

the heart of a haiku

a space for a little poem
to weave its magic!

part 5 the disjunction

We now learn that the 'cut' – the *kiru* – can be in more than one place!

All good haiku actually tells a story or part of a story, to a point where the reader steps in and brings it to completion. Film jargon uses the term *mise-en-scène*.

I'm now quoting Prof Anil Zankar on **Mise en scene**

Mise en scene (pronounced 'meez-uhn-sen') is a French term that literally means 'to put into scene' or 'staging an action'.

At its simplest it could be defined as the art of combining the animate (the actors) and the inanimate (sets, costumes, properties, natural and other ambience) elements to produce a cinematic scene. This usually includes set design, location, actors and their movements, costumes, make-up, sound, shot compositions, lighting. All these elements blend in the composition of a scene in a film. In other words, mise en scene is the capability of the director in making a harmonious whole out of the various parts.

This term has its origin in the art of theatre. In Europe, before the nineteenth century, plays were mostly static orations managed by the actors themselves. The players were called actor-managers. There was no concept of a director. The nineteenth century saw the emergence of the new kind of theatre with the rise of theatre directors like Edward Gordon Craig [UK] and Konstantin Stanislavski [Russia] gave a completely new dimension to the art of staging plays. They paid attention to details such as the sets, costumes, make-up, properties, lighting. This created a well-defined space within which the actors could move. Thus, the concept of the actors' movements in relation one another and in relation to the location and the properties began to get defined. Theatre had become quite dynamic in creating its own space at the end of the nineteenth century, when cinema arrived. This theatrical practice became the legacy of cinema.

Cinema, in fact, took this practice of mise en scene further. In theatre, the spectator is physically limited to the same viewpoint throughout the performance. Cinema offers a very dynamic process of change in viewpoint at regular intervals to the spectators through editing and movement of the camera. Even a simple action of a human being walking a few steps in the room can be shown from multiple viewpoints and yet remain a continuous action. The close proximity that the audience feels to actors and objects due to the use of close-up gives them an aura and a larger-than-life appeal in cinema. Use of long and extreme long shots brought in spectacles filled with action and panoramas of the city, village, streets, nature etc. Cinema also

had the additional facility of separating the actor and the action that theatre did not have. By being able to observe the actors very closely, cinema enhanced the presence of an actor.

Anil Zankar
Prof Screen Studies & Research
Film & Television Institute of India, Pune

Let's study this haiku along the lines of *Mise en scene*:

summer storm
the windscreen wipers
slice our silence

— Jo McNerney

If we are speaking of *mise-en-scène*, then yes, in this haiku three shots are very carefully selected and placed before the reader.

summer storm: the reader is given a picture of a summer storm, which brings to mind the onset on a rainy season. I see myself out there in the open, viewing the sky.

the windscreen wipers: the second line actually puts me behind the steering wheel, or I might be a passenger. I hear the rapid movement of the windscreen wipers as they swish from left to right.

slice our silence: this is an amazing leap which takes us into the interior worlds of these two people – who could they be? A couple? A parent and a child? Perhaps people with some sharp difference of opinion? We are all familiar with such silences. The story is left unfinished for the reader to fill in the details. In haiku this technique is called the semi-circle of a haiku, where some space is left for the reader to step in.

This brings us to the concept of 'montage,' another bit of film-world jargon. The dictionary defines 'montage' as 'the technique of selecting, editing, and piecing together separate sections of film to form a continuous whole.' This effective use of scissors to cut away all extraneous detail is what stopped me in my tracks when I first read this haiku. A technique used by master film directors for generations, it's not a bad technique to emulate when writing haiku.

Richard Gilbert's research into the practice of contemporary Japanese haiku has made him a strong advocate of the disjunction that often explains how a haiku works ... and how it works wonders. If you understand the technique used by film directors to narrate a story, you'll understand the concept of 'disjunction.'

Richard says: "More than trying to achieve a 'cut' go for the 'disjunction' to create that surprise and that magical moment that brings so much joy to the reader."

Some examples of ku with effective disjunction:

a baby's pee
pulls roadside dust
into rolling beads

— Ruth Yarrow

in the prison graveyard
just as he was in life —
convict 14302

— Johnny Baranski

deep in raga
sudden applause
startles the singer

— Kala Ramesh

In Indian Classical Music, raaga means melody, and its root word in Sanskrit means 'passion.' There is a pun on the word 'raga' in this ku.

Unlike Western Classical Music, which is scored, Indian Classical is based on improvisation. Here a musician creates on the concert platform; Jazz comes closest to this. When a musician improvises, there is a natural need to go deep within herself.

The audience listening to Indian Classical Music may respond spontaneously with loud claps or appreciation at any time while the music is being created. This is not regarded as a disturbance but rather as an incentive to the artist to create better.

As expected, a musician, who is deep into the raga / melody, having lost touch with the outside world, is startled by the sudden appreciation from the listeners.

In this haiku, you see three different images with two disjunctions, coming together so naturally. . . creating that very effective 'surprise' at the end.

In a one-line haiku, the cuts are more easily visible. An example:

into the night a cuckoo returns the call

— Kala Ramesh

Here is a simple way to see the cuts in haiku. Look at the many disjunctions that can be found in the meaning of this one-line ku:

into the night
into the night a cuckoo
a cuckoo returns
into the night a cuckoo returns
into the night a cuckoo returns the call
Finally, this one-line ku curls back on itself: returns the call into the night

Until we come to the last word 'call' we aren't aware of the mate who is waiting.

Here are two more examples of effective disjunction taken from Richard Gilbert's book: *The Disjunctive Dragonfly*

as an and you and you and you alone in the sea

— Richard Gilbert

I understood this beautiful one-line ku after I separated the first 'and'. Like the 'and' we are all connected but alone in this world – this is what this ku means to me.

as an 'and' you and you and you alone in the sea

damp morning
cash for a journey
warm from the machine

— Dee Everts

looking
not looking
road kill

— Christopher Herold

For more on this topic, read Richard Gilbert, "The Disjunctive Dragonfly: A Study of Disjunctive Method and Definitions," *Modern Haiku* 35.2, 2004 (<http://bit.ly/291QMLi>)

My special thanks to **Jenny Angyal** for editing and proofreading this column.

CitizenLit, founded by Jim Warner and Aubrie Cox has Kala Ramesh's short film on HaikuWALL India which she presented at the Haiku North America 2015 Conference, at Union College, Albany, NY. <http://www.citizenlitcast.com/blog/2016/2/22/episode-115-haiku-north-america-scene-report>
Passionate about taking haiku to everyday spaces, Kala has a 2-hour haiku workshop and an evening of her reading at the Pune International Literary Festival on 2nd September.

The copyright of the haiku rests with the authors.
Copyrights of the title and the page rest with Kala Ramesh.

Publishing Credits:

summer storm: *Jack Stamm Award* 2009

baby's pee: *Frogpond* 5:1 (1982)

in the prison graveyard- *Just a Stone's Throw* 2006

deep in raga: *Triplopia* VI:2. 2007

into the night: *Kokako*, annual print edition, September 2007

as an and: *Roadrunner* 11.2

damp morning: *End-grain*

looking: *The Heron's Nest XIII.1*