

# Anatomy of Film

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## CHAPTER 3

# Film, Space, and Mise-en-Scène



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In a film, images of people, places, and things can be near or far, partial or full, stationary or moving. They can flash by quickly or linger on the screen, follow each other chronologically or appear in a symbolic order. Which images we see and how we see them are the result of the filmmaker's choices.

### The Shot

A film is a moving picture. However, your film text includes many static moments. These can include stills, stationary images of particular moments in a film, or publicity photos intended primarily to promote the movie in question. Such a moment, or **shot**, is like an excerpt. And like an excerpt, it is only part of a work—sometimes, only the equivalent of a sentence or two. It is easy to become enamored of particular shots, especially those that are strikingly photographed. The first shot of John Wayne as the Ringo Kid brandishing a rifle in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) has become embedded in the memories of many moviegoers and contributed to Wayne's stardom. Some shots can have an impact even if you have not seen the films in which

they appear. Think of the frequently reproduced shot of Marilyn Monroe in Billy Wilder's *The Seven Year Itch*, in which she stands over a subway grate as a blast of air exposes her legs. A shot, however, should be viewed as part of the whole, in which its meaning resides. It is important to examine a shot in context, not in isolation. A shot takes on its deepest meaning within the context of the film.

## Types of Shots

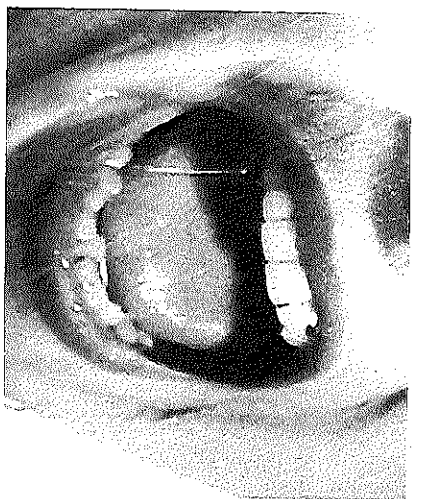
A shot is simply what is recorded by a single operation of the camera. Shots can be defined in terms of distance, area, or subject. Does the camera appear to be close to the subject? If so, the shot is a **close-up (CU)**—in terms of human anatomy, a shot of the head, for example. Perhaps it is a head-and-shoulders shot, in which case it is a **close shot (CS)**. If the shot is of a specific part of the body—an eye, a mouth—it is an **extreme close-up (ECU)**. A shot of the complete human figure, with some of the background visible, is a **long shot (LS)** or a **full shot (FS)**. If the camera is so far away that the result is a broad, panoramic view, it is an **extreme long shot (ELS)**. A shot that is neither a close shot nor a long shot but something in between is a **medium shot (MS)**, showing, for example, the subject from head to waist or from waist to knees. These definitions, however, are fluid and are, at best, approximate. What is a medium shot to one director may be a **medium close-up (MCU)** to another. The director may have used the term *close-up*, but on the screen, it becomes an extreme close-up. In other words, these are relative descriptions.

If a shot defines an area—say, a dining room with a family gathered around a table—it is called an **establishing shot (ES)**. This is a type of long shot that is often broken down into its components, as Frank Capra did in the dinner table scene in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), in which he first showed Jefferson Smith's (James Stewart) family, followed by individual shots of the various members. An establishing shot can also identify the setting by using a familiar landmark, such as San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge or Paris's Eiffel Tower. In short, it "establishes" the location so that the viewer knows where the action is taking place.

Shots can also be defined by what they contain. A two-shot includes two characters; a three-shot, three characters. A **shot/reverse shot** consists of alternating shots of characters in a conversation so that we see first one character, then the other. An **over-the-shoulder shot** functions in the same way, except that we look over the shoulder of character A into the face of character B; and then, over the shoulder of character B into the face of character A.

**Close-ups and Long Shots.** French director Jean-Luc Godard was fond of saying that the close-up was invented for tragedy, the long shot for comedy.

The ultimate ECU: a frame enlargement of Marion Crane's screaming mouth in the shower sequence from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). (Courtesy AMPAS)



This is something of an oversimplification, but Godard is correct when he suggests that filmmakers have reasons for choosing one shot over another depending on the kind of movie they are making or the type of scene they are shooting. A close-up, for example, can reveal a particular emotion that a long shot might not capture. When Lucy (Lillian Gish) is denounced by her father in *Broken Blossoms*, D. W. Griffith uses a close-up to express her fear.

The close-up is also a means of emphasis. Hitchcock found it ideal for objects like a suspicious glass of milk in *Suspicion* (1941), an envelope dropped by a Nazi agent in *Saboteur*, a wine bottle filled with uranium ore in *Notorious*, and a necklace worn by a woman who should not have had it in her possession in *Vertigo*. These objects were so crucial to the plot that Hitchcock used close-ups to make sure the audience could not miss them.

Hitchcock also used the extreme close-up to provide his audiences with a proverbial chill up the spine. The extreme close-ups of Marion Crane's screaming mouth and staring eye in the shower sequence in *Psycho* are what audiences expect in a horror film. Extreme close-ups of the eye are, in fact, standard in horror films, especially if it is the eye of the killer spying on a prospective victim through a peephole, as is the case in *Psycho* and *The Spiral Staircase* (1945).

Like any shot, an extreme close-up can have a direct bearing on the plot. The words "prognosis negative," which confirm Judith Traherne's terminal condition in *Dark Victory*, must be visible, and that can be done only in extreme close-up. If a scar identifies a murderer, as it does in *A Stranger Knocks* (1965), the scar needs to be photographed in ECU.

Since it is such a dramatic form of emphasis, the ECU should be used with discretion. For an example of the creative use of the ECU, you might study Samuel Fuller's *I Shot Jesse James* (1949), in which the director used ECUs to reveal the psychological states of the characters.

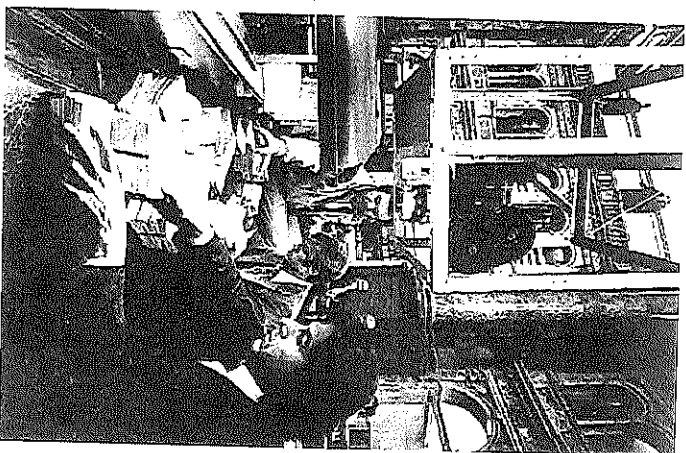
While a close-up can express moments of intense emotion, a long shot can be as effective in a different way. For example, a death in long shot is less painful to watch. The death of Santiago (Arthur Kennedy) in Edgar G. Ulmer's *The Naked Dawn* (1955) is photographed in long shot. Santiago is on horseback when the bullet strikes him; we see neither stunned eyes nor spurting blood. Instead, the shot has a formalized beauty; reminiscent of a painting like Breughel's *Fall of Icarus*, in which the death of Icarus is made part of the setting. In Breughel's painting, a ploughman goes about his business, not even noticing Icarus's leg, which is all that is seen of him as he disappears into the sea. Death—even one as dramatic as that of Icarus—is treated as a nonevent, something that happened while the earth was being plowed. Similarly, at the end of *Dancer in the Dark* and *Capote* the hangings were filmed dispassionately, with the long shots marking the official end of the case.

Westerns are known for their long shots and extreme long shots, which make the subject part of the environment in addition to conveying the awesome vastness of nature. In George Stevens's *Shane* (1953), a deer laps water from a stream, with snow-fingert mountains in the background. A man bids farewell to a woman who merges with the landscape as he rides off in John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946). Many of Ford's long shots have an intensely pictorial quality. In *Clementine*, we see a stretch of sky brooding over the dusty main street of Tombstone; a bar thronged by men—sometimes in silhouette, sometimes illuminated by the kerosene lamps that hang overhead; and Monument Valley with its cliffs and mesas rising skyward from a flat plain and dwarfing all who pass beneath them.

**High-Angle and Low-Angle Shots.** Shots are also defined by the position of the camera in relation to the subject. When Lillian (Jane Fonda) looks out of her hotel window in *Julia* (1977), what she sees on the street below is rendered as a **high-angle shot**. In a high-angle shot, the camera is positioned above, or sometimes "high above," the subject. This is occasionally referred to as a **God's eye shot** or **bird's eye shot**, a type favored by Hitchcock to suggest entrapment. As the insurance investigator in *Psycho* mounts the staircase of the Bates home, a high-angle shot makes him look smaller and therefore vulnerable—as indeed he is, as a figure rushes out of a room off the landing, ready to end his snooping with a knife. This kind of shot has not gone out of fashion; in *The Others* (2001) a stunning high shot shows a mother (Nicole Kidman) at the bottom of a staircase, terrified at the thought of confronting the "intruders" on the floor above.

A high-angle shot can also convey a feeling of frustration. The high-angle shot of the president pacing the floor in D. W. Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln* (1930) reminds us that the burdens of the office dwarf even the great. In *All the President's Men*, as reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein sort out library slips, the camera watches them from above; indeed, the men

Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman prepare for the Library of Congress scene in *All the President's Men* (1976). The camera is set for a high shot. (Courtesy Warner Bros. Inc.)

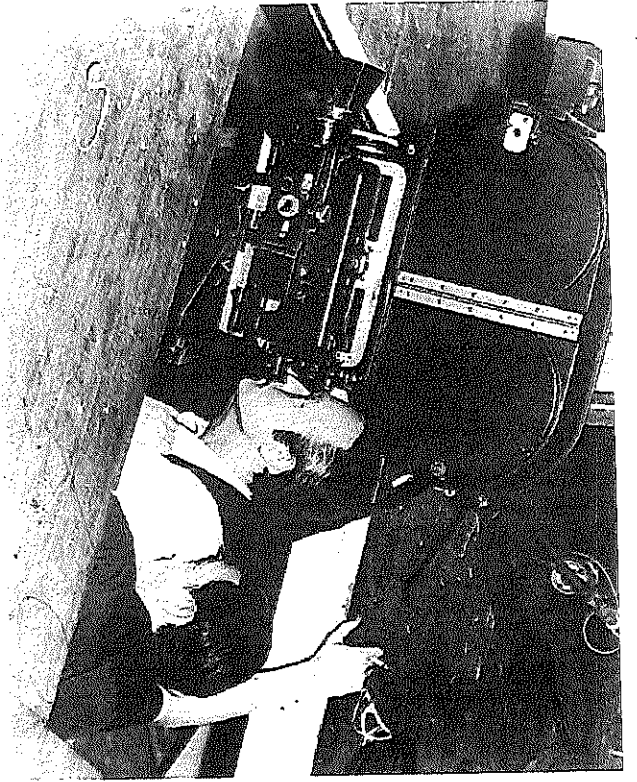


seem to grow smaller as they realize the enormity of their task. The scene ends with the camera peering down at the reading room of the Library of Congress, which looks like a magnified snowflake.

If the camera shoots up at the subject from below, it is a **low-angle shot**. Serving the opposite function of a high-angle shot, a low-angle shot makes the subject appear larger than it actually is. Such a shot can suggest dominance or power, as it does in *Citizen Kane* when Kane's guardian hovers over him as he presents the young Kane with a sled.

Sometimes the script requires a high- or low-angle shot for the sake of consistency rather than for symbolism or imagery. In *Julia*, the shot following the one of Lillian at the window looking down at the street had to be a high-angle shot; an eye-level shot would have made no sense. If a man is waiting at the foot of a staircase for a woman to descend, as Gabriel (Donal McCann) is for Greta (Anjelica Huston) near the end of John Huston's *The Dead* (1987), the woman must be photographed in a low-angle shot to match the man's angle of vision. The context of the action can determine the nature of the shot.

The same holds true of other types of shots; their nature is the result of a filmmaker's decisions based on his or her interpretation of the screenplay.

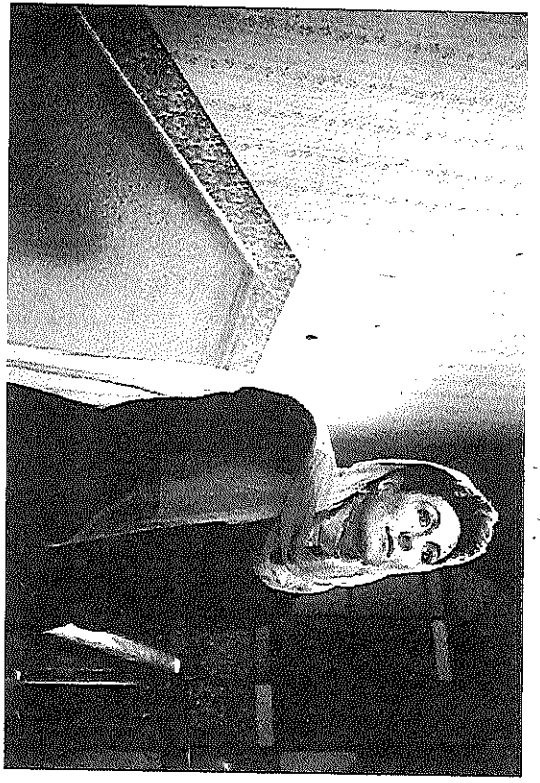


Orson Welles prepares for a low-angle shot below floor level, in *Citizen Kane* (1941). (Courtesy MOMAFSA and RKO)

**Subjective Camera.** An objective shot represents what the camera sees; a subjective shot represents what the character sees. This is sometimes referred to as **subjective camera**. As the Joads drive into Hooverville in John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*, the residents are looking straight ahead as they step aside for the truck. At whom are they staring? Actually, they are staring at the Joads, whom we cannot see. However, in terms of what appears on the screen, they are staring at us; Ford has put us behind the wheel in order to see poverty and squalor through the Joads' eyes.

Sometimes in a film we experience sheer motion without a corresponding image. In Hitchcock's *Marnie*, for example, Mark (Sean Connery) is seated at his desk when Marnie enters the room. Mark looks straight into the camera, acknowledging Marnie's presence. We do not see her, however; we only experience some sense of movement toward the desk. For a moment we have become Marnie, but we cease to be Marnie when she comes into view.

Subjective camera offers a one-sided take on reality. When overused, as it was in *Lady in the Lake* (1946), it calls attention to itself and can seem pretentious. The main character in the film, Philip Marlowe (Robert Mont-



A low-angle shot of Greta (Anjelica Huston) descending the stairs in *The Dead* (1987). (Frame engraving courtesy Vestron Pictures)

gomery); is never seen except in a mirror. As a result, there are scenes in which the other characters, supposedly looking at him, stare straight into the camera, which represents Marlowe and, by extension, us. When a woman kisses Marlowe, she has to purse her lips into the lens, which makes it seem as though she were kissing us. To light Marlowe's cigarette, she thrusts the lighter into the lens as if she were about to ignite the viewer. When Marlowe is socked in the jaw, it seems that the camera, and therefore, the viewer, is the one getting punched.

Subjective camera is best restricted to specific scenes or sequences, as it is in *Dark Passage* (1947), in which Vincent Parry (Humphrey Bogart) escapes from San Quentin to track down his wife's murderer. Parry escapes by concealing himself in a barrel that has been loaded onto a prison truck. The camera is totally subjective, jostling us as Parry maneuvers the barrel from the truck and making us reel with dizziness as it rolls down a hill. When the barrel comes to rest, we peer out of it cautiously but get no more than a tunnel-like view of the outside. Parry is now a presence. When he hitches a ride, the driver speaks to the presence. When the driver recognizes him, the presence knocks him unconscious. Later, the presence scans the highway and climbs into Irene Jansen's (Lauren Bacall) waiting car.

When the presence showers, a hand adjusts the showerhead and a jet of water sprays the camera lens. Camera movements express the presence's emotional state. When the presence is wary, the camera darts in the same

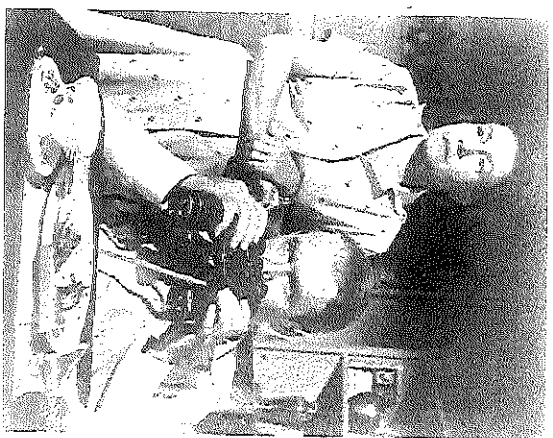


Philip Marlowe's (Robert Montgomery) reflection in *Lady in the Lake* (1946), the subjective-camera film in which Marlowe is visible only when a mirror catches his image. (Courtesy WCTK)

direction as his apprehensive eyes. Gradually, there is a switch from subjective to objective camera, from Parry as a presence to Parry as a character. The transition begins when a sympathetic cabdriver recommends plastic surgery and refers Parry to a reliable doctor. Once we see Parry after the operation, the camera ceases to be subjective.

Related to subjective camera is the **point-of-view (POV) shot**. A POV shot represents the point of view of the character, or what the character sees. There is a famous POV shot at the end of Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) when Dr. Murchison (Leo G. Carroll) is unmasked as a murderer. Murchison aims a gun at his accuser and then turns it around to fire at himself. The close-up of the gun with which Murchison commits suicide is a POV shot, representing the way he saw the gun when he turned it on himself. One of the most unusual—and unsettling—POV shots occurs in Jean Renoir's *The Woman on the Beach* (1947), when a blind painter shaves in front of a mirror that does not reflect his image. Although the character's blindness had been established earlier, we did not experience his point of view until that moment.

An entire film can be a study in point of view. In Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), a professional photographer (James Stewart) is confined to a wheelchair because of a broken leg. His apartment in a Greenwich Vil-



James Stewart as a photographer who spies on his neighbors and Thelma Ritter as a visiting nurse in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), filmed almost exclusively from the photographer's point of view. (Courtesy MCA)

lage complex allows him to look across the courtyard into the windows of his neighbors and observe their activities—which he does, out of a combination of boredom and voyeurism. Gradually, he reaches certain conclusions about the residents, even giving some of them names (he dubs a dancer “Miss Torso”; a woman who entertains an imaginary suitor, “Miss Lonelyheart”). Therefore, we see only what he sees; lacking any other source of information, we have no other choice but to accept his point of view.

*Curse of the Cat People* (1944), the sequel to *Cat People*, is told largely from the point of view of a child. At the end of *Cat People*, Oliver's first wife, Irena, is killed. In the sequel, Oliver has remarried, and Irena begins appearing to Amy, Oliver's daughter. Amy, who alone can see Irena, lives in her own fantasy world, and most of the film is filtered through her vision. In fact, the adult point of view barely exists. On Christmas Eve, Irena materializes on the back lawn, which she turns into a winter wonderland for Amy. Naturally, no one can see the spectacle except Amy. Earlier in the film, Amy also visits the home of an eccentric old woman, who enacts the story of the Headless Horseman. During the recitation, Amy hears the galloping horses and the sound of their hoofs. We are still entirely within the child's consciousness, as the filmmaker intended.

**The Moving Shot.** Movement in film can be deceptive. When the camera rotates on a fixed axis, either for a horizontal pan or a vertical tilt shot, it is not, strictly speaking, moving. The camera itself is probably on a tripod. Only the camera head moves. For **mobile camera** shots, the camera is on a moving vehicle such as a dolly, a truck, or a crane, or on specially built tracks. The mobile camera has the advantage of being able to add to the narrative by opening up more space, thereby augmenting what is seen. The pan and the tilt can add to our knowledge, too.

When the camera pivots horizontally left to right or vice versa, it is a pan shot. Through panning, a filmmaker can have the camera comment on a situation, thus making it almost a character. In *The Thin Man* (1934), when Nora Charles (Myrna Loy) opens a door on the right, the camera pans right to left, from the doorway to the interior, where her husband is comforting a weeping girl. When the husband catches sight of his wife, the camera pans left to right, back to Nora in the doorway, as if it, too, were embarrassed at what it has discovered.

In *The Others*, the daughter tells her excessively religious mother (Nicole Kidman) that there are "others" in the house. Her mother punishes her by having her read from scripture. Writer-director Alejandro Amenábar begins a slow pan from right to left, from the daughter to her mother embrodering, inverting the usual cause-effect relationship by starting with the effect (the punishment) and ending with the cause (the mother). By starting with the daughter doing her penance, and ending with the one who imposed it, Amenábar has established a connection between the punished and the punisher, which takes on greater meaning at the end when we learn that the daughter was right about "the others."

As David Locke (Jack Nicholson) in Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975) cries aloud in desperation because his Land Rover is stalled in the sand, the camera answers by panning the indifferent desert. Martin Scorsese uses slow, almost languid pans of the characters' living rooms in *The Age of Innocence*—the slow panning suggesting lives of leisure. A swish pan, which is unusually rapid and produces a momentary blur, can suggest a sudden change or a transformation. In Ruben Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1932), there is a swish pan immediately after Dr. Jekyll drinks the potion and becomes Mr. Hyde.

When the camera pivots vertically, the result is a tilt shot, which is sometimes called a vertical pan; hence the expression pan up/down, which has become increasingly common among filmmakers. Tilting can mimic the eye's movement, perhaps up the face of a building to take in its height, or down a column of names. In *Jane Eyre* (1944), the camera tilts down from a plaque that reads "Lowood Institution" to the figure of the sleeping Jane Eyre, who is being carried into it. In *Citizen Kane*, the camera pans up to the entrance gate of Kane's estate, Xanadu, past the No Trespassing sign, reminding us that the warning applies to everyone but itself. At the end of

the film, the camera pans down the gate to the No Trespassing sign as it returns to its starting point.

Like the horizontal pan, the tilt shot can be a silent spectator, commenting visually on a situation. As the vampire is about to sink her teeth into a victim's neck in *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), the camera pans up the wall, leaving the rest to the viewer's imagination.

As the camera pans or tilts, it guides the eye horizontally or vertically, determining both the direction and the object of the audience's vision.

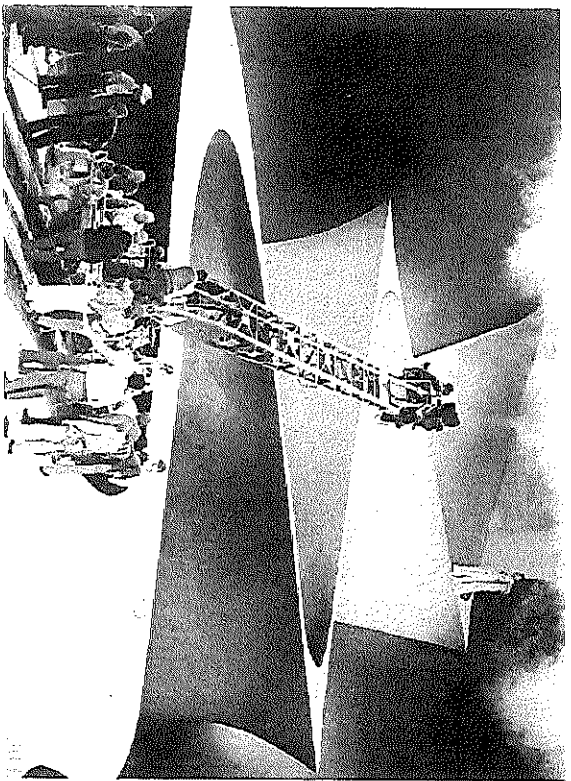
Tilt-pan and pan-tilt combinations are also possible, to direct the viewer or the character's gaze across one surface and up or down another. In Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (1950), a combination of panning and tilting occurs in the notorious flashback, which is later revealed to have been a total lie. Jonathan Cooper (Richard Todd) is explaining to his bewildered girlfriend (Jane Wyman) how Charlotte Inwood (Marlene Dietrich) begged him to go to her flat and bring her a new dress. As Cooper enters the flat, the camera pans across the room to the body of Charlotte's husband and then tilts up a closet door. At first the camera's tilting up a clothes closet seems odd, but it is part of Hitchcock's plan to make Cooper's story believable. Thus, Hitchcock has the camera guide Cooper to the closet, as if Cooper did not know where the closet was. If Cooper had headed straight for the closet, the audience would sense that he was more familiar with Charlotte's flat than he should be and would not accept his story.

As we have seen, in panning and tilting the camera itself does not move. In a moving shot, the camera moves with, toward, alongside, or away from its subjects. There are several kinds of moving shots, depending on the way in which the camera moves. If it moves on tracks, what you have is a **tracking shot**; if it is mounted on a dolly, a **dolly shot**; if it moves up and down, in and out of a scene on a crane, you have a **crane shot**, which is easily identified by its ascending or descending motion, although a crane can move laterally as well.

In *North by Northwest* (1959), Hitchcock uses a crane shot to suggest what may lie in store for one of the characters. When Philip Vandamm (James Mason) discovers that his mistress is an American agent, he decides to kill her aboard a plane. "This matter is something that is best disposed of at a great height—over water," he remarks. At the mention of height, the camera cranes upward.

Some writers use the terms *dolly shot* and *tracking shot* interchangeably; the camera dollies in (tracks in) when it moves toward the subject and dollies out (tracks out) when it moves away from the subject. Other writers simply call any shot in which the camera is moving on a vehicle a tracking shot, which is identified by the direction of the camera: forward tracking shot, vertical tracking shot, diagonal tracking shot.

Tracking shots have distinct advantages over other shots because they can encompass a greater area and supply more detail; thus, they can sustain



Preparing for a crane shot in *Cover Girl* (1944), with the camera in a mechanical arm. (Courtesy MOMA/ISA)

a mood for a longer period of time. While the pan and the tilt can act as a silent commentator, the track can be a character's alter ego or unseen companion. Max Ophüls was a master of the moving shot. In his films, the camera seems to waltz and glide; it can rush up the stairs with the breathless lovers or accompany them on a stroll, occasionally slipping behind a fountain so as not to be conspicuous. In *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Ophüls makes the camera almost human. As a provincial band ruins Wagner's "Song to the Evening Star," the camera, unable to stand the tinny sound, rises up fastidiously and leaves the square. In the same film, the camera accompanies the operators up the grand staircase as if it were escorting them.

The moving camera can physically draw viewers into the action, and it can even lure them into a character's consciousness, as it does in the film version of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The crane shot that ends the film is one of the great feats of moviemaking; in it Sidney Lumet manages to incorporate almost all of Mary Tyrone's great monologue. Mary (Katharine Hepburn) is in her parlor with her husband and their two sons. She recalls how a nun had dissuaded her from entering a convent. If regression could be visualized, it would consist of gradual diminution. Accordingly, almost as soon as Mary begins her monologue, the camera starts pulling back from her; then it rises up as her thoughts leave this world. As Mary grows smaller, so do her husband and sons. As the monologue draws

to a close, Mary appears in close-up as she speaks the final lines: "That was in the winter of senior year. Then in the spring something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time." Mary's close-up is followed by close-ups of the other Tyrones; then there is one last close-up of Mary's face, now strangely peaceful.

**Zooms and Freezes.** Some filmmakers prefer the **zoom** to the moving shot because it is both economical and time-saving. Technically, the zoom is not a moving shot because the camera does not move—a cameraperson employs a lens of variable **focal length**, the distance from the center of the lens to the point where the image is in focus. The adjustable lens gives the impression of the camera moving close to, or far away from, the subject, hence the terms **zoom in** and **zoom out**. A zoom can single out someone in a crowd, pinpoint a criminal's hiding place in the woods, or capture a facial expression without the person's being aware of the camera's presence. Zooming can also flatten an image, creating an unreal sense of depth and generally resulting in the loss of detail. Some filmmakers may prefer such a two-dimensional effect. Stanley Kubrick clearly did in *Barry Lyndon*, in which he deliberately zoomed out of close-ups to reveal scenes that resembled paintings—a technique in keeping with his purpose of portraying the eighteenth century as if it were a museum exhibit.

The zoom represents deceptive motion and distorts size; the **freeze frame**, on the other hand, is a form of stopped motion and suggests stasis. In a freeze frame, all movement suddenly halts, and the image "freezes" as it turns into a still photograph. At the end of François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959), Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre L aud), having escaped from a reformatory, heads toward the ocean. When he reaches the water's edge, he walks into the shallows; then he turns and faces the shore. At that instant Truffaut freezes the frame, trapping Antoine between the reformatory and the ocean, between the past and the present. The freeze implies immobility, helplessness, or indecision.

The freeze can also suggest the immobility that comes with death. At the end of the shower sequence in *Psycho*, Hitchcock freezes the close-up of Marion's staring eye, as the camera draws back, distancing itself from the eye that no longer sees and thus bringing to a close one of the most shocking yet artistically done sequences in film.

The zoom and the freeze are similar in that they can call attention to details more dramatically than other devices do. Because of their strong undressing power, they are as easily misused as italics are by inexperienced writers. There was a time in the 1970s and 1980s when many American films ended with a freeze frame, which then became the background for the end credits. However, examples of the intelligent use of the freeze frame are hard to come by. A great filmmaker will freeze for a reason; a mediocre one will freeze for effect. At the end of *The Philadelphia Story*, director George



The most famous freeze frame in film: the final shot in *The 400 Blows* (1959). (Courtesy MOMAFSA and Janus Films)

Cukor demonstrates an effective use of the freeze frame: he freezes a shot of the three main characters, played by Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn, and James Stewart, because a photographer has just taken their picture. Naturally, they look surprised, because they have been caught off guard.

## Combining Shots: The Sequence

In film, shots combine to form sequences, or what we generally think of as scenes. Note that some writers prefer to distinguish between a **scene** and a **sequence**. A scene, they would say, is a unit of action that takes place in the same location and is made up of one shot or many shots. A sequence is a group of shots forming a self-contained segment of the film that is, by and large, intelligible in itself.

From the above definitions, *scene* and *sequence* appear to be virtually synonymous, and for all practical purposes they are. The chief difference is that there can be scenes within a sequence, but not sequences within scenes. In the key sequence in *Notorious*, there are several scenes. The sequence begins in the bedroom with Alicia's removing the key to the wine cellar from Alex's key chain (scene 1); next, she gives the key to Devlin downstairs (scene 2); finally, Devlin and Alicia go down to the wine cellar (scene 3).

There are several kinds of sequences. In Chapter 2 we discussed credits and precredits sequences. Sequences can also be identified as linear, associative, and montage. Linear sequences have a beginning, a middle, and an end. When a sequence is designated as associative, it means that the links between beginning, middle, and end are visual rather than narrative. A montage consists of a series of shots related by some theme or mood, like the New York montage that accompanies the credits of Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1979). Note that these types of sequences are not mutually exclusive. An associative sequence can be linear; a linear sequence can contain a montage.

### The Linear Sequence

In a **linear sequence**, one action links up with another, creating a miniature drama. Let us return to the key sequence in *Notorious*. The beginning of the sequence initiates the action: Alicia removes the key. The middle adds to the action: Alicia slips the key to her coworker, Harry Devlin, during the party at Alicia's house; they proceed to the wine cellar, where they discover that one of the bottles contains uranium ore; meanwhile, the champagne supply dwindles, and Alicia's husband and the wine steward go down to the cellar. The end follows and completes the action: the husband discovers his wife with Devlin. In a linear sequence, then, the connections between the incidents are like links in a chain.

Another linear sequence occurs after *The Age of Innocence's* main title. The action begins with a shot of a basket of daisies. A hand plucks one of the daisies; it is the hand of the soprano singing Marguerite in a performance of Gounod's *Fanshi*. The setting, we understand, is an opera house. Everyone is elegantly attired, as indicated by shots of bejeweled hands and necks. And the audience is less interested in the opera than in who is sitting next to whom, as the camera initiates the way gossipmongers might use their opera glasses. Newland Archer is seated in a box, wearing a white rose in his lapel. In another box are three women, two of whom will play important roles in his life: his fiancée, May (Winona Ryder), and the Countess Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer), whose colorful past has made her an object of speculation and scorn. Although Newland insists that his engagement to May be announced at the ball following the performance, he chooses to sit behind the countess. Indifferent to the opera, Newland and the countess recall their childhood together.

Although this linear sequence lasts only a few minutes, it establishes the setting (New York in the 1870s) and introduces the characters (New York society), three of whom (Archer, May, and the countess) become the principal ones. The beginning of the sequence introduces us to a privileged world; the middle, to a world where appearances alone count; and the end, to a world where a man who cannot wait to announce his engagement to





Maureen O'Hara and Walter Pidgeon as would-be lovers in John Ford's *How Green Was My Valley* (1941). (Courtesy AMPAS)

an innocent young woman chooses to sit next to a woman whose innocence is questionable.

In some linear sequences, however, a few links may be missing; in such cases, the sequence is elliptical. In an **elliptical linear sequence** certain details are omitted because viewers are expected to make the connections for themselves. The "Wedding of Angharad" sequence in John Ford's *How Green Was My Valley* (1941) comprises three episodes that appear, on the surface, to be loosely related: "The Courting of Angharad," "The Visit to Gruffydd," and "The Wedding." In the first episode, Evans, a wealthy mine owner's son, comes to court Angharad (Maureen O'Hara). Since Angharad displays a mind of her own, there is little likelihood that Evans will win her despite his wealth. Thus, we do not take the courting seriously. In the second episode, Angharad calls on Mr. Gruffydd (Walter Pidgeon), the minister, whom she really loves. There is something disturbing about this episode—it hints at love never to be consummated. Angharad speaks of her affection for the minister, but his only concern is his low salary, which makes marriage impossible. In the third episode, Angharad steps ghostlike into a carriage, her bridal veil billowing in the breeze.

The three episodes become linked by the impressions they create in the audience's mind. Initially, there seems to be no connection between the courting and Angharad's visit to Gruffydd, but the link becomes clear with



Harry Devlin (Cary Grant) on the verge of forgetting the champagne in *Notorious* (1946). Hitchcock ends the scene with a close-up of the bottle, the object that unifies the entire sequence. (Courtesy ABC Picture Holdings, Inc.)

the final episode: money, which means nothing to Angharad but means a great deal to the minister. In choosing Evans, she chose what Gruffydd considered the prerequisite for marriage. The folly of her choice is a mirthless wedding. The tragedy of her choice is mirrored in the minister's face as he watches the wedding party drive away.

### The Associative Sequence

In an **associative sequence**, the scenes are linked together by an object or a series of objects. In another sequence in *Notorious*, Alicia, who has fallen in love with Devlin, plans an intimate dinner for the two of them. As Devlin leaves for headquarters, Alicia asks him to pick up some wine. In the next scene, Devlin enters his supervisor's office with a bottle of champagne, which he leaves on the desk. When he discovers that Alicia's assignment requires her to seduce Sebastian, he is so disturbed that he forgets the champagne. Scene 2 ends with a close-up of the bottle. In the third scene, Devlin is back in Alicia's apartment, where the dinner is burned and there is not even any wine to salvage the evening. He looks around for the

champagne. "I guess I left it somewhere," he mutters. These three episodes coalesce into a sequence that might be entitled "The Ruined Dinner," whose three scenes might be called "The Bottle Suggested," "The Bottle Purchased," and "The Bottle Forgotten." The bottle is an object that unifies the sequence; the close-up of the bottle in scene 2 links scenes 1 and 3, bringing them into dramatic focus.

In the sequence that ends another Hitchcock film, *North by Northwest*, Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint) is holding on to the hand of Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) to keep from sliding off Mount Rushmore. Thornhill encourages her to "hang in there," having recently proposed marriage. In one of the smoothest transitions in film, the hand to which Eve was just clinging is now helping her climb to the upper berth of a compartment on the Twentieth Century Limited. Without the audience's suspecting it, the scene changed from Mount Rushmore to the train compartment. Thornhill's hand was the unifying image; it rescued Eve from death and saved her for marriage.

### The Montage Sequence

**Montage** is a word that has many meanings. When it is used to describe a sequence, montage can be defined as a series of shots arranged in a particular order for a particular purpose. In a montage sequence, the shots are arranged so that they follow each other in rapid succession, telescoping an event or several events into a couple of seconds of screen time. In *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), there is a succession of shots featuring Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep), the formidable editor of a fashion magazine, dumping her coat and bag on the desk of her assistant Andy (Anne Hathaway) each morning. The sequence covers several weeks as Andy learns about the fashion industry, which she finally rejects in favor of a career in journalism. This is pure montage—simply a series of shots spanning a period of time—nothing more. There is also a specific kind of montage, called **American montage** because it was so prominent in American films of the 1930s and 1940s. In American montage, time is collapsed as shots blend together, wipe each other away, or are superimposed on each other. A typical American montage might consist of calendar pages blowing away as one month yields to another, while headlines proclaiming the main events of the time period are superimposed over the calendar pages. Another example of American montage would be newspapers spinning across the screen announcing a murder trial as one headline obliterates the other. During the trial, one shot would wipe away another. The face of the judge would dissolve into the defendant's; superimposed over the defendant's face would be that of his anguished wife and, over hers, the face of the real murderer. When the montage ends, the action resumes.

A montage sequence can include features of both the linear and the associative sequence. A montage sequence compressing a decade into ten seconds could be linear in its chronological arrangement. The World War II montage was common in films of the 1940s. First, one would see a headline announcing the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; then subsequent headlines would enumerate key battles, and the last headline would proclaim the Japanese surrender.

A montage can also be unified by images. For example, the tour-of-Washington montage in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* combines shots of the Capitol, the White House, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and excerpts from Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and the Gettysburg Address, all of which are associated with American democracy.

### From Shot to Shot

In order to create sequences and scenes, filmmakers must decide how to arrange a series of shots so that one replaces another. Filmmakers can move from one shot to another by either using a cut or a transition.

### Cuts

**Cut** is one of the most commonly used terms in film. It can be a verb a director shouts to terminate a shot ("Cut!") or a noun meaning a strip of film or a joint between two separate shots. It can also be a version of a movie in its various stages—a **rough cut** is one of the earliest versions, a **director's cut** is the film as the director envisioned it, and a **final cut** is the version audiences will see.

In the context of this chapter, a **cut** is the joining of two separate shots so that the first is instantaneously replaced by the second, showing something the preceding shot did not. There are six basic kinds of cuts: straight, contrast, cross (parallel), jump, form, and match.

In a **straight cut**, one image instantaneously replaces another. Straight cuts are the most common kind of cuts: shot B replaces shot A. In *The Lady Eve*, Preston Sturges cuts from Charlie Pike (Henry Fonda) sitting at a table in a ship's dining room (shot A) to a group of women staring in his direction (shot B). At the end of Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), Laughton cuts from a shot of Rachel (Lillian Gish) speaking about the innocence of children to one showing the exterior of her house made quaint by falling snow. The cut is a visual way of saying that the children found warmth and security in Rachel's home.

In a **contrast cut**, the images replacing each other are dissimilar in nature. In Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool*, the director cuts from a female

nurse and a television camera operator making love to a shot of a school teacher in her Chicago apartment. Dramatically, the cut is meaningful because the lives of the camera operator and the teacher will soon become interconnected. But the cut also contrasts the two women in the man's life: an attractive but vapid nurse and a plain but dedicated teacher.

**Parallel cutting** (also known as **crosscutting** or **intercutting**) presents two actions occurring simultaneously. In *Schlotau*, an attempt to sabotage a battleship at a christening is crosscut with the ceremony itself. In another Hitchcock film, *Strangers on a Train* (1951), the director crosscuts between a tennis match that Guy (Farley Granger) is desperately trying to finish and the psychopathic Bruno's (Robert Walker) feverish attempt to retrieve Guy's cigarette lighter in order to link Guy with his own wife's murder even though it was Bruno who murdered Guy's wife.

*The Godfather* ends with one of the most chilling examples of crosscutting in film. Scenes from the baptism of Michael Corleone's nephew are crosscut with a series of killings Michael has ordered to take place. At the same time that Michael is witnessing the religious ceremony, and officially becoming his nephew's godfather, the audience witnesses the Mafia assassinations that result in the deaths of Michael's enemies, including his brother-in-law Carlo, the baby's father.

A break in continuity that leaves a gap in the action constitutes a **jump cut**. In *Darling* (1965), a shot of a couple about twenty yards from the entrance to a building is followed by a shot of them going through the door to the interior of the building. Obviously not everything has to be shown in a particular scene or sequence, but excessive jump-cutting can give a film the continuity of a comic strip. On the other hand, when a knowledgeable director jump-cuts, there is probably a reason. In Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1959), the main character shoots a police officer in Marseilles, runs across a field, and emerges in Paris. Godard is too talented a filmmaker to break continuity without a reason. *Breathless* is the kind of movie that calls attention to itself as a movie. It is dedicated to Monogram Pictures, which produced low-budget films during the 1930s and 1940s, and re-creates the style of the low-budget American film in which a character can move from one location to the other without being seen in transit.

A **form cut** is a cut from one object to another that is similarly shaped. In Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour* (1946), there is a cut from a record in a jukebox to a drumhead—one circular object replacing another.

Similar in principle to the form cut is the **match cut**, in which one shot complements or "matches" the other, following it so smoothly that there seems to be no break in continuity as far as time and space are concerned, although there often is. However, if the match is designed to bring us into a different time frame, it should be done so naturally that we barely notice it. For example, in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), Steven Spielberg uses a match cut to bring Indiana from youth to adulthood. In the

first shot, Indiana the boy (River Phoenix) bows his head to receive the famous hat; as the head lifts in the second shot, it is Indiana the man (Harrison Ford) who is wearing the hat. Probably the most famous match in film is the one in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), when an ape hurls a bone into the air in one shot and a space shuttle appears in the next. The match condenses the history of evolution into two images.

### Transitions

In a cut there is no bridge between shots; one shot simply replaces another. Just as writers use transitional words and phrases like *however*, *moreover*, and *in fact* to bridge ideas, filmmakers use **transitions** to bridge scenes. And just as one can spot transitional phrases, one can also spot transitional devices in film because they are more noticeable than cuts. The following are the chief transitional devices used in film.

**The Fade.** The **fade-out** is the simplest kind of transition: the light decreases, and the screen goes dark or to a particular color. Ingnar Bergman, for example, fades to red in *Cries and Whispers* (1972); in *Mystic River* (2003), Clint Eastwood fades to white after Jimmy (Sean Penn) shoots Dave Boyle (Tim Robbins). The opposite is the **fade-in**, where the light increases as the picture gradually appears on the screen. In general, the term *fade* refers to a fade-out. Most fade-outs are no more profound than a blank screen, but some can bring an action to an artful close, much the way a gifted orator rounds out a sentence. A good illustration is the first fade-out in William Wyler's *Mrs. Miniver*. The first sequence covers a day in the lives of the Minivers. Both husband and wife feel guilty for having purchased something the other might find frivolous: Kay (Greer Garson) has bought a new hat, and Clem (Walker Pidgeon) a new car. At the close of the day, the camera pans the bedroom, pausing at the hat smartly perched on the bedpost. The scene fades out with the hat in silhouette. Fading out on the hat brings the sequence full circle: it began with Kay's buying the hat and ends with the hat's being displayed. We smile at the fade because it provides the same pleasure of recognition we receive when a speech begins and ends with the same image. But we also smile at its wisdom, for it represents one of those little domestic triumphs that seems more meaningful at the end of the day than at the beginning.

In the theater, the stage may go dark between scenes, or the curtain may even descend between them, to mark the passage of time. In film, a fade can function in the same way. The first fade in *Notorious* occurs at a particularly dramatic moment. There is an unidentified guest at Alicia's party, sitting with his back to the camera. Curiously, he remains after everyone else leaves. Hitchcock fades out on the back of the man and fades in



Harry Devlin as the uninvited guest at Alicia's (Ingrid Bergman) party in *Notorious*. Hitchcock will fade out on the back of Grant's head and fade in on his face. (Courtesy ABC Picture Holdings, Inc.)

on his face, which is none other than Cary Grant's. Hitchcock interrupts the party with a fade to indicate a lapse of time; but the fade is also a clever way of introducing the male lead by linking two scenes in which he appears—one ending with his back to the camera, the other beginning with his face coming into view. The fade helps produce a natural rhythm.

A fade can also be commentative. In *Mr. Skeffington* (1944), the aging Fanny Skeffington (Bette Davis) reassembles her former suitors, who are now either married or going bald. The scene fades out as the men enter the dining room and fades in on a gentleman's hat and gloves. The hat and gloves belong to Edward (Jerome Cowan), an impoverished suitor who has returned to court Fanny. The fade-out allows us to see a connection between the two scenes. In the first, Fanny has invited her suitors to dinner to reassure herself that she is still beautiful. However, Edward is not interested in her beauty, which is nonexistent, but only in her money, which is also nonexistent although he does not know it. One charade fades out and another fades in. A cut would not have conveyed the idea of one farce rising out of another.

**The Dissolve.** A fade denotes demarcation, marking the end of a narrative sequence. A dissolve denotes continuity by the gradual replacement of one shot by another. This kind of transition, in which the outgoing and incoming shots merge, serves a variety of functions. Sometimes a dissolve simply has the force of "in the meantime" or "later." In *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock dissolves a shot of Roger Thornhill bribing his mother to get a key

from a hotel desk clerk to a shot of the two of them walking toward the room that Thornhill was so anxious to enter.

A dissolve can also mean "no sooner said than done." The Mother Superior in *The Song of Bernadette* (1943) no sooner asks to see Bernadette than the shot dissolves into Bernadette's room. In Max Ophüls's *Catche* (1949), a shot of a woman gazing at a picture of a model in a mink coat dissolves into a shot of the woman, who has become a model herself, wearing a mink.

When is a dissolve a transition, and when is it more than a transition? This is like asking, when is a word simply a conventional sign and when is it a symbol? Water can simply be a liquid, or it can be a sign of birth, rebirth, or fertility. It depends on the context: in T. S. Eliot's poems, water is never just water. It is the same with a dissolve. What a dissolve means—if, in fact, it means anything—is determined by the context. The dissolve in *North by Northwest* is simply a way of getting two characters from the hotel lobby to one of the floors.

When two images blend in such a way that their union constitutes a symbolic equation, however, the result is a metaphorical dissolve. This is a visual form of **synecdoche** (or **metonymy**, to which synecdoche is very similar). Synecdoche is a species of metaphor in which the part is substituted for the whole—the term *wheels* for "car," for example—or a sign replaces the thing signified, as in *green* meaning "go." We often use this figure of speech without knowing it—saying "All hands on deck" when hands = crew, or "He addressed his comments to the chair" when chair = chairperson.

In *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* (1947), Geoffrey Carroll (Humphrey Bogart) is a wife-poisoner. Early in the film, Sally (Barbara Stanwyck) discovers a letter he dropped, addressed to his wife. Because Sally is in love with Geoffrey, she questions him about his marriage. He replies that he is getting a divorce. The letter dissolves into a neatly wrapped package of poison Geoffrey has just purchased from a pharmacist. The merging of the two images, the letter and the package, results in the equation: Mrs. Carroll + package = death. Dissolving an envelope bearing a woman's name into poison—the means that will make her only a name—is an ingenious touch.

The dissolves in George Stevens's films have an effect similar to the homogenization of cream and milk. In *Shane*, when Starrett (Van Heflin) and Shane (Alan Ladd) succeed in uprooting a stubborn tree trunk, Stevens slowly merges their triumphant faces into the landscape, making the men one with nature. Later, when Starrett watches a homesteader's property go up in flames, Stevens dissolves his vengeful face into the burning house. The resulting equations—man + nature = natural man; face + burning house = consuming rage—do not advance the plot; their purpose, rather, is to illustrate one of the film's main themes: the pioneer's oneness with nature, which enables him to become a part of everything he sees or does.

A dissolve can sometimes have the effect of **dramatic foreshadowing** if the filmmaker prepares the audience for subsequent events by hinting at their outcome earlier. In Joseph Losey's *King and Country* (1964), a skull mired in mud dissolves into the face of a soldier playing a harmonica. The dissolve prefigures the fate of the soldier, who later dies in the mud, his voice silenced by a pistol shot in the mouth.

Dissolves can also recapitulate. At the end of Peter Bogdanovich's *The Last Picture Show* (1971), Sonny (Timothy Bottoms) returns to the house of Ruth Popper (Cloris Leachman), the coach's wife, with whom he has been having an affair. The movie house has closed its doors forever; Sam the Lion and Billy are dead; Duane is on his way to Korea. All that remain are Ruth and the dreary Texas town where the tumbleweed rolls down the main street. As Sonny and Ruth look at each other, their eyes forge the only bond that can unite them—loneliness. At that moment, Sonny and Ruth dissolve into the town and the vast Texas flatlands. There is no difference between a young man without prospects, a middle-aged woman without hope, and a town without a future. Their destinies have become one.

At the end of *Colorado Territory* (1949), Raoul Walsh's western remake of his earlier success, *High Sierra* (1941), the hands of Wes (Joel McCrea) and Colorado (Virginia Mayo), touching in death, dissolve into a shot of a ringing bell. The dissolve does not so much connect two images as it connects two events that the lovers' hands and the bell represent. Earlier in the film, Wes had hidden some stolen money in an abandoned church. After the deaths of Wes and Colorado, a priest discovers the money and uses it to restore the church bell, telling the villagers it was the gift of two lovers who passed by.

**The Form Dissolve.** A filmmaker can merge two images with the same shape or contours through a **form dissolve**. Often, a form dissolve is merely easy on the eyes. For example, in *Jane Eyre* the figure of a ballerina on top of a music box dissolves into a little girl dressed in the same costume. In Mervyn LeRoy's *I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang* (1932), the shot of a judge banging a gavel dissolves to one of a hammer pounding the bolt into the shackles of a prisoner—the one whom the judge in the previous scene had sentenced to ten years of hard labor. A form dissolve can also be directly related to the plot. In Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man*, a jazz musician is falsely accused of committing a holdup. As the musician (Henry Fonda) prays in front of a picture of Jesus Christ, the scene gradually changes to that of a man walking down a dark street. Then the man's head merges with the musician's. The man whose head fits into the musician's is the real criminal. The dissolve shows how easy it is to mistake the innocent for the guilty; it is just a matter of superimposing one face upon another.

The decision to cut or dissolve, or do both, is the filmmaker's choice. In his sequel to *The Godfather*—*The Godfather, Part II*—Francis Ford Coppola chose to interweave the lives of Vito Corleone (Robert De Niro) and



The killing of Don Clelio in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather, Part II* (1974). (Courtesy Paramount Pictures)

his son Michael (Al Pacino) by restricting each of them to a particular time period (1901–1925 for Vito, 1955–1959 for Michael). The film shifts back and forth from past to present. The shift occurs for the first time as Michael is putting his son to bed. Slowly, the scene dissolves to Vito in 1917, as he puts Michael's brother, Sonny, to bed. When Coppola wants to contrast Michael's frenetic lifestyle with his father's more leisurely one, he uses a cut. More often, however, Coppola dissolves from present to past, and vice versa. For example, when Michael learns that his wife Kay has had a miscarriage, later revealed to have been an abortion, Coppola dissolves to a shot of Vito, hovering over Michael's older brother, Fredo, who is ill with pneumonia. Coppola ends the flashback with the young Michael on Vito's lap, but then cuts to a car making its way along a wintry road and proceeding through the imposing entrance of Michael's Lake Tahoe home. The cut ushers us into a present so loveless that Kay does not even look up from her sewing to greet her husband. Rarely has a filmmaker alternated between dissolves and cuts as creatively as Coppola does.

**The Wipe.** In the 1970s and 1980s, television news programs often used a line traveling vertically across the scene to switch from one news item to another. That traveling line is a **wipe**, and in the movies of the 1930s and 1940s the wipe was the most stylish of the transitions. Since the screen is rectangular, the wipe can move vertically, horizontally, or diagonally; it can create a theatrical effect by rising or falling like a drop curtain.

Sometimes wipes complement each other: one shot ends with a wipe that travels from left to right; the next with a wipe that moves across the screen from right to left. The best example of complementary wipes can be found in the opening of *The Petty Girl* (1950).

More fluid than a cut and faster than a dissolve, the wipe is ideal for presenting a series of events in quick succession. Wipes are often used in the opening sequences of Frank Capra's Columbia films of the 1930s, notably in the opening sequences of *It Happened One Night*, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. In the handwriting sequence in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, for example, one expert after another testifies to the authenticity of Jeff Smith's signature. After each expert speaks, Capra simply wipes him off the screen, thereby showing the inanity of the investigation.

Rouben Mamoulian's excellent use of the wipe is apparent in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. After Jekyll (Fredric March) becomes Hyde, he goes off into the night, deserting Muriel Carew (Rose Hobart), his fiancée, who expects him at her dinner party. A wipe opens like a fan, dividing the screen diagonally: on the left is the departing Jekyll; on the right, the party in progress. When Jekyll leaves the Carew estate, Mamoulian wipes him out of the frame, which expands to disclose the dinner guests and the worried Muriel. At that point, the frame divides diagonally again: on the right is Ivy (Miriam Hopkins), the woman Hyde will kill, sipping champagne; on the left is Muriel, the woman Jekyll yearns to marry. The wipe acts as a parallel cut, informing us that while Muriel was at her party, Ivy was at home. But the split screen also represents the protagonist's ideal woman, who is similarly halved. It is only fitting that for a double man (Jekyll/Hyde) there should be a double woman (Ivy/Muriel).

When Muriel's father, furious at Jekyll's absence, cries, "Muriel, you will have nothing more to do with that man," a wipe begins to move him from the left of the screen to the center, revealing the man himself. However, it is not Jekyll but Hyde whom we see. The wipe is an ironic commentary on the father's outburst; clearly, he did not mean that Muriel should have nothing to do with Hyde (whom he cannot know) but with Jekyll. At this point, however, Jekyll is Hyde.

**The Iris.** Mount Rushmore, as seen through a telescope in *North by Northwest*, appears inside a circle in the middle of the darkened screen. This is a **masking** shot, or, to be more accurate, an **iris shot**, in which everything is blacked out except what is to be seen telescopically. Depending on the form in which the director wants the audience to see an image, the frame can also be altered to simulate other shapes, such as the view from a keyhole, through binoculars, or out a submarine periscope.

The director can also choose to iris in or iris out. **Irising in** consists of opening up the darkened frame with a circle of light that keeps expand-

A frame enlargement of an iris shot from *The Birth of a Nation*. In an iris shot, the image appears within a circle on an otherwise dark screen. (Courtesy MOMAFSA and Epoch Producing Corp.)



ing until the picture fills the frame. **Irising out** is the opposite; it is as if darkness were seeping into the frame from all sides, forcing the diminishing picture into some part of the frame until it becomes a speck and disappears. A director can dolly in or out of a scene or zoom in or out of one; but there is nothing quite like an iris to open the frame. In *The Birth of a Nation*, Griffith used the iris breathtakingly in Sherman's march to the sea. The frame opens from the upper-left-hand corner to reveal a mother and

her children on a hill; at first we do not know why they are huddled in fear, but as the frame opens we see Sherman's soldiers in the valley below. In *Intolerance*, Griffith gradually disclosed the splendor of Babylon by expanding the frame, starting at the lower-right-hand corner.

The iris is especially effective in death scenes. Irising out can suggest death because of the way in which darkness creeps into the frame, reducing the size of the image to a pinpoint and then annihilating it. Orson Welles chose the iris to symbolize both the death of Wilbur Minkler and the end of the horse-and-buggy era in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942). A horseless carriage moves in long shot across the snow. The passengers sing merrily, but their song is in sharp contrast to the landscape, which is dominated by a dead tree with wiry branches. As the motor buggy moves out of the frame, Welles irises out until it disappears in the darkness of a fade. One would have expected him to iris out of one scene and into another, but the shot that follows the fade is of a black wreath on the door of the Amberson house. The iris and the fade imply finality in different ways—the iris gradually and poetically; the fade, irrevocably.

The flashbacks in George Stevens's *Penny Serenade* (1941) are also unified by irising. Julie (Irene Dunne) recalls incidents from her marriage by playing old records of songs that had meaning for her and her husband. Each flashback begins with a close-up of the center of the record, which then opens up, rislike, to reveal the scene.

Irising is still being practiced, although not as regularly as it was in Griffith's day or during the 1930s and the 1940s. However, we do find iris-ing on certain television programs and in movies where techniques of the past function as period touches. When George Roy Hill irises out on the two con men at the close of *The Sting* (1973), it gives the ending a deliberately old-fashioned look. Similarly, the iris in Peter Bogdanovich's *Nickelodeon* lends an air of authenticity to the film, which is set in the early days of the movie industry.

Contemporary filmmakers such as Steven Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola, Woody Allen, and Martin Scorsese, who have immersed themselves in the films of the past, understandably draw on the techniques that have occupied film history and proven to be effective in the past. Brian De Palma chose a fade as a sign of demarcation at the beginning of *Dressed to Kill* (1980) when he fades to white after Kate's sexual fantasy. Steven Spielberg fades to black in *Empire of the Sun* to indicate that the first part of the action is over. In Francis Ford Coppola's *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986), a wipe takes Peggy Sue (Kathleen Turner) from high school, where she is talking with a male student, to her bedroom, where she is talking with her girlfriends. Two iris shots appear in Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*—one of May's unusual engagement ring; the other of Newland and the countess at the opera, either to suggest intimacy by placing them within a circle of privacy or to imply that they may have come within the range of some gossip's opera glasses. Wipes and irises abound in the *Star Wars* films, which

evoked the old movie serials in which such devices were common. Here they have the double function of evoking nostalgia and promoting the narrative.

*The Golden Bowl* (2001), an adaptation of Henry James's novel, ends with an iris shot for a specific reason. The film, set at the turn of the twentieth century, concludes with a newsreel showing the return of an American millionaire and his English wife (Nick Nolte and Uma Thurman) to the United States. Since early newsreels often closed by iris-ing out on an image, director James Ivory did likewise to provide an air of authenticity as well as to suggest that the couple's reputation as patrons of the arts has made them newsworthy.

As more film students go on to become filmmakers, their work will reflect what they have learned and what they have seen. If they have been exposed to classic films, they, too, may imitate the techniques which they have absorbed.

## Assembling the Shots

When Alfred Hitchcock said that a film must be edited, he meant that the shots that make up the movie must be assembled and arranged in such a way that the action proceeds in a logical and coherent manner. **Editing** involves selecting and arranging the shots based on the following considerations: their place within the narrative, their contribution to the mood of a particular scene or to the film as a whole, their enhancement of the film's rhythm, their elucidation of the film's deeper meaning, and their fulfillment of the filmmaker's purpose.

The most common form of editing in the narrative film is **continuity editing**, which entails assembling shots so that they follow each other smoothly and without interruption, as opposed to the piecemeal way in which a movie is originally filmed. Movies are generally shot out of sequence, with location filming usually done before soundtrack filming, and scenes involving actors with other commitments shot when the actors are available. Filmmakers do not care which scenes were shot first or that the climax in the Grand Canyon was shot on the second day of shooting because the weather happened to be ideal. Continuity editing preserves the illusion of an ongoing narrative.

Continuity editing is only one option a filmmaker might choose. Another might be montage.

## Eisenstein's Theory of Montage

While montage is sometimes used as a synonym for editing (e.g., American montage sequence), it had deeper implications for the great Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein. Eisenstein believed that shots should not so much

connect as collide, and that the viewer should be affected by their collision. Unlike continuity editing, which is supposed to be unobtrusive, montage calls attention to itself. If a man postures like a peacock, cut from the man to the peacock; if he is figuratively a horse's ass, pair him with a real one. If the purpose of a scene is to show people being killed like animals, cut from workers being massacred to an ox being slaughtered. This is the kind of montage that Eisenstein practiced.

Eisensteinian montage is based on contrast and conflict, which can exist both within the film as a whole and within a particular shot or scene. For example, without creating an actual series of cause and effect, Eisenstein opened *Potentkin* with a shot of breaking waves and followed this image of turbulence with shots of men sleeping in hammocks that formed a shroudlake tangle, mess tables swinging back and forth, meat crawling with maggots—each image jarring us, disquieting us, but ultimately preparing us for the sailors' revolt.

Eisenstein's influence was enormous, but not always beneficial. Instead of producing an artistic effect, the collision of images sometimes produces only pretentiousness. There is an embarrassing scene in Mamoulian's otherwise impressive *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* when Jekyll, exulting over his impending marriage to Muriel, shouts, "If music be the food of love, play on!" as he sits down at the organ and pounds away. Five shots appear in rapid succession, commenting on his rapture: a lighted candelabra, an illuminated art object, a smiling statue, the butcher's beaming countenance, and a blazing hearth. Jekyll's rapture is evident from the way he plays the organ; the accompanying montage is superfluous.

To Eisenstein, montage meant the visual conflict of images. In European countries, it means editing; selecting and arranging the shots that will form the scenes and sequences of a film. In England, the same process is called editing, or cutting, but with a slight difference: "editing" means the step-by-step assembling of the shots in the cutting room, while "montage" refers to the process considered as a whole. A further complication is that during the 1930s and 1940s American films employed American montage, which, as we have already seen, is a convenient way of collapsing time. Although this form of montage, in which time is telescoped through a blend of dissolves, wipes, and superimpositions, is not in vogue today, in its time it was highly effective and was regarded as sufficiently important to warrant screen credit for the montage editor. Slavko Vorkapich was especially adept at montage (*Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*); Don Siegel began in montage at Warner Bros. before going on to become a well-known director (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1956; *Dirty Harry*, 1971; *Escape from Alcatraz*, 1979; and so on).

### Continuity Editing

While montage may seem to be intellectually more exciting than continuity editing, it would be a mistake to dismiss continuity editing as merely the sequential arrangement of shots. Continuity editing is based on other editing principles that affect a film's rhythm, time, space, tone, and theme.

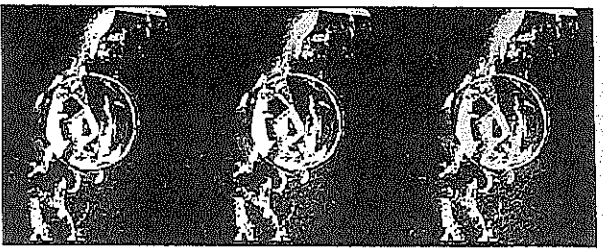
**Rhythm.** No great film is rhythmically uniform. Some shots remain on the screen longer than others; some sequences move more rapidly than others. One sequence may be uncommonly slow while another may be unusually fast. The best filmmakers vary **rhythm**—speed, movement, and pace—knowing that long strips of roll film produce a slower rhythm, short strips a more rapid rhythm. The process itself is not the issue here; the effects are, as one can see in the first two sequences of *Citizen Kane*, "The Death of Kane" and "News on the March."

*Citizen Kane* begins with a series of dreamlike dissolves culminating in a shot of a lighted window that suddenly goes dark. A mouth utters "Rosebud!" through a veil of falling snow, and a glass paperweight with a snow-covered house inside it smashes without making a sound. A nurse enters a room and folds a dead man's arms across his chest. The mood of the first part of "The Death of Kane" is slow and languid. As the camera draws closer to the window, the rhythm accelerates. Snow falls to the sound of crystalline music, evoking Kane's Colorado boyhood. After the paperweight breaks and the nurse enters, the rhythm decelerates; and the mood becomes solemn as she places Kane's arms on his chest. Without warning, a voice bellows, "News on the march!" as a newswreath of Kane's life unfolds. In the second scene the pace is frenetic; fifty years of a man's life are compressed into a few minutes. The pace builds inexorably until the "News on the March" is over and the camera sputters out, as if in exhaustion.

**Time.** Parallel cutting makes it possible for two concurrent actions to be depicted on the screen without one being completed before the other begins—the filmmaker simply cuts back and forth between them. Most novelists would never narrate two simultaneous episodes by completing the first before going on to the second; the novelist would bring the first to a certain point and, leaving the reader in suspense, proceed to the second. The novelist would then gradually add to each episode until the episodes are resolved either separately or jointly. D. W. Griffith understood this principle when he made *The Lonely Villa* (1909), in which he cut back and forth between a mother and her daughters being terrorized by thieves who have broken into their home, and the father en route to rescue them. The action is resolved by the last-minute rescue.

**Space.** Film's ability to alter our perception of space is well known. A filmmaker can combine a shot of a tractor trailer that has jackknifed on Route 81 outside Scranton, Pennsylvania, with a shot of a girl who has just





From "The Death of Kane" in *Citizen Kane*

Frame enlargement of the glass paperweight that falls from Kane's hand. The lighted window of Kane's bedroom goes dark. Suddenly snow begins to fall; it is the artificial snow in the glass paperweight that falls from Kane's hand as he utters his last word, "Rosebud!" (Courtesy MOMA/FSU)

gotten off the Cyclone at Coney Island, looking appropriately dazed. The combination could lead one to conclude that the girl witnessed the jack-knifing, even though one event occurred in Pennsylvania and the other took place in New York.

D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* is a four-plot film about injustice as seen in four different periods: the early twentieth century, the age of Cyrus the Great in the sixth century BCE, the time of Christ, and the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre of the Huguenots in 1572. Although the film depicts events in four different parts of the world, everything converges at the climax. By alternating between shots of Christ on his way to Calvary, the Mountain Girl on her chariot to warn Cyrus, a modern-day race against the clock to save the life of an innocent man, and Prosper the Huguenot rushing through the streets of sixteenth-century Paris to rescue his beloved, Griffith makes it seem that everything is occurring not only at the same time but also in the same general area. The parallel cutting has affected our sense of time and space, as well as reflecting the film's theme: the existence of intolerance at all times and in all places.

**Tone.** Just as tempo should vary in a film, so too should tone, which is primarily light, shade, and color. Again, *Citizen Kane* is an excellent example. The first sequence, "The Death of Kane," is dark and eerie. The second sequence, "News on the March," is the exact opposite.

As the nurse enters Kane's room, her image is refracted through a piece of the shattered paperweight. (Courtesy MOMA/FSU)



When Francis Ford Coppola contrasts the lives of the Corleones in *The Godfather, Part II*, Vito's world—New York's Little Italy—is warm and inviting, as compared to Michael's, which is dark and forbidding.

**Theme.** Juxtaposing contrasting shots can deepen a film's theme. In *A Doll's House* (1973), there is a cut from Nora's upper-middle-class home to Krogstad's hovel; seeing how Krogstad lives makes it easier to understand his blackmailing Nora. Sometimes, a film's theme depends on contrasting two ways of life. In William Wyler's *Dead End* (1937), for example, the action takes place on a New York street, where an affluent apartment house is situated opposite a tenement building whose residents can barely manage to eke out a living. In *Dead End*, Wyler does not cut back and forth between the apartment house and the tenement; instead, he devotes most of the film to the tenement dwellers, suggesting that they are the more important characters. Pay close attention to films that contrast two lifestyles to see if the film's theme involves privileging one over the other. In *Dead End*, the sympathies of Wyler and his screenwriter, Lillian Hellman, both of whom were staunch liberals, lay with the underclass.

### The Role of the Editor

Since it is a common fallacy that films are made in the editing room, students often have difficulty distinguishing between the editor's role and the filmmaker's. We have seen that editing involves selecting and arranging the shots in a particular order. But who does the arranging—the editor or the filmmaker?

Let us use an analogy from student life. After you have written an essay or a term paper, you submit it to your instructor. Before submitting it, you have edited it: removed superfluous words, substituted the right words for the wrong ones, and corrected spelling and grammar. Still, your essay may not be perfect; you have been too close to it to catch all the mistakes. Since your instructor did not write it, he or she can be more objective. You may

have sentences, or even paragraphs, that should be transposed. What you thought was an introduction might work better if you made it your conclusion. Perhaps you did not prune the paper of all its excesses; your instructor will note that. A good instructor can take what you have submitted and, by making the proper corrections and suggestions, show you how it can be improved. Your instructor did not write the paper, yet he or she has made it better by doing something for it that you have not done.

An editor performs a similar task: he or she takes what has been shot and improves on it. The ideal film editor is the director's alter ego, carrying out what the director would do if he or she had the time to be all things to the film. Thus, an editor may select the shots or decide which portion of a shot should be used. An editor can give an action scene its distinctive rhythm by alternating tempo and varying directional movement. If a sequence needs greater momentum, an editor can cut it in such a way that it acquires this feature. If a scene is especially violent, an editor can cut it so rapidly that the movie will receive a PG-13 instead of an R rating. If shot A shows the pursuers moving left to right, shot B must show the pursued fleeing left to right; otherwise, it would look as if they collided. If a character exits shot A from the left, the character must enter shot B from the right.

Because all films require some form of editing, the importance of editors has often been exaggerated, and their role sometimes equated with that of directors. Lee Bobker compares editors with painters, working in isolation to create the movie's pace, mood, and rhythm. Yet, despite Bobker's respect for the editor's function, he is forced to admit that it is a sub-vent one: "The editor should always enjoy a wide creative latitude, but he should never fall prey to the illusion that he is creating a new film from scratch. His primary purpose is to bring to completion an artistic work already in progress."<sup>1</sup>

In the first edition of *The Technique of Film Editing*, Karel Reisz dubbed the editor "the interpreter of the small details rather than the prime creator of the continuity."<sup>2</sup> For the second edition, Professor Thorold Dickinson stated that "the modern editor is the executant for the film-maker and no longer his equal on any self-respecting film."<sup>3</sup>

Most good editors would agree. The best answer to the question "What is film editing?" was given by the British editor Anthony Gibbs: "Film editing is putting into dramatic form the basic filmed material given to the editor by the director."<sup>4</sup> However, just as there are average, good, and great directors, there are average, good, and great editors. Gibbs would call a good editor someone who can achieve "the total interpretation of the director's and the writer's intentions," and a great editor someone who is capable of "taking their intentions even farther, showing them a dimension to their project which even they may not have imagined to be there."<sup>5</sup>

True greatness is rare in any profession; thus, great editors are probably at a premium. It is likely that an editor capable of bringing new dimensions

to the surface would go on to become a director. The motto of Edward Dmytryk, who began his career as an editor and then went on to direct some fifty films between 1935 and 1975, is relevant: "Substance first—then form."<sup>6</sup> Director Sidney Lumet goes even further: "No movie editor has ever put anything up on the screen that hadn't been shot."<sup>7</sup> The filmmaker must provide the substance if the editor is to provide the form.

Alfred Hitchcock always provided the substance, as the first part of the key sequence in *Notorious* demonstrates. The effectiveness of the sequence came from the editing; but editor Theron Warth could not have achieved such effectiveness if Hitchcock had not first determined the form of the sequence by providing Warth with twelve shots that he could assemble.

Hitchcock had an imaginative approach to the scene; he knew that whatever he shot had to be edited in such a way that the audience would wonder whether Alicia could detach the key; and if she did, what next? The way the sequence is edited reflects the way Hitchcock wanted the viewer to experience the removal of the key:

1. Putting on her earrings, Alicia enters the frame in a LS that ends with a MS as she looks to her left.
2. She was looking in the direction of the bathroom, where we see the shadow of her husband, Sebastian (MS).
3. Alicia seems to be gazing at something (CU).
4. The camera tracks up to the object of her gaze: the key ring in CU on the dressing table.
5. Alicia approaches the dressing table and glances toward the bathroom (LS).
6. Sebastian's shadow is still visible (MS).
7. Back to Alicia at the dressing table.
8. She glances again at the bathroom (CU).
9. She removes the key (CU).
10. Repeat of shot 8.
11. Sebastian comes out of the bathroom as
12. Alicia goes back to the bedroom (LS).

To paraphrase Sidney Lumet, Hitchcock provided the material; the editor gave it form. By providing Warth with a mix of close-ups, long shots, and medium shots, Hitchcock enabled him to give the scene a definite rhythm that it would not have had if the twelve shots had been reduced to Alicia's noticing the key ring and removing the correct key as her husband comes out of the bathroom.

## Mise-en-Scène

You may have been told in an English class never to use a foreign word or phrase when an English one would suffice. The rule is a good one, but it is not always possible to follow. Some terms have become so much a part of our critical vocabulary that, although they derive from other languages, they crystallize a complex idea in a single word or phrase. If that word or phrase is properly understood, discussion can proceed without further explanation. Such a phrase is one that film critics use: *mise-en-scène*. *Mise-en-scène* is a French phrase used to describe the staging of a play. Often a playwright will read "Staged by" rather than "Directed by" because, in effect, the director has brought a written text to the stage, giving it the visualization it needs to go beyond being words on paper.

In film, *mise-en-scène* has a similar meaning: the "staging" of a movie, using the same attention to detail that is lavished on a theatrical production, so that the filmmaker, like the stage director, can realize his or her vision of the material. Some film scholars have restricted the phrase to the arrangement of the visual elements within a shot or a sequence such as camera movement, the placement of the characters in relation to each other, the set, lighting, and so forth. But there is general agreement that, just as a stage director must decide how to give life to a written text, a film director must do the same. Both cases involve a script and its realization, whether it is called a dramatization or a visualization.

*Mise-en-scène* is really a form of *framing*, a term that is easily understood by anyone who has either studied painting or has actually painted. *Framing* is the act, and sometimes the art, of composing a shot, reflecting decisions similar to those painters make about how their canvas will ultimately look. The filmmaker's canvas is the *frame*, the strip of celluloid on which the image is captured. Like a painter, the filmmaker must arrange the details of the frame in terms of the visual or dramatic points being made, or the ideas being expressed.

A shot in *Road to Perdition* (2002) depicts a hit man loading his gun in a room in which there is a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Director Sam Mendes could have panned over from the gun to the picture, but instead he included both in the same frame to make a visual comment on the disparity between the hit man's profession and the religion in which he had been raised—a religion founded on the Ten Commandments, the fifth of which is "Thou shalt not kill!"

In *Gangs of New York*, there is a shot showing Irish immigrants no sooner arriving in New York on one ship than they are boarding another to be transported south to fight for the Union in the Civil War. While they are boarding the ship that will eventually bring them to the battlefields of the South, a coffin is being lowered onto a dock that is already lined with coffins. By including the boarding of the ship and the lowering of the cof-



The controlling mother (Leopoldine Konstantin), dominating the frame as she stands between her oedipal son (Claude Rains) and his future wife (Ingrid Bergman) in Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946). (Courtesy MOMMA/SA)

fin in the same shot, Scorsese is suggesting the potential fate of the men who are off to fight for a cause they barely understand, if at all.

In *The Hours*, Leonard and Virginia Woolf have left London for the suburbs on the advice of a doctor, who believed Virginia's mental state would improve in a rural environment. Yearning for city life, Virginia heads for the train station, where she buys a ticket to London. When Leonard discovers her at the station, he confronts her on the platform. Director Stephen Daldry frames Leonard and Virginia at opposite ends of the platform, as if they were two opposing forces. All that is between them is empty space, broken only by a bench. Daldry could easily have had Virginia sitting on the bench, as Leonard approached; he could also have had Leonard sit down beside her and explain why she must return to their temporary home. Instead, Daldry chose to isolate the characters at opposite ends of the frame to convey the existing tension.

Shots can be framed graphically in terms of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines; they can be framed geometrically or iconographically; in deep or shallow focus; from a high or a low angle; in a frame that has been masked or doubled. A shot can last a second or run ten minutes. Each choice a director makes results in *mise-en-scène* that creates a unique effect.



Tight framing in *Detour* (1946). The camera tracks in for a close-up of Roberts (Tom Neale), who looks imprisoned within the frame. (frame enlargement courtesy John Belton)

Although there are no ironclad rules of framing, certain principles are widely followed.

In **tight framing**, the subject appears to be confined within the horizontal and vertical borders of the frame, so that there is not even a hint of offscreen space. Tight framing gives a feeling of oppression. To create an atmosphere of fatalism, Edgar G. Ulmer chose tight framing for several shots of Al Roberts (Tom Neale) in *Detour*. When Roberts's face is trapped within the frame, destiny seems to be closing in on him.

Whatever is to be emphasized in a shot should occupy a position of prominence, but not necessarily in the center of the frame. The frame can be slightly asymmetrical. An image placed dead center can give viewers the feeling they are looking at a static representation stamped on the frame. A filmmaker might want to **compose a shot** so that the image is closer to one side of the frame than the other, making it possible to incorporate other visual detail. In Neil Labute's *Possession* (2002), two academics, played by Gwyneth Paltrow and Aaron Eckhart, have reached an impasse in their relationship. To convey the distance between them, Labute places Paltrow at the left of the frame, with Eckhart behind her at the water's edge—his back to the camera. Isolating a character at the extremity of the frame is also useful if a disorienting or unusual effect is sought. For example, in *Detour*, when Roberts discovers that Vera (Ann Savage) has accidentally strangled herself with a telephone cord, her body is seen at the right of the frame, the head hanging above the bed.

Vertical and horizontal compositions denote solidarity, while diagonals and oblique compositions denote tension. In *Potemkin*, the masts of the ships, the raised arms of the sailors, and the waving arms of the people suggest a solidarity that is destroyed when the Cossacks appear at the top of the Odessa Steps. Their shadows falling on the steps create a diagonal that breaks the unity.

A **canted shot** (also known as a Dutch-angle shot) results in an oblique composition in which the frame looks lopsided. Edgar G. Ulmer

The Conflict of Lines in the Odessa Steps Sequence of *Potemkin*

**TOP RIGHT:** The shadows cast by the Cossacks create ominous diagonals on the steps in *Potemkin* (1925).

(Courtesy MOMM/ISA and Janus Films)

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** The juxtaposition of strong verticals (the soldiers' legs) and stable horizontals (steps) with broken lines (sprawled bodies) and hands raised in supplication) suggests the dominance of the Cossacks and the helplessness of the people in *Potemkin*. (Courtesy MOMM/ISA and Janus Films)



uses canted shots in *Bluebeard* (1944) to emphasize the mental state of the mad puppeteer; the canted shots in *The Third Man* (1949) imply a world in which things are askew. In the violent argument between the title character and her mother in *Carrie* (1976), the frame looks as if it will tip over. When an IRA hostage speaks wistfully of his "special friendship" with a hairdresser in *The Crying Game* (1992), director Neil Jordan chooses a canted shot, which should cause us to wonder why the frame is tipped. Is Jordan suggesting that the relationship is not entirely conventional? Eventually we discover that this is the case: the hairdresser is a transsexual.

Sometimes vertical framing is intentionally ironic. In *Address Unknown* (1944), Grisselle (K. T. Stevens) flees from a mob that has discovered she is Jewish. She hopes to find refuge in the home of a family friend. Framed by trees, she looks hopefully into the distance where the friend lives. Ordinarily such a composition, with its strong verticals, would imply hope. However, Grisselle is a Jew in Nazi Germany, and the man she assumes is a friend has become a Nazi.

Vertical bars across the face, on the other hand, have another connotation: mystery, imprisonment, exclusion. When Grisselle, in *Address Unknown*, finally arrives at the friend's house and stands before the gate, the composition



**Caned Shots**  
A caned shot of Orson Welles as Harry Lime in *The Third Man* (1949). (Courtesy MOMAFSA)

recalls the earlier one in which she was framed by trees. Here, however, the gate is a barrier, and even though she reaches it she does not gain access to the house. The use of verticals in this different composition, as bars across the face, suggests exclusion: prevented from entering, Griselle is killed by the Gestapo.

Other types of geometrical compositions can be symbolic as well as visually interesting. In Jungian psychology, the circle is a symbol of wholeness, suggesting unity and commonality. Such is the case in *Salt and Fire* (1943) when Sergeant Joe Gunn (Humphrey Bogart) passes a cup of water around to his thirsty men, who stand in a circle. If a composition involves three characters, triangular arrangements can make a statement about their rela-

**Deceptive and Debarring Verticals**

**TOP RIGHT:** Griselle (K. T. Stevens) in *Address Unknown* (1944) is framed between two trees, expecting to be saved from the mob that is pursuing her. Here the verticals are a support, but only a temporary one. (Courtesy Sony Pictures Entertainment)

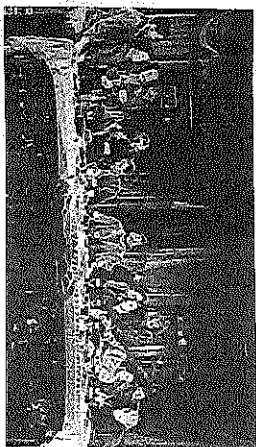
**BOTTOM RIGHT:** Griselle before the gate leading to the home of a family friend who will not receive her (*Address Unknown*). (Courtesy Sony Pictures Entertainment)



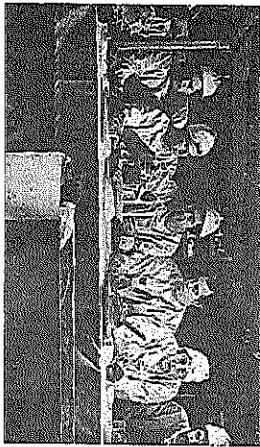
tionship, as is the case in François Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* (1961), in which two men share the affections of the same woman.

Sometimes a filmmaker chooses to frame a shot so that it consciously evokes a famous painting, or a character is meant to represent a famous person from another era. This is called **iconography** and should be as unobtrusive as possible. If the filmmaker is imitating a painting or a sculpture, the composition should look natural even though it is a replica of, or an homage

#### Iconographic Framing



**TOP LEFT:** *The Last Supper* parody in *Viridiana* (1961). (Courtesy MOMA/FSA and Janus Films)



**BOTTOM LEFT:** Another Last Supper parody in *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970). (Courtesy Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences)

to, a work of art. The beggars' banquet in Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana* (1961) is an obvious parody of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, made even more so by the use of the "Hallelujah Chorus" as background music. *The Last Supper* is also parodied in Robert Altman's *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970) when the medics stage a literal last supper for a dentist who plans to commit suicide because he thinks he is impotent. *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (2003), based on Tracy Chevalier's novel, offers an imaginative explanation of the circumstances that inspired the seventeenth-century artist Johannes Vermeer to create his famous painting of the same name. If you enjoyed the film, you might ask yourself the following: did you enjoy it because of the exquisite photography or was it the story that captured your attention? If the former, then you were paying more attention to the way the shots were framed and photographed; if the latter, then you were more taken with the unfolding of the action. If both, then you saw how iconography and narrative were interwoven, so that the *Girl with a Pearl Earring* looked as if Vermeer himself had determined the film's visual style and was telling his own story.

Martin Scorsese also seemed to be thinking of a painting at the beginning of *Gangs of New York*. At the end of the brutal confrontation between the immigrants and the nativists, Scorsese has the camera zoom out, leaving the square to the survivors, who look like sick figures in a composition reminiscent of Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow*. Bruegel's painting depicts a bleak winter scene in which nature is all-powerful, and human beings are dark shapes or specks. Similarly, in the film, a square that has witnessed a

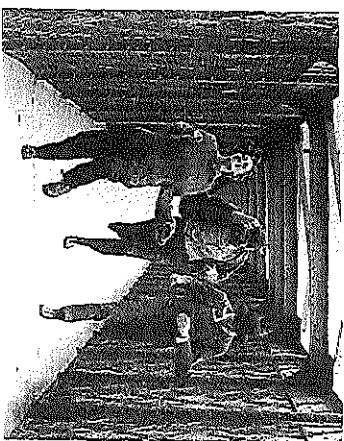
battle has been reduced to an image drained of blood and humanity. The shot is the equivalent of a crime scene, rendered remote and distant after the bodies have been removed.

Narrative logic and symbolic implications can determine the angle at which the subject is viewed. As we have seen, if a character is looking out of a hotel window onto the street below, the shot that follows must be a high-angle one. Similarly, if a character is on the ground looking up at someone, the person at whom the character is looking must be photographed at a low angle, with the camera shooting upward. Since subjects photographed from a high angle look small and those photographed from a low angle look large, high-angle shots can imply inferiority, defeat, or oppression; low-angle shots, power, dominance, superiority. Susan Alexander Kane is often photographed at a high angle in *Citizen Kane*, because she is dominated by her husband, who is often photographed from a low angle.

If the filmmaker decides that in a particular shot, foreground, middle ground, and background should be equally visible, the shot will have a **deep focus**. In *Citizen Kane*, Orson Welles used deep focus for several reasons: to convey a greater sense of depth, to minimize the need to cut from one shot to another, and to bring out meanings that might otherwise not be apparent. The classic deep-focus shot in *Kane* shows Mary Kane making arrangements with a banker who is to raise her son as a gentleman because she and her husband cannot. The positions of the mother in the foreground, the banker and father in the middle ground, and the son in the background, seen through the window blissfully playing in the snow, say infinitely more about the way young Kane's life is being signed away without his knowledge than if the action had been broken down into four separate shots of mother, father, banker, and son.

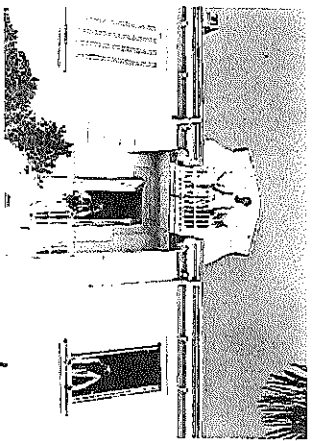
Sometimes **shallow focus**—when the foreground is more distinct than the background—is preferred. At other times, the background must remain indistinct until the time for it to be clear. In such a case, the filmmaker will pull focus: first, the background will be a blur and the foreground sharp; then the background will be sharp and the foreground blurry. This technique, known as **rack focus**, is one way of concealing a character's identity until the filmmaker is ready to reveal it. In *Time After Time* (1979) someone is behind the heroine, but the person's face is a blur. Then the face comes into focus, and we realize that it is Jack the Ripper's. Likewise, after a massacre in the rain in *Road to Perdition*, John Rooney (Paul Newman) stands amid the bodies, as a figure seems to be moving toward him. At first, the figure is nothing more than a blur; until director Sam Mendes brings it into focus. It is the avenger, Michael Sullivan (Tom Hanks), ready to take his revenge on Rooney, whom he holds responsible for the deaths of his wife and younger son.

Focus may be deliberately erratic, with the image going in and out of focus, as might happen if a character is hallucinating, disoriented, or drunk.



Triangular Compositions in *Jules and Jim* (1961) showing Catherine (Jeanne Moreau), Jules (Oscar Werner) and Jim (Henri Serre), who become a ménage à trois.

**TOP LEFT:** The ménage running. (Courtesy MOMAFSA and Janus Films)  
**BOTTOM LEFT:** The ménage shot from below. (Courtesy MOMAFSA and Janus Films)

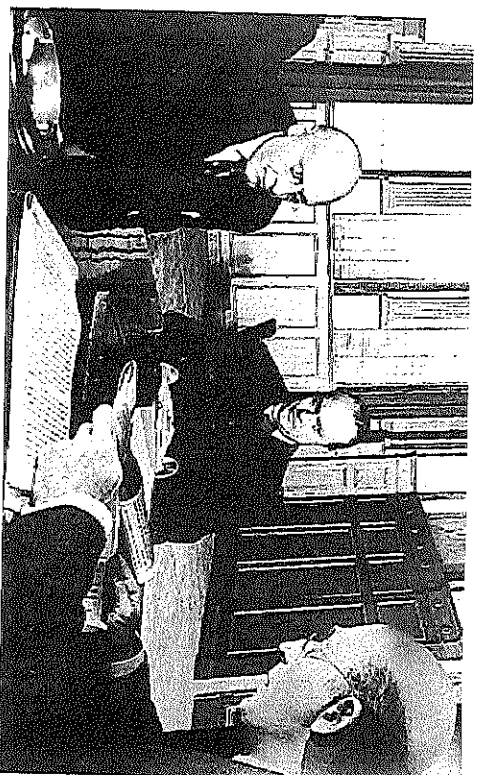


In *Detour*, when Roberts realizes that Vera has accidentally strangled herself, objects go in and out of focus as he looks around the room in a state of shock.

Narrative logic and symbolic value also dictate when a frame should be masked—that is, when its shape should be altered. If a character is peering through a pair of binoculars, a telescope, a microscope, or a keyhole, the next shot should assume the appropriate configuration. There are times in *The Thin Red Line* (1998) when we seem to be looking through a camera lens. Actually, we are, since Truman Burbank's (Jim Carrey) life is being televised, although he has yet to realize it.

The setting itself can offer a kind of masked frame. If a character is positioned in a doorway, the result is a frame-within-a-frame, or double framing. Double framing may reveal something about the character so framed. John Ford often uses the frame-within-the-frame, especially in *The Searchers*. When Ethan (John Wayne), who will always be a loner and a searcher, returns with Debbie, the object of his search, he remains in the doorway while the others go inside the house.

Because doorways and archways resemble the proscenium arch of a theater, they have a dramatic effect. In John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952),



A different triangular composition from *Citizen Kane* (1941), showing Kane (center) flanked by Thatcher (left) and Bernstein (right) as he is about to relinquish control of his enterprises after the crash of 1929. The position of Kane at the apex of the triangle makes him both the focus of attention and an object of defeat, since he is dwarfed by the more prominent figures of Thatcher and Bernstein. (Courtesy MOMAFSA)

Mary Kate (Maureen O'Hara) is framed in the doorway as Sean (John Wayne) pulls her toward him. In William Wyler's *The Little Foxes* (1941), the Hubbards do their plotting in the archway of the drawing room, thus seeming like the stage villains they were in Lillian Hellman's play.

A **long take**—a shot that lasts more than a minute—can also be framed. Recall the definition of a shot: a single run of the camera. Although the average shot lasts between ten and twenty seconds, the traditional roll film camera could accommodate ten minutes' worth of film. The **Steadicam**, however, has changed that. With a Steadicam, which came into use in the 1970s, the camera is attached to a body harness worn by the cameraperson, enabling him or her to achieve the fluidity of a mobile camera without the jerkiness that often results from a **handheld camera**. It is not only ideal for moving shots, because it reduces the need for complex camera setups, but it also allows for a single take that runs as long as a typical movie.

When Russian filmmaker Alexander Sokurov decided to make *Russian Ark* (2003)—in which a tour of St. Petersburg's great art museum, the Hermitage, would also be a meditation on history with actors impersonating real and fictitious characters—he decided to shoot it in one unbroken take that ended up lasting 96 minutes. Sokurov's decision posed an enormous challenge to Steadicam operator Tilman Bittner, who had a special



James Stewart (left) confronting the two murderers (John Dall and Farley Granger, right), with the means they used to kill their innocent friend in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), an 80-minute film in eight approximately 10-minute takes. (Courtesy MCA Universal)

dolly built so he could occasionally rest on it for a few seconds at a time.<sup>8</sup> *Russian Ark* was a thrilling experience, but it is hard to imagine many filmmakers following Sokurov's lead. Even before the advent of the Steadicam, films containing ambitious long takes were extremely demanding.

Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948) consisted of eight takes, each running about ten minutes, the maximum length of film on a roll camera. If a mistake such as a flubbed line or camera mishap occurred during a take, Hitchcock would have the cast and crew start over.

*Rope* was based on Patrick Hamilton's play about two young men who strangle a prep school acquaintance because they consider themselves superior beings, able to commit an act for which the ordinary person would be punished (little knowing that the same fate awaits them). Convinced that theirs is the perfect crime, they celebrate by inviting the victim's fiancée, father, and sister-in-law, along with an ex-classmate and their former headmaster, to a buffet, with the trunk containing their victim's body serving as a table.

To create the semblance of a play, the action was continuous. Since the entire action took place in the murderers' New York apartment, the walls of the set had to separate and rise up, so the camera could come through on a dolly, moving from one room to another.

Hitchcock uses one traditional cut—at the beginning. After the credits, the camera tracks up to an apartment window. There is a scream, followed by a cut to the living room where the men have just strangled their friend. At that point, the first of eight long takes begins. The two men, Brandon (John Dall) and Philip (Farley Granger), place his body in the trunk, standing by it while they talk. Lighting a cigarette, Brandon walks over to the bay window, opening the blinds to reveal a view of the New York skyline. Still, no cut. Philip and Brandon discuss the murder. The camera has now pulled back, so that the men are framed in long shot as Brandon boasts of their having committed the “perfect crime.” The camera then moves closer to the pair, resulting in a medium shot that captures the tension between them—Philip being as nervous as Brandon is calm. Even when Philip wants some champagne, Hitchcock does not cut, although the as they proceed from the kitchen refrigerator. Instead, the camera tracks the pair in the kitchen, talking all the while. Returning to the dining room, Brandon begins lighting the candles on the table that had been set up for the buffet. Suddenly, he decides to celebrate the occasion by using the trunk instead of the table. At that moment, Hitchcock has Brandon with his back to the camera, so that he could end the take by fading out on the back of Brandon's jacket.

Hitchcock was still in his long take mode when he made his next film, *Under Capricorn* (1949), which included several long takes. The most impressive is Henrietta's (Ingrid Bergman) monologue, done in one take, in which she admits her guilt in a crime for which her husband was convicted. Arguably the most famous long take in American film is the credits sequence in Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958), which lasts almost three minutes. A time bomb is in the trunk of a car. Two people get into the car and proceed down the street of a Mexican border town, past Mr. and Mrs. Vargas (Charlton Heston and Janet Leigh). The car pulls up to the booth. The driver is known to the customs officer. The woman with him complains about a “ticking noise,” but the customs officer does not take her seriously. The car crosses the border, continues a short distance, and then explodes into flames. Welles chose to make the credits sequence of *Touch of Evil* a long take and framed it accordingly, creating an atmosphere of restlessness with a camera that is continually moving.

Another classic long take occurs in Martin Scorsese's *GoodFellas* as Henry Hill (Ray Liotta) and Karen (Lorraine Bracco) enter the Copacabana nightclub through the kitchen. The camera follows them as they move up a flight of stairs to the reservations line, where, despite the line, they are immediately escorted to a table. Scorsese then pans to the next table and over to the bandstand, where comedian Henry Youngman is set to perform. The long take, lasting well over a minute, has been carefully framed to capture the unbroken rhythm of an action in one uninterrupted shot.



Guided by a script that requires a scene to be filmed in a particular way and by aesthetic considerations that will enhance the script and enrich the narrative, the filmmaker makes his or her decisions. These decisions, however, should not be accepted on faith. Knowing the many choices a filmmaker has—from the angle of the camera, to the composition of a shot, to the arrangement of a sequence—allows the viewer to ask whether the filmmaker's decisions were the right ones.

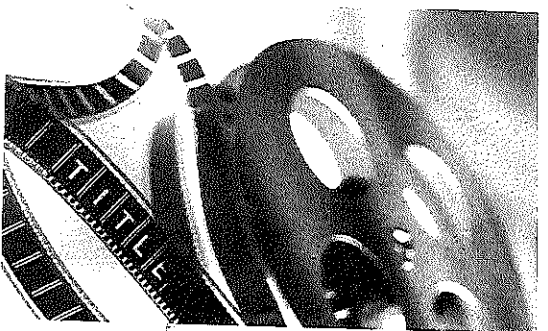
## NOTES

1. Lee R. Bobker, with Louise Marinis, *Making Movies: From Script to Screen* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 209.
2. Karel Reisz and Gavin Miller, *The Technique of Film Editing* (New York: Focal Press, 1968), 84.
3. *Ibid.*, 2nd ed. (1974), 277.
4. "Film Editors Forum," *Film Comment* 13 (March–April 1977): 24.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Edward Dmytryk, *On Film Editing: An Introduction to the Art of Film Construction* (Boston: Focal Press, 1984), 145.
7. Sidney Lumet, *Making Movies* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 148.
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## CHAPTER 4

# Enhancing the Image

## Color, Lighting, and Visual Effects



Filmmakers can create certain moods throughout their movies by working with color, lighting, and visual effects. Even before the advent of color film, all three were important tools that helped filmmakers visually communicate emotions and information.

### Coloring the Image

Truly creative filmmakers use color for more than mere embellishment; they use it to direct the eye to what the script is saying verbally but cannot say visually; they use color to suggest, characterize, and forge symbolic connections. You should always remember that it is only since the late 1960s that color has been the norm. Yet, even when black and white was the norm, filmmakers could work within the parameters of monochrome and achieve something akin to color. You should be able to determine when color is decorative and when it is functional.