Lighting: Controlling Shadows, Shape, Mood and Tone

p.s. Machinima doesn’t have to use these!
“GTA Coca-cola ad”

Color shift?
PHILOSOPHY

• Light affects everything

• Changes mood

  • Seasonal effective disorder

  • Film noir vs. Wizard of Oz

  • Fluorescent lights in Joe vs. Volcano

• Mix of art and science

• Use technique and aesthetics to support the theme

Thursday, February 12, 2009
2 PHILOSOPHIES

1.) IMITATE LIFE
   - Aims for realism
   - Where is the existing light? Attribution? Motivation?

2.) INTENSIFY EXPERIENCE
   - More expressionistic
   - What’s the emotional tone? Temperature? Mood?
MOTIVATION

• Motivation is often what separates student films from professional films--how did that light get there?

• Practicals--light provided within the frame, such as a lamp

• The sun and its light derivatives are major motivators
CHARACTERISTICS

1.) INTENSITY

• Measures the brightness of the shot

• Saturation measures brightness of a color
2.) QUALITY

• Is the lighting harsh, or soft

• Further from source, harsher the shadows (counterintuitive)

• Hard vs. soft, full sun vs. cloudy, direct vs. diffusion

• Size--smaller is harder (think sun), larger is softer (think clouds)
CHARACTERISTICS

3.) CONTRAST

- Gauges the levels of brightness within the frame between the highlights and shadows
CHARACTERISTICS

4.) DIRECTION

• Where is the light coming from? What angle?

• Motivation--realistic or expressionistic

• Reflective

• Bouncing/dampening

• Shaping
5.) **COLOR**

- **Temperature**—Is it a warmer or cooler color? (usually from more orange to more blue)

- **Neon lights, stained glass, gels**

- **Psychology of color**
  - Emotion of red, white, and blue

- **Cultural**—"Lady in Red"
3 (or 4) Point Lighting

- 1.) **Key** -- primary light source
- 2.) **Fill** -- fills in the shadows
- 3.) **Back** -- separates from background; 3D quality
- 4.) **Background**

- Real world more complex
3 (or 4) Point Lighting

- Fill light only
- Key light only
- Back light only
- Complete 3-point light setup
HIGH vs. LOW KEY

- **High Key**—No or few shadows; flat light; evenly lit can cause eye to wonder
  - Ex. TV shows—Jay Leno, Stephen Colbert—soaps; full shade and overcast

- **Low Key**—More shadows; more moody; light leads the eye
  - Ex. Film noir, Chiaroscuro, full sun
“Slightly Later Man”

“Male Restroom Etiquette”

“Legend of a Cowgirl, 2:00 mins. in”
STYLES

Chiaroscuro

“Jill’s Song”
STYLES

Dramatic

“Maintenance Man”
STYLES

Realism Saturated

“Ignis Solus”
STYLES

Realism Desaturated

“Melon 3” & Coke ad

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STYLES

Sepia Toned

“Flying Fenix”
Lighting Effects

Color key

Silhouette

Fog and natural elements

Spectral flare
“The Right - in production”
CLOSING WORDS

• Light as simply as possible

• Make pictures one picture at a time

• Managing light is also managing shadows (don’t just eliminate them)

• Let necessity drive your decisions

• If all else fails... turn all the lights off and turn them back on one-by-one

• Draw a lighting diagram