir directors are unconventional even in the way they use screen-size in noir films. They often used unnerving variations of traditional close-ups and medium shots. Establishing long shots were seldom seen in noir movies, thus giving the viewer no means of spatial orientation. Choker close-ups framing the head or the chin, and high-angle long shot with a fatalistic angle were shot to aid disturbing and opposing sense of feeling. To heighten the harsh unpleasant feeling, these shots were placed in juxtaposition to each other. A good example would be to cut from an extreme close-up to a high-angle long shot looking down upon a man being pursued on a dark city street [11].

III.3. Characteristics of Looney Tunes

At Warner Bros., cartoons remained cartoons. In contrast to the Disney style, the Holy Grail was not the "illusion of life." Disney moved forward with an ever-greater proficiency at bringing realism into all their animations, trying always to remove any cue that might remind the audience that they were watching cartoons. At Warner Bros. however, the animators wanted the audience to recognize their artwork as work of pure fantasy, yet simultaneously a consistent world capable of sustaining their artifices.

- Fred "Tex" Avery directed many films with innovative ideas, and throughout

these efforts, he made sure that all his characters remained in the cartoon frontier which was a unique quality of Warner Bros. cartoons. During the formative years the Warner Bros. animators generally became less bound to cinematic storytelling conventions. In many of their shorts, little signs and placards would pop into the screen, making comments on the events that are taking place. In Porky Pig's *Duck Hunt* (1937), a hand-held sign appears in the screen notifying the audience, "This is an electric eel, folks" just before the wiggly thing transforms into an underwater lightning bolt [12]. In some cases, the characters themselves would step out of their roles and address the audience, like in 1941's *Tortoise Beats Hare*, Cecil Turtle tells the viewers, "We do this kinda stuff to him (Bugs Bunny) all through the picture." [12] Also, sometimes the characters would flick their eyes in the audience direction forewarning them of the treacherous act they are about to commit.

- Warner Bros. cartoons employed some devices that had elaborate comical effect on these shorts. One such effect can be observed in Avery's *The Bear's Tale* (1940) in which we see Goldilocks and Red Riding Hood chatting on phones, revealed by a diagonal line dividing the screen, thus showing them both. In this short, at the end of the call, Red hands Goldie a note by reaching her over the line, thus violating the "special effect" of the split screen. There were several cartoons that showed what appeared to be a silhouette of a man stand up and interact with the characters on screen while the story was in motion. In *Thugs With Dirty Mugs* (1939), a spectator gives up the information of where the film's thugs are hiding to the cartoon cop, after saying that he had sat through this film twice. And in *Daffy Duck and Egghead* (1938), one of members in the audience

gets shot at by a rifle-toting hunter for not listening to the hunter's requests, after being told repeatedly to sit down quietly.

- Many techniques were used to intentionally disengage the viewer's focus on the storyline and direct them toward the film qua film, thus never letting the audience forget that the characters on screen were cartoons. One of the popular conventions was to allow for a quick change in the pace of action, from slow-and-easy to super-fast and back. A good example of this would be *Fast and Furry-ous* [1949] in which the opening shot shows a fast-paced Road Runner being chased by slightly slower Coyote at a distance. This shot then cuts to a closer freeze frame shot wherein introductions are made while the camera moves back and forth. Immediately after we see a slow-motion animation of an accelerating Road Runner who eventually starts running at his regular pace, and so does the animation.

- Live-action technics introduced by Frank Tashlin, such as montage, dissolves, oblique camera angles, up-shots, and down-shots gave Warner Bros. cartoons a visual variety and fineness of timing that contributed to their unique style of magical realism [13].

- Chuck Jones introduced the use of highly stylized backgrounds. The setting was as caricatured as the cartoons themselves. For example, trees were jagged washes of color, and other features in the landscape were depicted by a variety of abstract forms.

Having a general understanding of these characteristics will help us get a clear picture of its usage when we see its application in some of the examples presented in the next section.

CHAPTER IV

CASE STUDY – VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS

In this chapter examples which showcase some of the characteristics of film parody, film noir and *Looney Tunes* discussed in the previous chapter will be reviewed. Specifically, film noirs exemplars, as well as a film noir parody and a Looney Tunes short that spoofs gangster movies will be used to illustrate signature lighting techniques and camera composition.

IV.1. *My Favorite Brunette* (1947) – A Film Noir Parody by Bob Hope

My Favorite Brunette is primarily a parody of film noir movies, in particular detective stories with iconic protagonists. Examples such as Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and Philip Marlowe in *The Big Sleep* (1946) immediately come to mind. *My Favorite Brunette* opens with Ronnie Jackson on death row, about to be executed for a murder he didn't commit. He explains to all the journalists outside his cell how he evolved from a baby photographer into a private eye. It begins with his attempt to manage the business of his next-door neighbor who happens to be none other than celebrated noir performer, Alan Ladd. He explains to them how Baronness Carlotta Montay came to ask his help in tracking down her missing uncle and, before he knew how, he was deeply involved in solving this mystery and entangled in a plot to find the Baron's uranium. This is a classic pattern characteristic of film noir wherein the story begins with the protagonist recalling the events that occurred in the past, which led him or her down the path of destruction. Like most film noir movies, this story has a flashback and a voice-over narration by the protagonist, who is currently awaiting

execution.

My Favorite Brunette is an excellent example of what was referred to earlier as "creative criticism." In the story Ronnie Jackson, Hope's character, steps into the gumshoes of Sam McCloud (played by Alan Ladd), who is on a case to find the missing husband of the mysterious femme fatale Baroness Montay, a case involving deadly villains, hulking thugs, double and triple crosses, and gloomy mansions. Predictably the movie also contains many plot twist *clichés*. What makes a satisfying parody, however, are the in-jokes, screwball spoofs, and ironic performances amalgamated with the storyline.

The use of film icons that are strongly associated with the genre under friendly attack is evident in *My Favorite Brunette*. Apart from the cameo role of Alan Ladd, Peter Lorre, known for his roles in classic noir films such as *The Maltese Falcon* and *Casablanca*, also plays a part in the movie as evil Kismet, the right hand man of the master criminal who is after the uranium. Lon Chaney Jr., known for starring in many horror films plays one of the master criminal's henchmen, grows fond of Hope's character, Ronnie. There is also a significant difference in the acting styles of Hope and Ladd as seen in the movie. Hope's character is a cowardly figure who attempts to be a tough guy. He plays his part as a thorough comedian by being fully animated, while Ladd like many of the film noir figures, has minimalist style of body movement and dialogue. Thus, he lives up to the expectations of a noir character who would engage in protecting oneself by exposing very little.

IV.1.1. *Visual Characteristics*

My Favorite Brunette incorporates most of the cinematic elements that characterize film noir. The use of these elements, however, varies from being quite typical to being highly exaggerated, highlighting the styles in the genre being parodied.

- Film noir makes extensive usage of unconventional camera angles, designed to make the audience feel tense and uncomfortable. In one of the early scenes in *My Favorite Brunette*, Carlotta meets Ronnie at his office for the first time, tells him about her case, hands him a map, and leaves the office hurriedly on sensing someone overhearing their conversation. One of the camera shots here has Ronnie looking down from his office window to see Carlotta leaving his office building and driving away. Behind her the thug whose presence she sensed earlier in Ronnie's office follows her in his car. The tension that this scene demands is well handled with a high angled camera view looking down upon the street outside Ronnie's office (see Fig. 4. (a)). There is also slight camera tilt and panning which further unnerves the audience (see Fig. 4. (b)).

Fig. 4. *My Favorite Brunette* 1947, camera angles. (a) & (b) High angle, overhead and skewed shot [14].

- The use of low key lights along with little or no low intensity fill lights are typical of the film noir genre and are clearly evident in Ronnie's office building corridor, Sam's office, and the old mansion (see Fig. 5.). As is typical, the vast majority of the frame is black due to a single source of light being used to illuminate the entire shot leading to heavy shadows being cast [15]. The high contrast lighting, with actors placed under harsh key lights, produced dark shadows across their faces and on the backgrounds.

Fig. 5. *My Favorite Brunette* 1947, lighting. (a) & (b) Low intensity key light with no or low intensity fill lights [14].

- The techniques used to create exaggerated shadow are used to engender feelings of confinement, dread and some other dark emotions in the audience. For instance, in the bar scene from the movie *Murder My Sweet* (1944) (see Fig. 6. (a)) we see bright lights filled with shadows. The shadows cast by the chairs stacked up on the table in the background create an eerie intertwinement of lines on the walls. It appears like a web that echoes the film's plot. In *My Favorite Brunette*, we see Baron Montay sitting in a wheelchair for the first time, and behind him on the wall we see a shadow of a window in the shape of a cobweb (see Fig. 6. (b)). Here, the director's parody of this characteristic cinematic element is self-evident.

(a)   (b)

Fig. 6. Comparing shadow patterns. (a) *Murder My Sweet* 1944, (b) *My Favorite Brunette* 1947 [14].
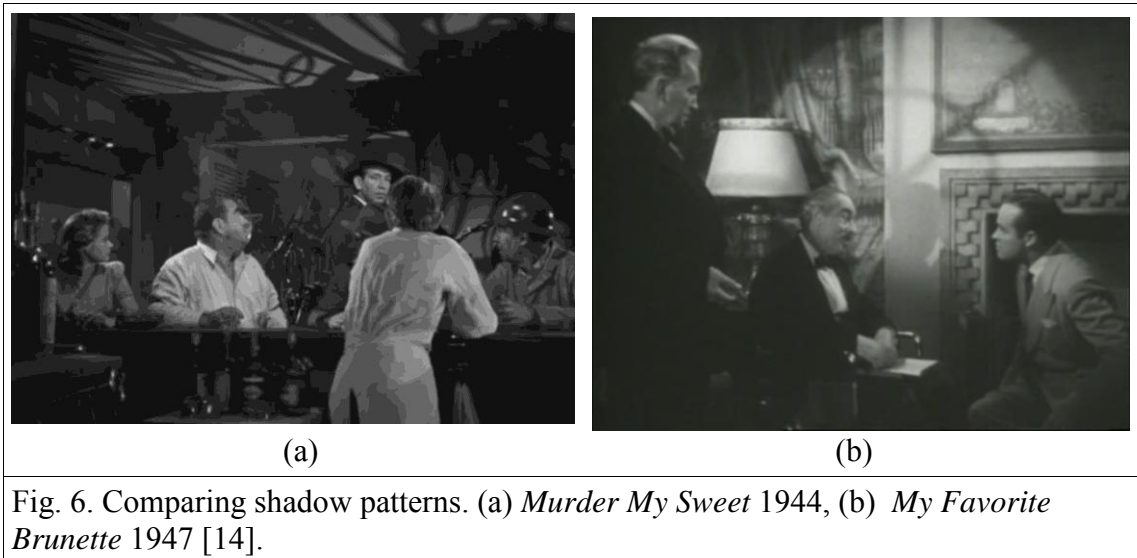
- In the mental sanitarium where Ronnie and Carlotta have been held captive, we see big venetian blinds shadow cast on the walls of the corridor, which is almost the length of the wall. The blinds create visual tension because of the vivid strips and distorted diagonal lines they cast as shadows. This brings about an air of

instability, ambivalence, or imprisonment like being caged, or being behind

prison bars. Also the light coming through these blinds create an impression that

it is always darker and claustrophobic inside the room, where the characters are

confined. Since the blinds create equal parts of light and shadow, transparency

and opacity, it also acts as a filter through which we see our protagonist and in

interpreting the events. This plays a significant role in the world of treachery and

deceit, where nothing is clear and certain until it's too late [16]. In *My Favorite*

Brunette, the venetian blinds shadow has been used to convey the captive

situation of Ronnie and Carlotta (see Fig. 7.). This is also indicative of the

deceiving act put on by Ronnie who behaves like a mental patient to a pseudo-

nurse Carlotta for a passing sanitarium attendant as they try to escape out of the

sanitarium.

Fig. 7. *My Favorite Brunette* 1947,
venetian blinds [14].

- In another scene, on gaining consciousness after being hit on the head, Ronnie

  tries to recollect what had just happened, when his baby photography customer

  walks into his office demanding him to give her baby pictures. This makes him

realize that the key-hole camera picture he took at the mansion of the thugs and the uncle, who was no longer wheelchair borne, has gone missing. At this point, we see the shadows of the letters 'ER' from his office door   'PHOTOGRAPHER' label being displayed across his pants (see Fig. 8.), and he exclaims, "Boy! I have things to do... very important things to do." This gesture made using shadows again is an obvious announcement to the audience of the current frantic situation.

Fig. 8. *My Favorite Brunette* 1947, 'ER' shadow pattern [14].

- Deep focus is also a technique used in the movie. For example, in one scene Carlotta is in the living room of the mansion explaining to Ronnie about her missing uncle when a rear door opens to reveal the master criminal standing in the dark. In this shot (see Fig. 9.) we see Ronnie and Carlotta placed at medium shot distance from the camera with Carlotta being lit with harsh key light as if she was being interrogated. The door is placed in the center of the frame giving it significant importance, which is later opened by the master criminal who is seen, but is placed in the dark, giving him that mysterious, unknown quality.

Fig. 9. *My Favorite Brunette* 1947, deep focus
[14].

Apart from cinematographic elements, the presences of telltale objects, such as cigarettes and alcohol, contribute to film noir's mise-en-scene [17][18]. When Ronnie returns to Sam's office after developing the picture taken through the keyhole, he sits at Sam's desk and pours himself a glass of whiskey. In this medium shot (see Fig. 10. (a)) with low key lighting, we see bottles and glasses on the desk, and on a table in the background, all present in this single camera view to exaggerate the importance of and thus parody the presence of alcohol bottles and glasses in film noir. At the beginning of the movie, the first shot of Ronnie has him smoking a cigarette (see Fig. 10. (b)). Before walking out of his cell for being executed, he pretends to be a tough guy by puffing smoke at the guard staring at him.

Fig. 10. *My Favorite Brunette* 1947, mise-en-scene. (a) Liquor bottles, (b) cigarette smoke [14].
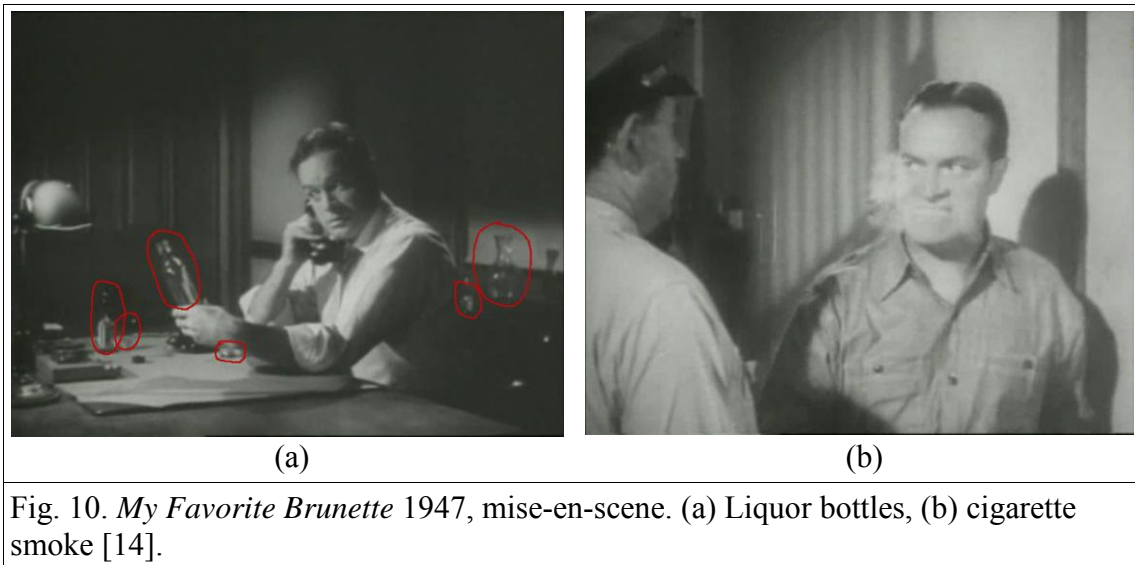
- As noted earlier, film noir characters employ a minimal body language to protect themselves from deceitful world around them. Everything is done in such a subtle manner that the audience remains uncertain about the character's real intention, thus contributing to the ever present tension. In *My Favorite Brunette*, in addition to Hope's fully animated character, Carlotta routinely overplays her part to give it a comical touch. One particularly comical scene occurs when Carlotta points a knife at a cowardly Ronnie, who has returned after meeting with her doctor in the other room, and is aware of her mental illness. She keeps swaying the knife in an obvious fashion in front of his face making him jumpy and restless in front of her, thus revealing to her that the doctor and others had given him false information about her.

- The color of the clothes worn by the actors in most parts of the movie also conveys the nature of the characters in some ways. For instance, Peter Lorre's character and the master criminal are dressed in black most of the time. Lon Chaney, Jr., however, is seen in shades of black as well as white colored clothes.

In the movie, Lon's character is a right hand man of the master criminal, but who grows fond of Hope's character. Having him clothed in black or white depending on the nature of the role he is playing conveys directly his ambivalent disposition. Similarly, Carlotta is dressed in shades of black and white. In her case, the viewer is unclear of her character's nature and one is forced to rely on the color of her clothing to decide. The viewer is unsure as to whether she is also playing a part in the conspiracy of her missing uncle, or whether she is truly concerned for him being kidnapped. Hope's character for most parts of the movie is seen in light shades of gray or in white, which clearly signals that his character is pure and trustworthy.

The same pattern can be observed in case of the cars driven by these two different sets of people. The color of the card driven by Ronnie and Carlotta are always shades of white, while the thugs always appear in black cars.

IV.2. Film Noir Lighting Style and Camera Composition

IV.2.1. Murder My Sweet *(1944)*

This film employs a complex, convoluted plot that inculcates feelings of terror and mystery by adopting a rigorous consistency in visual style. In their article, *Towards a Definition of Film Noir*, Borde and Chaumeton link the adjectives "nightmarish weird and cruel" to the cinematic and narrative style of film noir [19]. *Murder My Sweet* exhibits these characteristics, especially via Marlowe's character, and this has been

reinforced in the film through the way he is lit. In most parts of the film he is shown in dark shadows with only a small portion of his face made visible with a sliver of light for noting his expression. The film itself is shot with extreme 'low key' lighting in many parts to establish the hard storyline.

In one particularly well-crafted scene from *Murder My Sweet* (see Fig. 11.), Philip Marlowe is lit by a harsh lamp light, as well as from another light which is not visible within the scene. The presence of the other light is known from reflections seen on the table lamp's surface. The white cloth binding his eyes loses details at its extreme ends; the front of which is exposed to the harsh light is bleached out, while the opposite end, which receives no light at all, loses its 3 dimensionality because of dark shadows. Marlowe's face has a gradient tone that ranges from stark white to pitch black. The office setting is engulfed by blackness from all sides. The white light from outside the door on the left, and the diffused light on the wall with a well-defined shadow on the right help audience to identify the whereabouts of the characters, and prevent the blackness from completely consuming their environment.

Fig. 11. *Murder My Sweet* 1944, lighting conditions [20].

In Fig. 12, in a still shot from the same scene, we see a man whose face is lit from the left by an intense light, a man to whom the past events of Philip Marlowe's life are being told. The position of the unknown light in this shot can be predicted by observing the shadow formed on the wall. In his book, *Perspective Drawing Handbook*, D'Amelio talks of how the angle of the light rays is used to determine the shadow length. He notes that their (light rays) vanishing point must lie on the same vertical vanishing line as the shadows' vanishing point because both the rays and the shadows lie on parallel plane [21]. Thus, once this point is fixed, it is easy to locate the correct shadow lengths from the light rays passing through the objects. Therefore, shadows are long when the vanishing point for light rays is close to the horizon, and as the vanishing point increases in distant from the horizon, either from above or below. Also, the shadows become shorter as the rays rise higher. Getting back to the image we were discussing earlier, we see that the man's shadow is almost as tall as himself, and so we can conclude that the light might be slightly above, or at the same height as him at an angle on the right in the

room. The intensity of it is strong enough to light the wall behind him brightly, and create a sharp shadow. This can be established after comparing it with the other light cast on same wall on the right side of the character. This source of light seems more diffused in comparison, and hence creates a shadow with slightly blurred edges. Also, like observed earlier, the presence of one harsh light and lack of fill lights renders the character's right side of the face dark, thus losing details except for the hint of light that locates his eyes, brows, and ears.

Fig. 12. *Murder My Sweet* 1944, determining lighting conditions using shadow information [20].

IV.2.2. Kiss Me Deadly *(1955)*

As observed in the figures from this film, the dutch angle is used in the hospital scene to portray the imbalance experienced by Hammer as he regains his consciousness (see Fig. 13. (a) & (b)). The camera alternates between the director's and character's point of view to emphasize this point. Dutch angle shots thus create uncomfortable, disoriented viewing for the audience.

(a)	(b)

Fig. 13. *Kiss Me Deadly* 1955. (a) & (b) Dutch angle shots [22].

IV.2.3. Touch of Evil *(1958)*

Fig. 14. shows a low, wide-angle head and shoulder close up shot of Orson Welles. The wide-angle lens used here makes his face bulge outward, giving him an unpleasant look. The low-angle of the camera distorts the compositional lines and creates a more forceful perspective, thus intensifying the dramatic impact on the audience. It enlarges the form in front of the camera by giving it a broad base and a reduced perspective, and when used with wide-angle lens, this optical effect is further emphasized.

Fig. 14. *Touch of Evil* 1958, wide, low angle shot
[23].

Thus, the visual characteristics of film noir can be understood with these different

approaches to lighting and camera composition seen in these different examples. These

tell us how lights can be set up to achieve high contrast lighting with crisp shadows, and

how to compose a shot using dutch angles and wide-angles to produce an uncomfortable,

dramatic effect.

IV.3. *Thugs with Dirty Mugs* (1939) – A Looney Tunes Parody

Thugs with Dirty Mugs is a short directed by Tex Avery, whose satirical eyes took aim at

just about everything. This short is a spoof of gangster movies in which a caricature of

Edward G. Robinson voiced by Tex Avery himself stars as Killer Diller, who along with

his gang are responsible for robbing every bank in town. The police lead by Flat-Foot

Flanigan starring as "Sherlock Homes", has failed to catch them despite their

predictability. In this short, Killer and his gang loot every National bank except the 13th

as Killer is superstitious (see Fig. 15.), and the audience is informed about this in a

headline of a newspaper.

Fig. 15. *Thugs with Dirty Mugs* 1939, superstitious killer [24].

As discussed earlier, there are many instances in this short film that make the audience believe what they are watching is in fact a cartoon. For example, the gangster's car exhibiting extreme squashing everytime it stops (see Fig. 16. (a)), the violation of "rules" of the split screen by Flat-Foot Fanigan when he tells the Secret Agent 2138 who has information of the gangster's hideout to speak up louder on phone by looking over to his side of the screen (see Fig. 16. (b)), the guns and the cigarette hanging in the air while Killer bags the bills at a bank, and Flat-Foot Fanigan pacing his office while overtly obsessing over catching Killer, respectively (see Fig. 16. (c)).
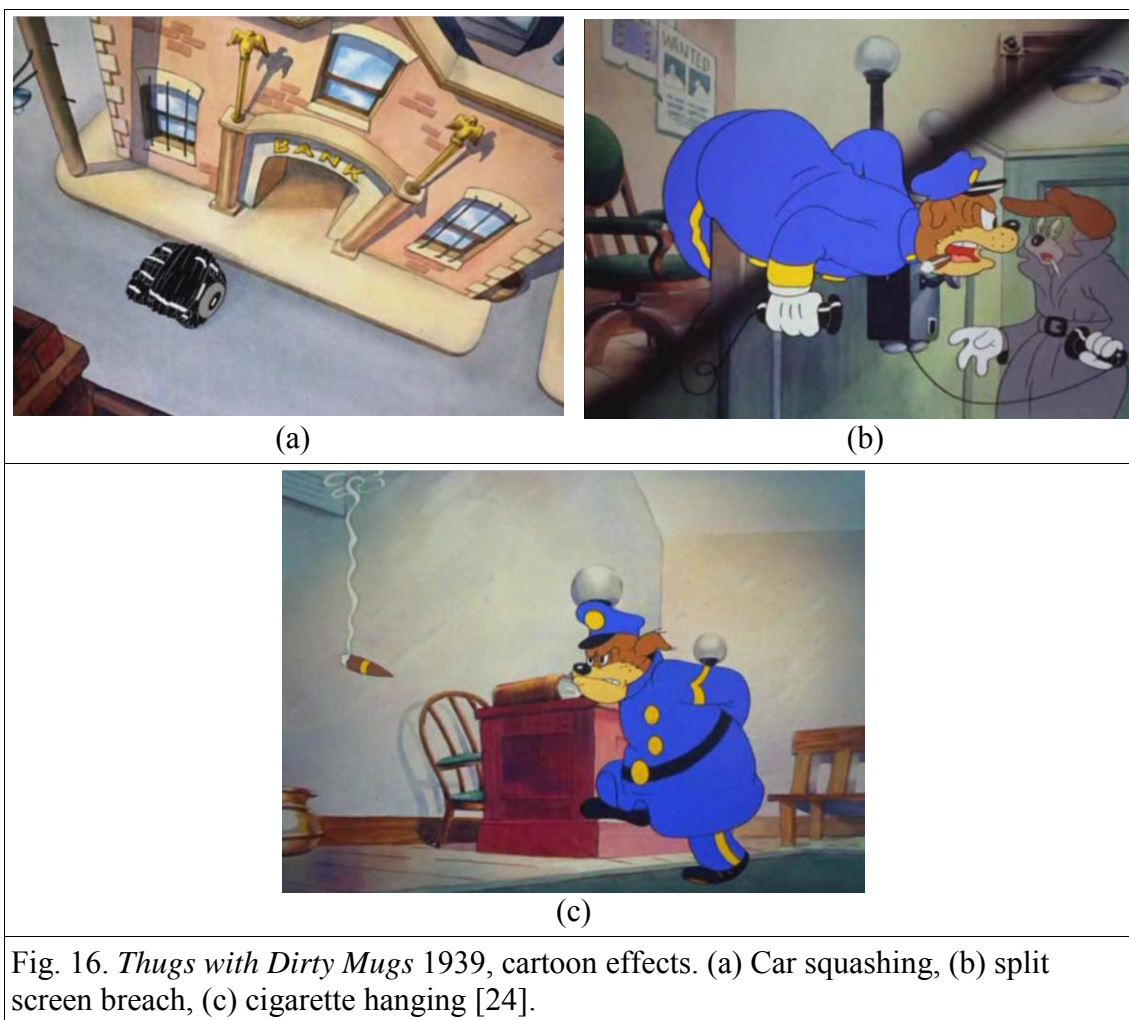
Fig. 16. *Thugs with Dirty Mugs* 1939, cartoon effects. (a) Car squashing, (b) split screen breach, (c) cigarette hanging [24].

This last mentioned sight gag where laws of physics are defied is commonly seen in many Looney Tunes shorts. In *Falling Hare* (1943), Bugs Bunny and the Gremlin are in a wrecked airplane that is going down at full speed, but are saved at the very last minute just few inches above the ground. Later, the Gremlin tells the viewers, "Sorry folks, we ran out of gas!" (see Fig. 17.).
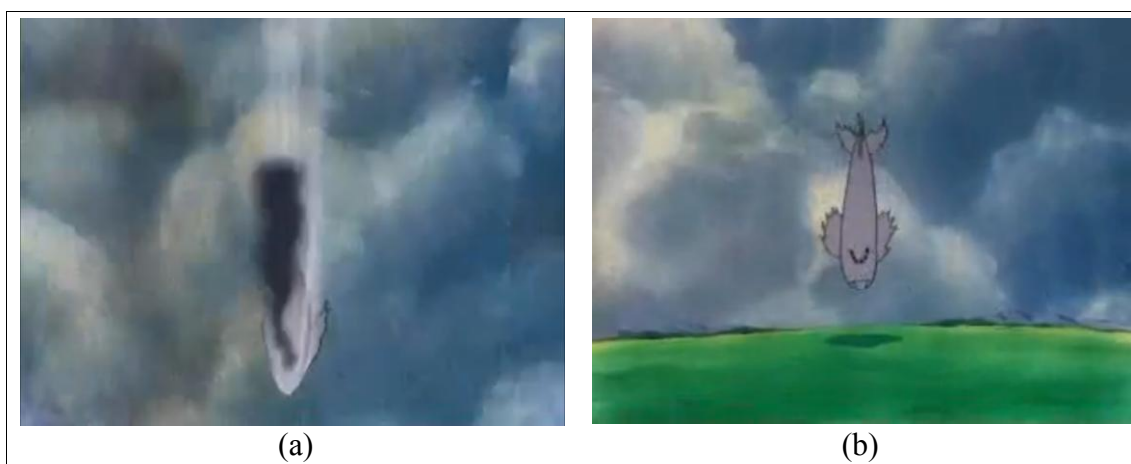
Fig. 17. Falling Hare 1943. (a) & (b) Run out of gas [25].

Coming back to *Thugs with Dirty Mugs;* this short has gags on literal meanings of some phrases. Flat-Foot Fanigan is shown throwing cheese pieces at a rat while he shouts out, "Take that you rat!" (see Fig. 18. (a)), and towards the end of the short, after Killer is captured and gets a long sentence, we see Killer writing the "long sentence" on a black board a 1000 times (see Fig. 18. (b) & (c)).
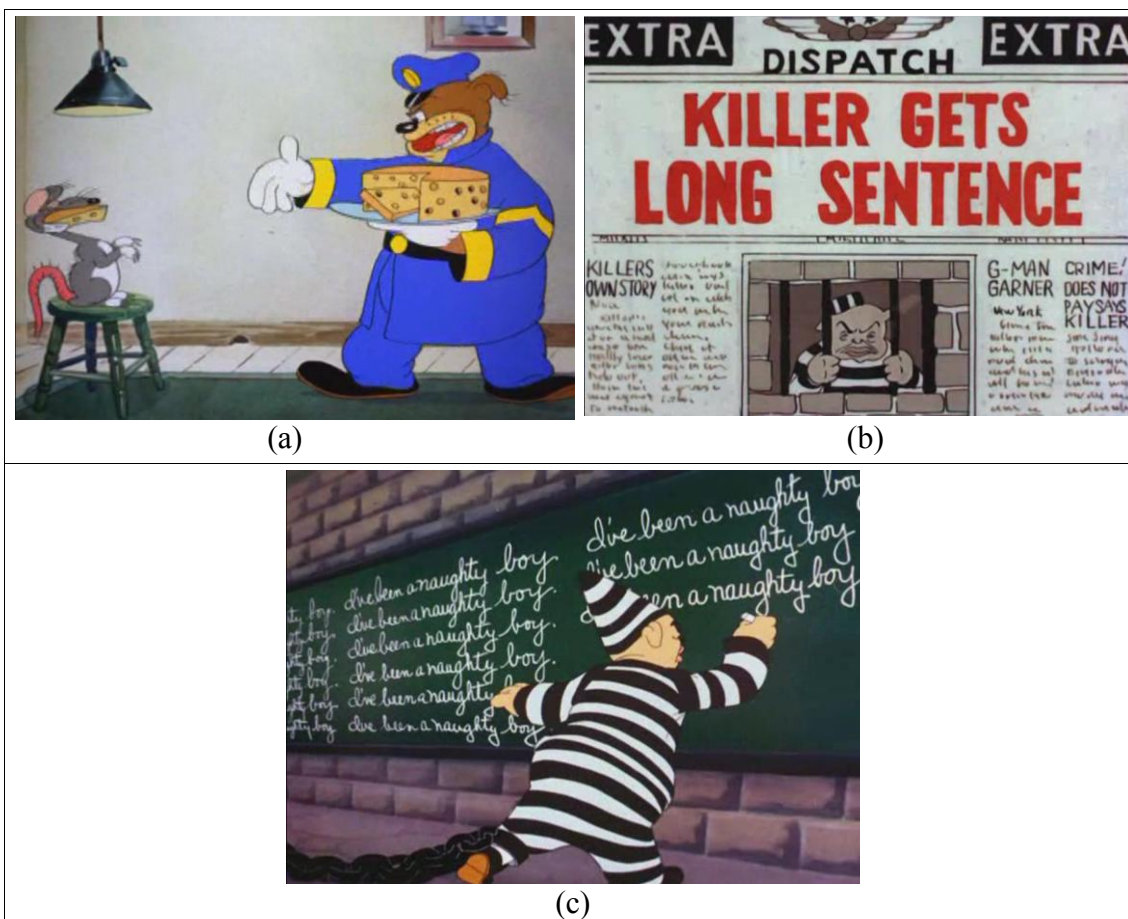
Fig. 18. *Thugs with Dirty Mugs* 1939, literal meanings. (a) "Take that you rat!" (b) & (c) Long sentence [24].

Some *Looney Tunes* shorts have used signs in relevant scenes to make it crystal clear to viewers of what they are seeing, leaving no room for doubts. One such sign seen in this short is the parking sign on a street, in front of a bank, which reads, "reserved for gangsters" (see Fig. 19. (a)). In *The Great Piggy Bank Robbery* (1946), detective Duck Twacy starring Daffy Duck gets into a tram with a sign, "to GANGSTER HIDEOUT", and reaches a destination with big neon signs reading, "TO GANGSTER HIDEOUT" and "THIS IS IT! ENTERANCE" (see Fig. 19. (b) & (c)).
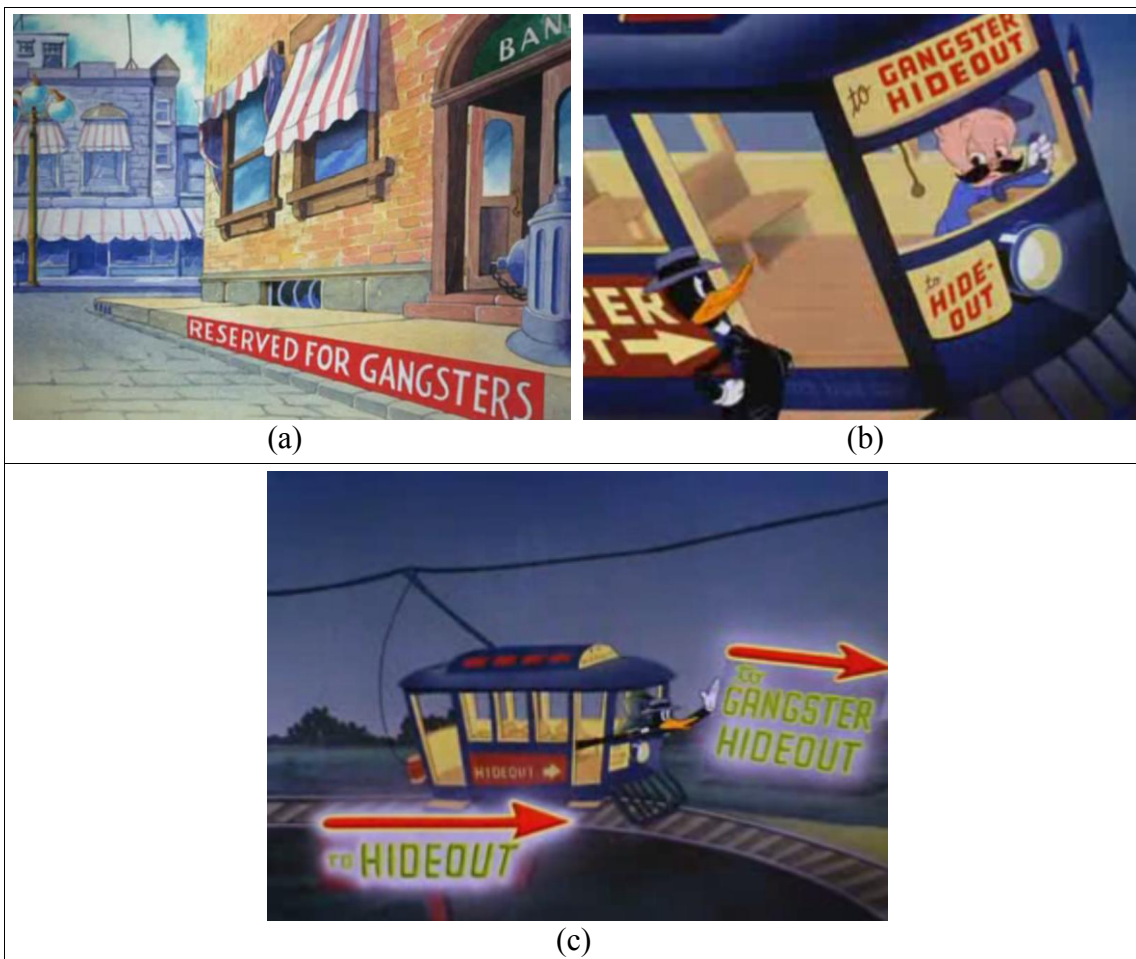
Fig. 19. Parking signs and signboards. (a) *Thugs with Dirty Mugs* 1939 [24], (b) & (c) *The Great Piggy Bank Robbery* 1946 [26].

We also see Killer, the police, and members in the audience interacting with each other in midstream (see Fig. 20.), thus helping the story progress and remain a coherent film.

Fig. 20. *Thugs with Dirty Mugs* 1939, interacting with audience [24].

Thus, these examples show how visual parody was conveyed in *Looney Tunes* shorts without much of their primary boisterous actions being used to exhibit the comical nature of these sequences.

CHAPTER V

CONVENTIONAL CAMERA COMPOSITION AND COLOR STUDY

A clear differentiation between the styles seen in framing film noir shots and traditional shots can be understood by studying different forms of conventional camera compositions, having already studied and knowing film noir compositions. In this section, conventional camera compositions that aid in telling a story along with the use of pleasing color palette is discussed to make a composition more lively, meaningful and appealing.

V.1. Camera Composition

The angle of camera along with camera placement plays an important role in viewing the characters, settings, and actions taking place in a narrative. They determine area and the audience viewpoint within a shot. If chosen properly, the camera angle make the visuals dramatic, otherwise, it could confuse the audience in such a way that the meaning of a scene would become difficult to understand. So, selection of correct camera angles is important for continued interest in the storyline. Some of the camera angles used are:

- Extreme Long Shot: An extreme long shot covers vast areas, so that audience can view large areas of settings and events happening. Adapting an extremely wide angle shot when shooting long shot works better than panning the camera for a static shot. Extreme long shots are best filmed from a mountain top, or from a

building top, or from an airplane or a helicopter, thus giving the audience an overall view of the location being filmed, and setting a proper mood. It makes for a good opening sequence or introduction for establishing a storyline [27].

- Long Shot: A long shot establishes the area of action, place, people and the objects in the scene. A long shot may include a street, a house, a room, or any other place where the action is taking place [27]. Audiences are aware of the character's surroundings, and can view all the objects in the scene. These shots are loosely composed to give the actors enough room to move about while acting.

- Medium Shot: In a medium shot, the camera is placed close enough to record actor's gestures, facial expressions and movements. The two-shot is most commonly used in a medium shot as it heightens the drama. Generally two actors facing each other and exchanging dialogues is captured. However, if well-lit equally none of the actors assume domination in the composition. Dominance can only be achieved through dialogues, actions, or through appropriate lighting. Depth can also be created in a two-shot by angling the camera such that the nearest actor is turned slightly away from the camera, while the farthest player is filmed in three-quarter angle [27].

- Close-up: Close-ups eliminate all the non-essentials in the scene, and isolate the significant event that needs narrative emphasis. The different kinds of close-ups of people are,

- ◦ <u>Medium Close-up</u>: Captures midway between shoulder and waist to above the head.

- ◦ <u>Head and Shoulder Close-up</u>: Captures from below the shoulder to above the head.

- ◦ <u>Head Close-up</u>: Captures head alone.

- ◦ <u>Choker Close-up</u>: Captures from below the lips to above the eyes.

- ◦ <u>Extreme Close-up</u>: Small portions of big objects or spaces can be filmed so that they look magnified on screen. For example, portions of head such as lips, ears, and nose can be filmed when they receive dramatic significance in a narrative [27].

V.2. Color and Its Meaning

Colors are so evident in our daily life that we almost give no conscious attention. Colorists from various fields put pigments to all kinds of applications, to maintain harmonious effect. In cartoons, Disney was the first to venture into creative use of colors in his animation shorts. As Leonard Maltin notes, "Right from the start Disney was concerned with creative use of color, not just color itself" [28] Color certainly helped in asserting Disney's three aspects of color representation; them being, creating a convincing "illusion of life", story narration and maintaining strong emotional attachment and identification for the audience through character's personality and actions, and finally Disney's "artistic spectacle" - its attention to detail and stylistic flourishes – presented as a third important dimension [28].

Color is one of the most active stimulus for perception of spacial orientation and depth as cited by Psychologists and perception theorists. Robert Boynton in his article, "Color in Contour and Object Perception," writes that when we open our eyes in an illuminated room we are bombarded with the images of forms that quickly become "differentiated and separated from one another through differences in their colors. Colors are what fill in the outlines of the forms; they are stuff out of which visual phenomena are built." [28] The choice of colors also helps in creating an illusion of various planes, other than the depth and spatial cues. For example, cooler colors and tints tend to draw back, while warmer colors and shades appear to advance in a flat color image. In the same way, brighter colors appear larger, in comparison to darker objects of similar shape and size. This helps in determining the perception of various planes in two-dimensional surfaces.

As per philosophy of Natalie Kalmus, color should follow established conventional standards of harmony, contrast, and cultural connotations; color should be narrativized to add to the story without distracting the audience. She appealed for "natural colors" which did not tax the eye, and added that "even when Nature indulges in riot of beautiful colors, there are subtle harmonies that justify those colors." Her policies, as Bordwell writes, insisted on cool colors for sets and costumes, "the better to set off the tones of the characters' faces." and thus she dictated heavy use of pastels which were "less harsh and distracting." [28]

 A color design strategy helps to maintain harmony and color balance even in "riot of colors". It is done by using adjacent colors such as blue, blue-green, and green in the color scheme, with hues sharing similar values. The larger areas such as the sky, the

grass area or the wall has lesser intensity, whereas foreground objects and spaces use more saturated colors. This way there is more balanced color harmony with a greater sense of depth in the image.

As described in above paragraphs, the usage of different types of camera compositions and proper mix of colors provide a harmonious balance on screen, making a shot presentable. This can be further understood clearly with examples in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER VI

CASE STUDY – CAMERA COMPOSITION AND COLOR

A study of camera composition in select scenes from *Looney Tunes* shorts is presented in this chapter. The choice of colors used in these shorts give an overall idea of the *Looney Tunes* style of composition and colors choice.

VI.1. Camera Angles

Director Frank Tashlin was known for introducing cinematic techniques to Looney Tunes shorts. He used unconventional camera angles and rapid editing pace that are not exclusive to live-action cinema. In *Now That Summer is Gone* (1938), we see everything from zooms, pans and trucks to double exposure, montage and POV shots. The opening shot reveals a serene forest scene with colorful leaves flying in front of the camera, which starts to pan until the leaves cover the entire screen, when it cuts into the next extreme long shot (see Fig. 21. (a)). This shot captures a trail of working squirrels in the forest as the camera zooms in and dissolves into the next shot in which the trails are shown in closer proximity (see Fig. 21. (b)). We also get to see fade in and fade out effect being used when cutting from one location to another.

Fig. 21. *Now that Summer is Gone* 1938, camera angles. (a) Extreme long shot, (b) long shot [29].

The depth of field effect is produced as seen in Fig. 22 by placing the two squirrels very close to the camera, and the key character along the line of vanishing point. This effect is asserted further when the key character, and nearby squirrels grow larger when they come closer to the camera (see Fig. 22.), and then grow smaller when they move back again.

Fig. 22. *Now that Summer is Gone* 1938, depth of field effect, close-up, and wide-angle shot [29].
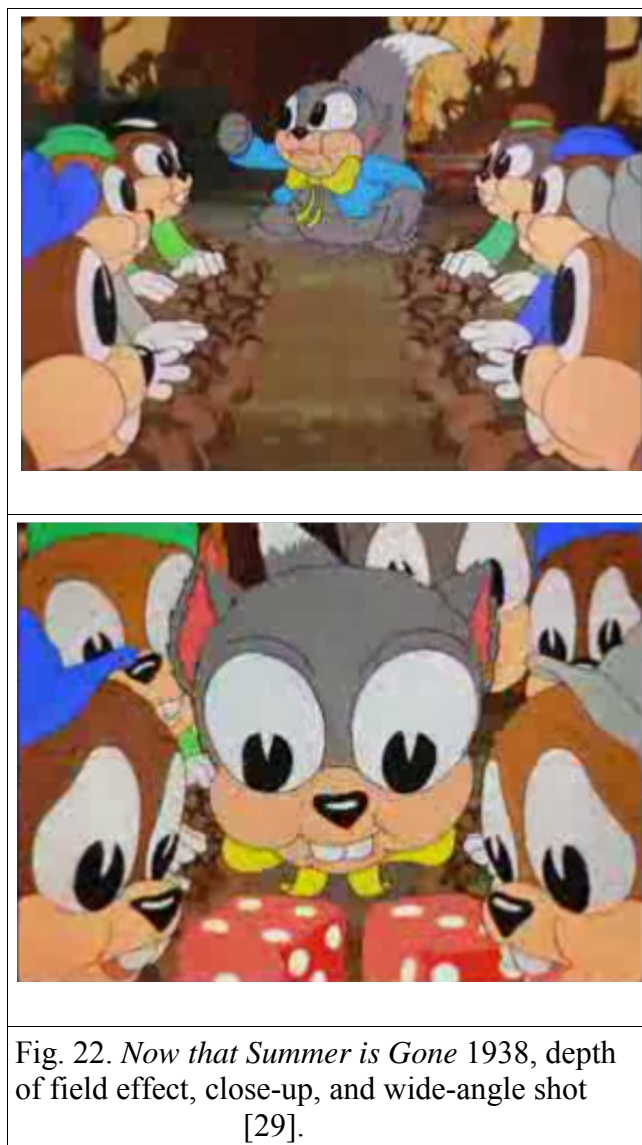
Tashlin directs the viewer's eyes in the desired direction as seen in Fig. 23 by placing the camera between the key character's legs, and thus creating a focus point within the camera frame.

Fig. 23. *Now that Summer is Gone* 1938, viewer's focus point [29].

We also get to see overhead shots and low camera angle shots as seen in Fig. 24.

In *Super Snooper* (1952), which is a spoof on private-eye film noir movies, the camera, though exaggerated, are similar to the style used in film noir. The opening shot is a low angle view of New York skyscrapers (see Fig. 25.), which is quite dramatic. The close up shot of the telephone as seen in Fig. 25 is accompanied by camera shake effect to emphasize the gun shots and screams coming through it. Juxtaposing an extreme high angle shot (see Fig. 26. (a)) with a low angle shot (see Fig. 26. (b)) in the same scene, and subsequently cutting to a medium low angle shot (see Fig. 26. (c)), is a unique style used generally in filming of film noir movies, and thus facilitates noir parody. Panning and zooming techniques are used extensively in this short.

Fig. 24. *Now that Summer is Gone* 1938, overhead shot, low angle shot [29].

Fig. 25. *Super Snooper* 1952, low angle shot of high rise buildings, and close-up shot [30].
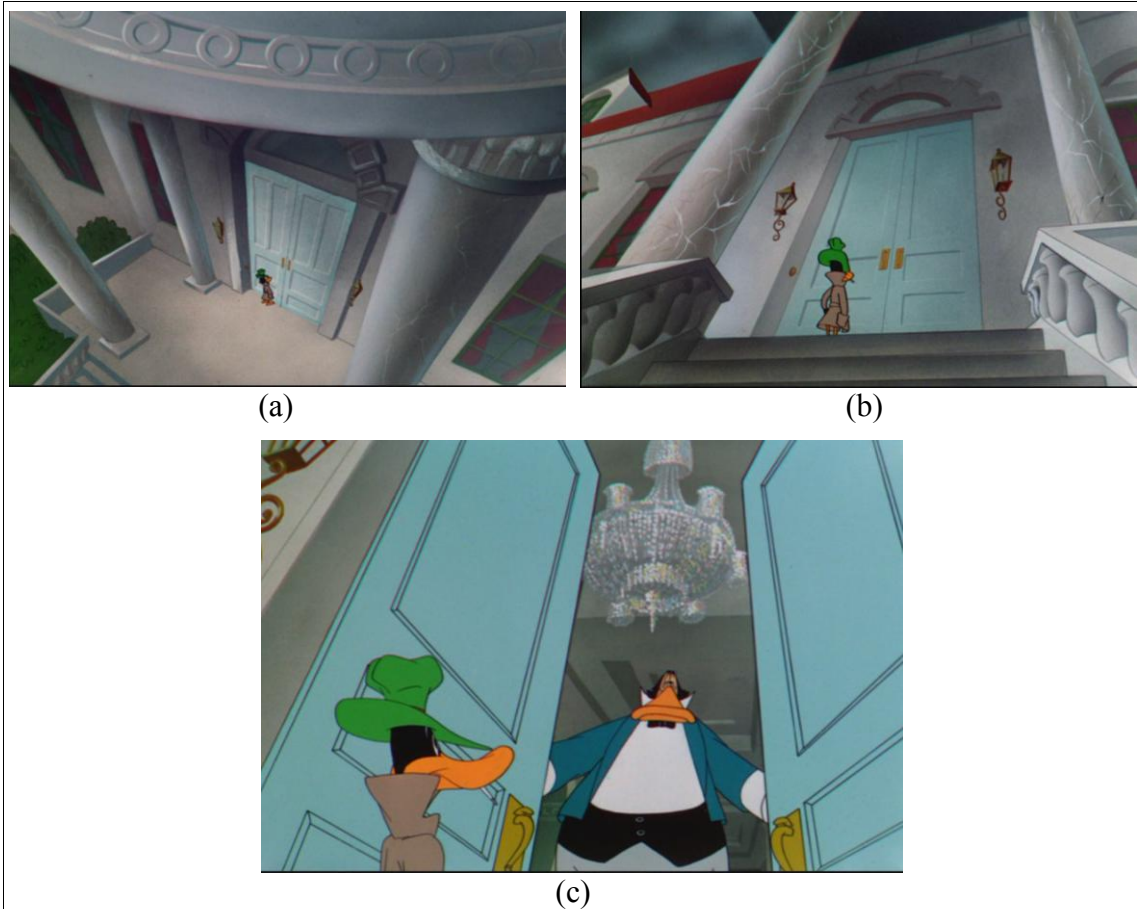
Fig. 26. *Super Snooper* 1952, (a) & (b) Juxtaposing high angle and low angle shots, (c) medium low angle shot [30].

VI.2. Color Schemes

The color schemes used in *Looney Tunes* shorts ranges from blending subtle color value to highly contrasting saturated warm and cool colors. John Kricfalusi in his blog observes Johnny Johnston paintings in *Tortoise Wins by a Hair* (1943), "Within his deep tones are many subtle color and value blends which makes the paintings and scenes really rich." [31] In the projector room (see Fig. 27.), the artist has used rich dark repressive colors like warm greys on the wall and the floor which contrast the cool grey
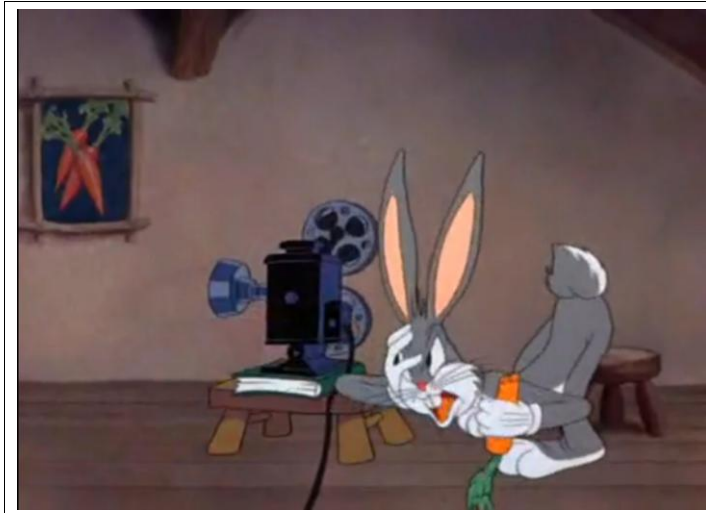
of Bugs Bunny, thus making it a pretty picture.

Fig. 27. *Tortoise Wins by a Hair* 1943 [32].

What's Opera Doc? (1957) is a parody of the 19th century classical composer Richard

Wagner's operas, particularly *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring of the Nibelung) and

Tannhauser, and utilizes a rich and varied color palette. The film begins with a silhouette

of a mighty Viking who is none other than Elmer Fudd, conjuring up an intense lightning

storm. The silhouette is seen on a background cliff which is painted blue (see Fig. 28.

(a)), while the parting clouds and the sky itself are combination of colors which include,

purple and blue for the sky, pitch black for the clouds, and off white for lightning (see

Fig. 28. (b)).

In contrast, Elmer Fudd, and the cliff he is standing on are painted bright yellow (see

Fig. 28. (c)), pushing them into the foreground and thereby adding depth to the picture.

Further depth planes are conveyed with the use of additional related colors, such as

bluish-green for ground near Bug's hole (see Fig. 28. (d)).

In one striking scene, the color of Elmer Fudd's helmet changes from muddy green to bright golden yellow when he proudly explains to Bugs how he is going to kill the "wabbit" with his spear and magic helmet (see Fig. 28. (e)). In another scene, when Elmer realizes that the beautiful Valkyrie Brunhilde is none other than Bugs himself, everything including himself, except the sky changes to bright red color (see Fig. 28. (f)). The artist behind these monumental designs and daring color-schemes, Maurice Noble recalls, "They thought I was bats when I put that bright red on Elmer with those purple skies." In the end, we see a bright yellow cone of light around Bugs' dead body, as Elmer picks him and walks away on a brightly lit yellow path. In this shot, he is shown as a silhouette walking through bright yellow rays of light (see Fig. 28. (g)).
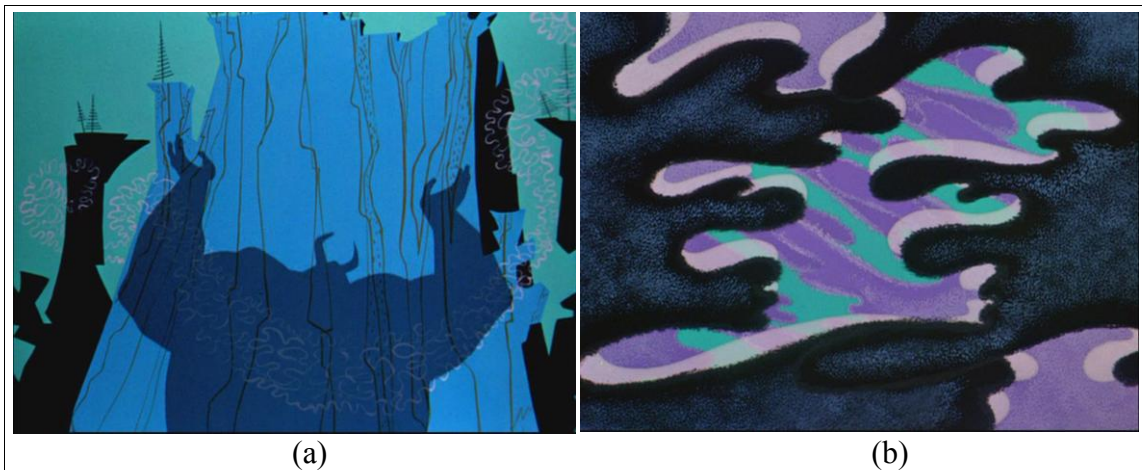

(a)   (b)

Fig. 28. *What's Opera Doc?* 1957, color palettes. (a) Blue cliff, (b) black clouds, off-white lightening, and purple sky, (c) yellow cliff, (d) bluish-green ground, (e) bright golden yellow helmet, (f) bright red color, (g) brightly lit yellow path [33].
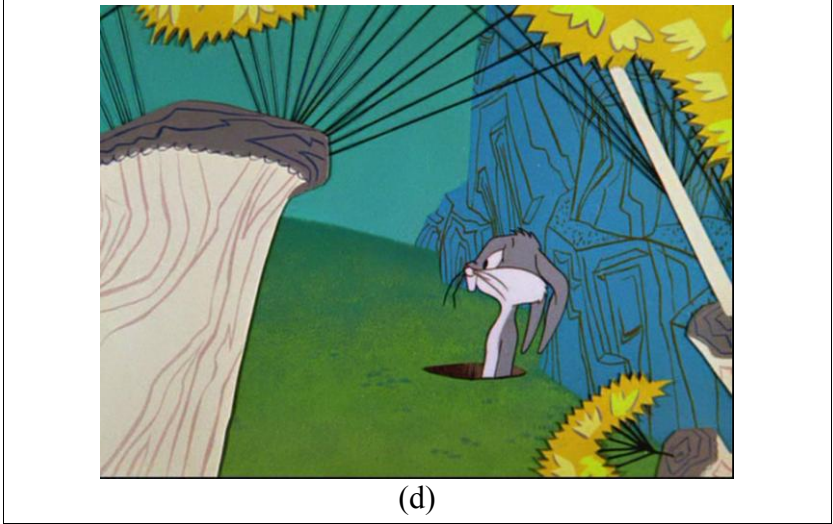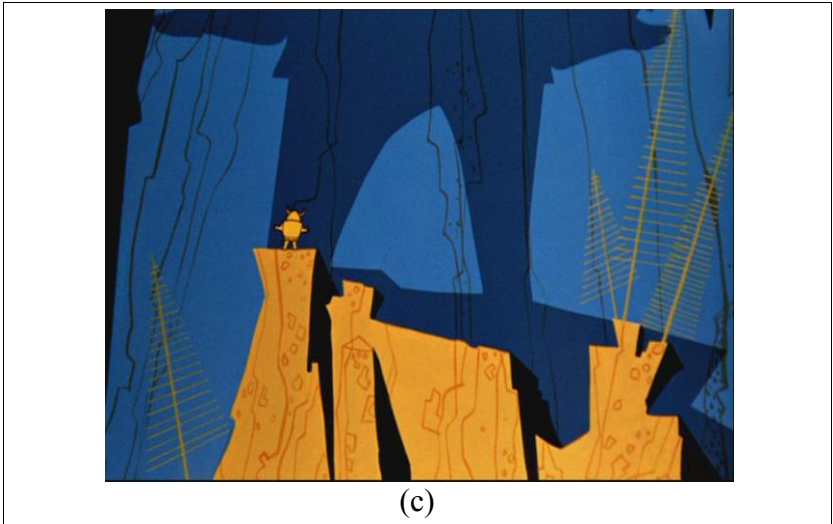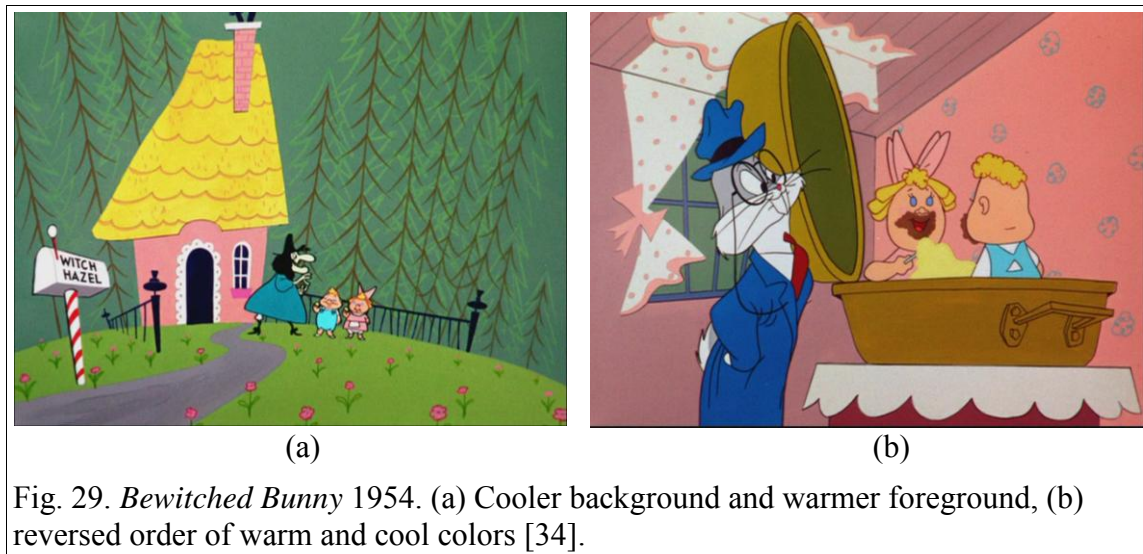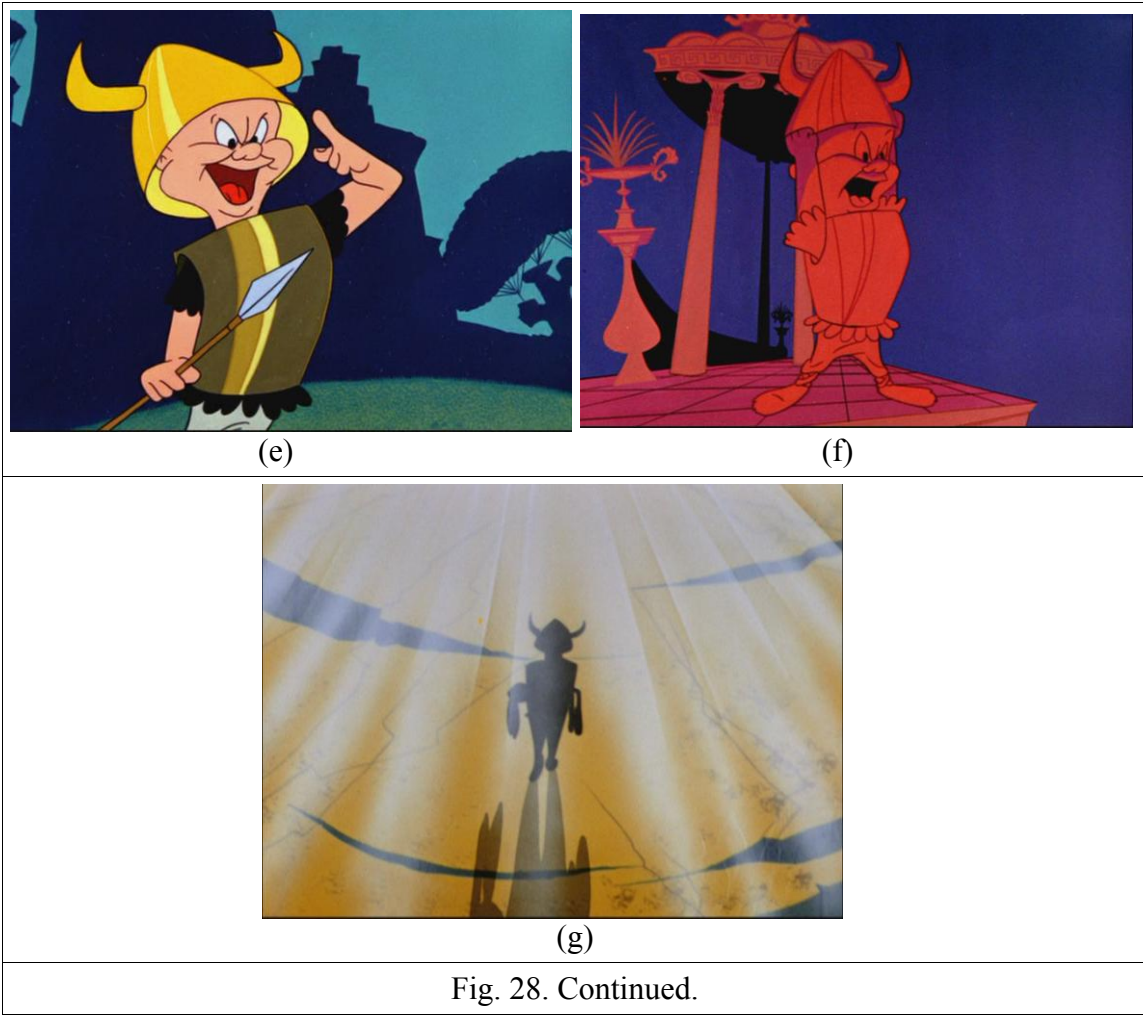
(c)

(d)

Fig. 28. Continued.

(e)

(f)

(g)

Fig. 28. Continued.

(a)

(b)

Fig. 29. *Bewitched Bunny* 1954. (a) Cooler background and warmer foreground, (b) reversed order of warm and cool colors [34].

Bewitched Bunny (1954), directed by Chuck Jones, is a very stylized piece with an uncommon color scheme. For example, early on we see a house painted yellow and pink which stands out in the green background, while the path and the surrounding area is painted with cool colors of less intensity like bluish gray and light green that matches the green background (see Fig. 29. (a)). Thus, larger portions of the screen are painted with cool colors, while a small portion (the house) is colored bright to direct viewers focus in a particular direction.

Warm and cool colors also appear in reverse order, however, (see Fig. 29. (b)). Here the background wall is painted pink, with purple being used on the adjacent wall to give the room dimension and depth, while the foreground cooking vessel which occupies the center of the screen is painted muddy green. The children themselves are mostly colored with warm colors that are slight variations of the pink wall, except for their yellow hair. While Bugs Bunny is dressed in bright blue, clearly separating him from the background.

The different camera compositions and color palettes used in all these examples illustrate their importance to the storyline, to visually convey the emotion of the moment, or to creating depth in the scene. Also, the color itself is used to separate the different objects and characters from each other in the environment, which is important in 2D sequences where everything looks flat.

CHAPTER VII

IMPLEMENTATION

Based on my prior review and analysis, I created four detailed still images of novel

scenes created to systematically explore the intersection. Of parody, film noir and

Looney Tunes - The base CG models for the scenes and final still images were created

using Autodesk® Maya®, Autodesk® Mental Ray®, and Adobe Photoshop software.

The four final images appear on pp.66, 67, 69, and 70. Two of them implement the

lighting style as seen in film noir and are rendered in black-and-white tones, while the

other two are color images created to capture the look and feel of *Looney Tunes*. The

environment and the models remain the same in both the cases with their outlook design

kept similar to *Looney Tunes* design styles. Also, the medium and long shots rendered in

either black-and-white tone or color have their respective close-up shots to highlight the

differences in camera compositions as seen in film noir and in traditional composition.

Thus, each of these shots were set up to illustrate the effect of applying film noir

cinematography to *Looney Tunes* style scenes to help evolve *Looney Tunes* which are

basically flat lit and framed in traditional camera composition.

VII.1. Modeling

The office model and props were designed based on iconic *Looney Tunes* backgrounds

and props. For example, the window frame and the shelf shown in the figure on p.67,

have been expressionistically distorted. In addition, the rotary phones are designed in a style typical in the early part of the 20th century, a style seen in many *Looney Tunes* shorts. Finally, all the object models in the scene are kept simple to match the style that is seen in *Looney Tunes* shorts which has simple illustrations of the environment and set-up.

VII.2. Shading

The cartoon shader was made using the layer shader in Maya®, which combines appropriate "toon shaders." The shader's color was changed for each object based on the color chosen from the color palette. The attributes of s*pecularity*, *diffuse lights*, *outline thickness*, *highlight color*, *outline color*, and *attenuation* (i.e., the intensity gradiant) were varied to achieve the desired result.

VII.3. Parody Features

In these scenes film noir's most prominent characteristic, i.e. the inevitable involvement of the male protagonist with a femme fatale and his depressing fate that follows, has been "creatively criticized." [35] The protagonist helpless, miserable situation as a result of having fallen in love with a woman who has lured him sexually to use him to her advantage has been parodied through the use of a simple, child-like character that faces away from the camera (see the figure on p.66). The protagonist's deflected gaze is common in many noir movies, creating an air of alienation and paranoia as can be seen

in figures on pp.66 and 67. The smoke in the form of a woman in Fig. 32, for example, engenders the feeling that everything around him reminds him of the situation in which he has got himself into. Signboards are employed to reinforce this point to the viewers, to communicate character's thoughts directly. The environment signboards tell us about profession of the character. The presence of 'femme fatale' club neon lights seen outside the window is again used to exaggerate the point being made. The signboards and exaggeration of an idea is borrowed from the *Looney Tunes* shorts as discussed earlier.

VII.4. Camera and Lighting

VII.4.1. *Black-and-white Images*

VII.4.1.1. *Camera Composition*

The camera compositions for the black-and-white images are adapted from film noir movies such as *Touch of Evil* (1958) and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955). In the figure on p.66, for the medium shot, dutch angle composition was used to exaggerate the things which are placed on the table, making them look bigger than their normal size. In film noir, claustrophobic shots with props crowding the frame with everything in focus are quite often seen. In *Double Indemnity* (1944) (see Fig. 30 (a) & (b)), *w*e see a cluttered office table where Walter Neff is shown sitting, recording his past events to a dictaphone. Typically in film noir, the objects in the scene are equal or more important than the character himself, thus making him seem insignificant. In my scene (see the figure on

p.66), a similar cluttered table concept is being used while exaggerating the number or the sizes of the props cluttered on the table to match the exaggerated look usually seen in Looney Tunes shorts.

Fig. 30. *Double Indemnity* (1944). (a) & (b) Cluttered room [36].
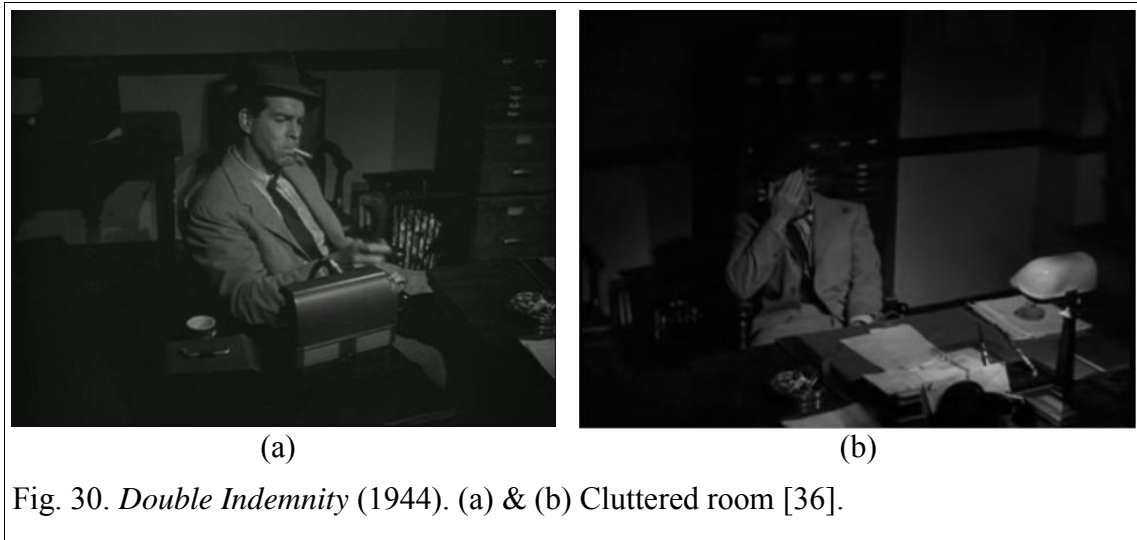
In the close-up shot (see the figure on p.67), low, wide-angle camera composition is used. Since, the character is lean faced, there is a slight distortion applied horizontally making his face bulge outward slightly. In the Fig. 31 (a) & (b), from *Touch of Evil* (1958), the actor's face is lean as well, but still we see that his face bulges outward giving him slightly distorted unusual look. An approach is made in this thesis to get a similar look for the character's lean face as well.
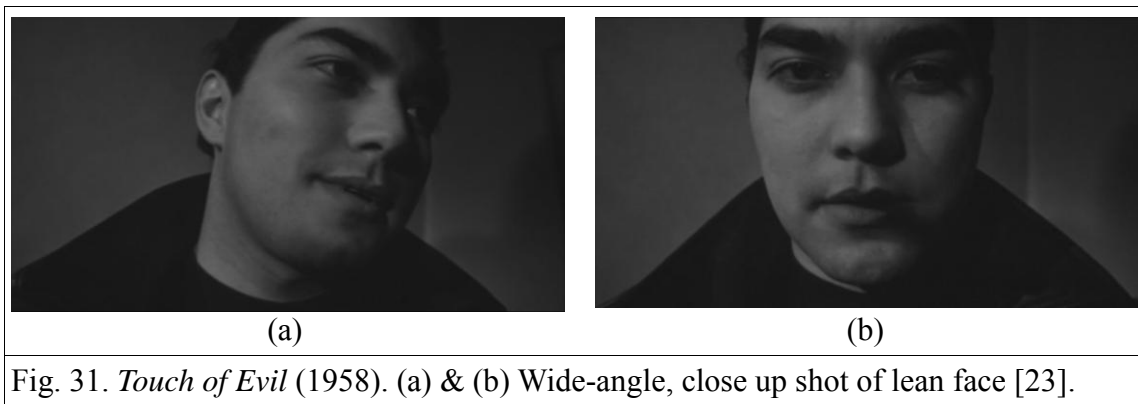
<center>(a)   (b)</center>

Fig. 31. *Touch of Evil* (1958). (a) & (b) Wide-angle, close up shot of lean face [23].

VII.4.1.2. *Lighting*

The lighting for black-and-white images (see the figure on p.66 and p.67) is done similar to that seen in film noir movie *Murder My Sweet* (1944). As generally seen in film noir, *a* low-key lighting scheme is used here as well as seen in Fig. 32. There is a high contrast between light and dark which creates a feeling of mystery. Fewer fill lights of very low intensity are used. To focus attention on the character, and the neon signboard seen outside the window, the intensity of the light goes from light to dark in order to create depth in the scene.

The character and the background setting are lit separately. The character is lit by the lamp light and a low key light which is near the lamp. In order to have high contrast between light and the dark, the highlight on his face is made harsher, while the darker regions of his face receive minimal light. Thus, there is one intense light near the left side of his face, and a low intensity fill light from the camera angle. The props on the

table and the signboard are lit by spot lights behaving as light sourced from the lamp. These lights also have a natural fall off value which bounces off the walls in the office and off the objects placed on the table. To have a uniform ambient lit office space, a light coming from the bottom which is of low intensity is used. The neon signboards outside the window have a glow attribute, and uses two lights to illuminate them.

VII.4.1.3. *Post Production Work*

The smoke in the shape of a woman as seen in figure on p.66 was created later using *Adobe Photoshop.* The image colors themselves were manipulated to get the right balance between black-and-white colors and black-and-white. Artistic filters like poster edges and rough pastels were used to have a more pronounced outline for objects and character, and to give the whole image a stylized look.

In the close-up (see the figure on p.67), in order to direct eyes of the viewer to the character's face, lights with a fall off value have been used to see the gradient change across the image. We can understand this better by observing the right most section of the image which receives more intense concentrated light when compared to the left section which receives diffused and less intense light. The phone with the sign is placed in the background and in a slightly dark region. The background has enough balance of light and dark regions thus separating it from the foreground. This helps when there is no depth of field effect being used to blur the background elements as in film noir. Here, everything is kept within focus.

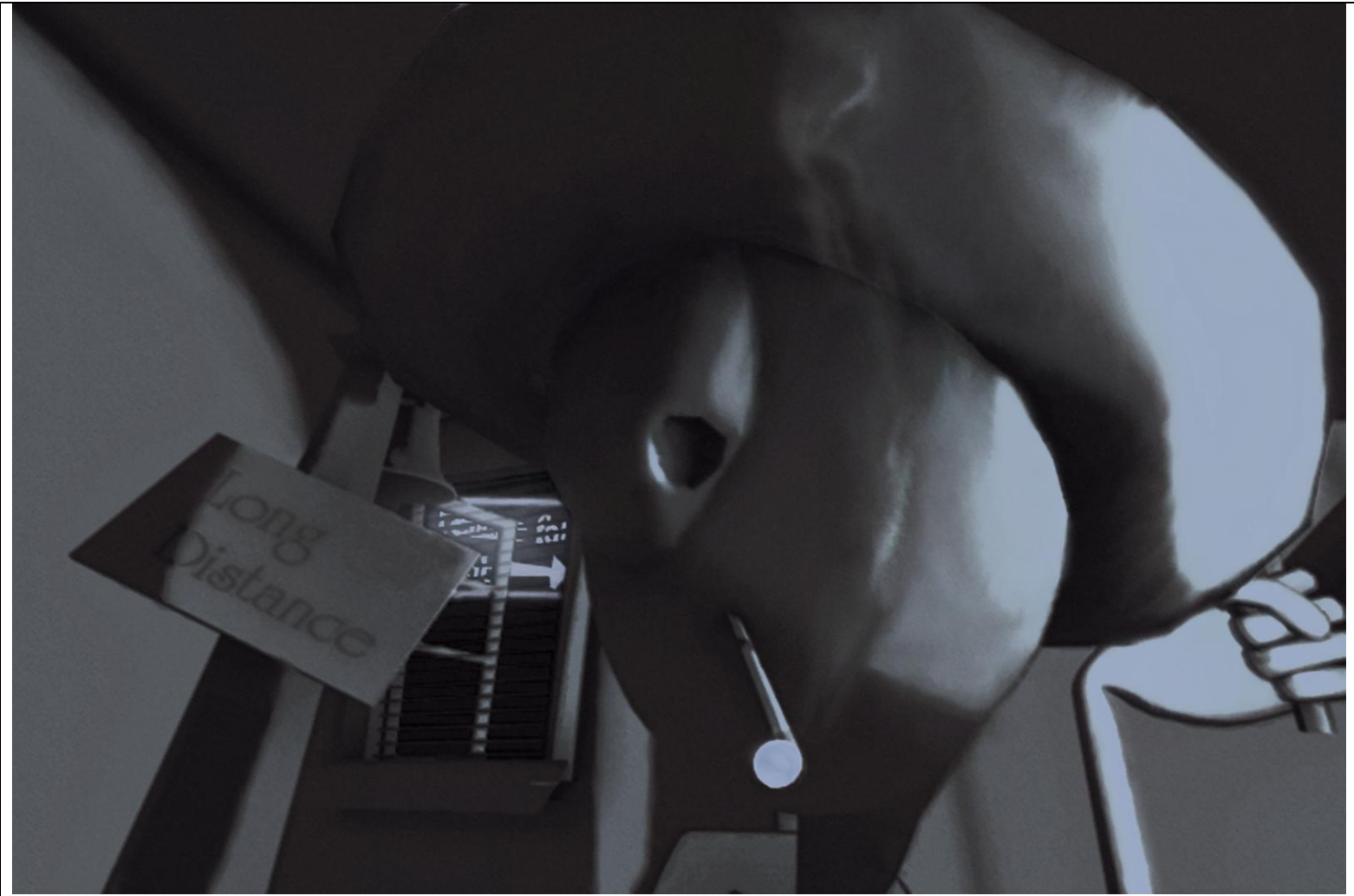Fig. 32. Medium, dutch angle shot (Original).

Fig. 33. Close up shot, wide angle shot (Original).

VII.4.2. *Color Images*

VII.4.2.1. *<u>Camera Composition</u>*

 In Fig. 34, a long shot is used for the composition to establish the environment in which the character is placed. The camera is placed slightly lower than the character's eye level to give him some dominance in the scene. He is also placed in the center of the composition to direct viewers eyes on him. Since, we are not looking down on the things placed on the table (or looking up from close proximity); these look distant and hence do not seem cluttered like in the medium shot black-and-white image.

The figure below (see Fig. 35.) is a close-up shot taken from behind the character which reveals what the character is intensely reading. The color acts as a key to direct viewers eyes here. This composition reveals enough information that the viewer needs to know about what is inside the folder, and how close the character is holding the folder due to his short-sightedness.

Fig. 34. Long, below the eye level shot (Original).

Fig. 35. Close-up shot (Original).

VII.4.2.2. *Color Scheme*

For the color images, colors that complement each other are used. The focus point in the long shot (see Fig. 34.) is what the character is curiously reading, and what is written on the sign board. Therefore, I have assigned them saturated warm colors so that they call for viewers' attention. While the foreground objects like the table, the chair, the floor are colored in warm colors as well, the background elements like the walls and the windows have been assigned a cooler color to create a depth in the scene. To balance the composition, I have maintained more or less equal amounts of warm and cool color in the shot, like the right and left portions of the image has cool colors while the center where the viewers' attention needs to be directed has warm colors.

VII.4.2.3. *Lighting*

We have seen that *Looney Tunes* shorts are flat-lit images. The only appearance of lighting we see is in different shadings that are visible on the background scene, while the characters themselves are mostly flat. So, in order to keep up with the similarities, I have used minimal three point lighting scheme to provide the necessary shading in the images to give it an appearance of three dimensionality. In the long shot (see Fig. 34.), the main source of light is placed near to the camera and above it, a fill light is placed near the camera on the left. Light linking was also done to illuminate the character, the

sign board, and the props around for the camera individually. In addition to these lights, I have bounce lights for the room itself, to accommodate for the diffused light present in the room. For the close up shot (see Fig. 35.), the main key light used in the long shot has been reused along with a fill light which is placed slightly left and behind the character to illuminate the character's face, and the folder.

VII.4.2.4. *Post Production Work*

Again, as seen earlier, *Adobe Photoshop* was used to add filters to make the image look more like a painted image than a digital render. To achieve this, textures along with scratches and noise maps were used with different modes to give details to the image and to give it a layered paint texture.

Thus, the implementation of the black-and-white color image scenes help in understanding how a visual parody can be made through film noir and Looney Tunes visual styles, while the color image scenes help in contrasting and comparing the difference in lighting and compositional styles used in traditional films.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

VIII.1. Conclusion

This thesis is a study to understand and analyze the parody characteristics, lighting and compositional elements as seen in film noir parodies, film noir, and in *Looney Tunes*, respectively. Use of film noir lighting and monotone colors in a cartoon environment helped in achieving a different mood for the image scenes. Combining film noir's style of high contrast, low key lighting with comical patterns such as the oblique shaped set design, exaggerated clutter on table, huge neon signs, and piles of files and paper helped in emphasizing visual parody in the scene. Also, a comparative study made between the look and composition methods as seen and used in film noir parody images and conventional looking, colorful parody images helped in emphasizing the need for using different techniques to achieve different moods.

To aid in this study, a film like *My Favorite Brunette* gave sufficient number of examples on how to create visual parody in a scene, and study of movies like *Murder My Sweet*, *Kiss Me Deadly*, and *Touch of Evil* helped in understanding how light can be used to influence the monotone color distribution in a composition, thus conveying a visual meaning within a scene. For the color images, study of *What's Opera Doc?*, *Super Snooper*, and *Now That Summer is Gone* helped me to understand how colors could be

used harmoniously in a scene, and how cinematic techniques for camera placement can be applied to cartoons. Thus, four image scenes were built to highlight few characteristics of cinematography and parody of these genres to understand them better. To conclude, this thesis presents an analytical study of the visual elements from two different genres, and how they can be combined meaningfully using a third factor. In this case it is done by studying the characteristics of parody. It also compares the resulting 3D scene images with colorful 3D scene images to establish the difference in moods between the two.

VIII.2. Implications for Future Research

As outlined in the abstract, this thesis only generates still images of the parody scene. It would be interesting to see the same as a full-length 3D animation, with boisterous actions that is primarily seen in *Looney Tunes* cartoons, while film noir visual elements play their part in affecting the mood of the entire piece.

Another approach would be to choose other combinations of lighting styles and camera setups on *Looney Tunes* -esque elements. The lighting and compositional elements are seldom noticed in Looney Tunes shorts.

Film parodies in many cases have affectionate fun with a genre by imitating its icons, and its plots. Very few among them have parodied the techniques like the iris-out and

the wipe used in classic films. However, parodying the visual elements of a genre is seldom seen in these films. Thus, a study of how the visual elements of a particular genre could be the basis for comic attack will make a good topic for future work.

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