

Looking at movies: an introduction to film.

pp. 233-257

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Atgoffir staff a myfyrwyr Prifysgol Cymru Y Drindod Dewi Sant bod hawlfraint ar y darn hwn ac ar y gwaith y cafodd ei gymryd ohono. Gwnaed y Copi Digidol hwn o dan delerau trwydded CLA sy'n caniatáu i chi:

- fynd at gopi a'i lwytho i lawr;
- argraffu copi;

Sylwch bod y deunydd hwn yn UNIG at ddefnydd myfyrwyr sydd wedi cofrestru ar y cwrs astudio fel y nodir yn yr adran isod. Caniateir i holl staff a myfyrwyr eraill ddarllen y deunydd yn unig ac ni ddylent ei lwytho i lawr ac/neu argraffu copi

Mae'r Copi Digidol hwn ac unrhyw gopi digidol neu brintiedig a ddarparwyd i chi, neu a wnaed gennych, o dan delerau'r Drwydded hon, i'w ddefnyddio gyda'r Cwrs Astudio hwn. Gellwch gadw copïau o'r fath ar ôl i'r cwrs ddod i ben, ond at eich defnydd personol eich hun yn unig. Bydd pob copi (yn cynnwys copïau electronig) yn cynnwys y Rhybudd Hawlfraint hwn a bydd yn rhaid eu dinistrio ac/neu eu dileu pan fydd Prifysgol Cymru Y Drindod Dewi Sant yn galw am hynny.

Ac eithrio'r hyn a ganiateir gan gyfraith hawlfraint, ni chaniateir copïo, cadw neu ddosbarthu pellach (yn cynnwys drwy e-bost) heb ganiatâd deiliad yr hawlfraint.

Mae gan yr awdur (ac mae'r term hwnnw'n cynnwys arlunwyr a chrewyr gweledol eraill) hawliau moesol dros y gwaith ac ni all staff na myfyrwyr achosi, na chaniatáu, i'r gwaith gael ei aflunio, ei lurgunio neu ei addasu mewn unrhyw ffordd arall, neu ei drin yn ddiraddiol mewn unrhyw ffordd, a fyddai'n niweidiol i anrhydedd neu enw da'r awdur.

Mae hon yn fersiwn ddigidol o ddeunydd hawlfraint a wnaed dan drwydded gan ddeiliad yr hawl, ac ni ellir sicrhau ei chywirdeb. Cyfeiriwch at yr argraffiad cyhoeddedig gwreiddiol os gwelwch yn dda.

Trwyddedwyd i'w ddefnyddio ar gyfer y cwrs M4X01897 - Visual Studies

Teitl: Looking at movies: an introduction to film.

Enw'r Awdur: Barsam, Richard Meran, Monahan, Dave and Gocsik, Karen M.

Enw'r Cyhoeddwr: W. W. Norton

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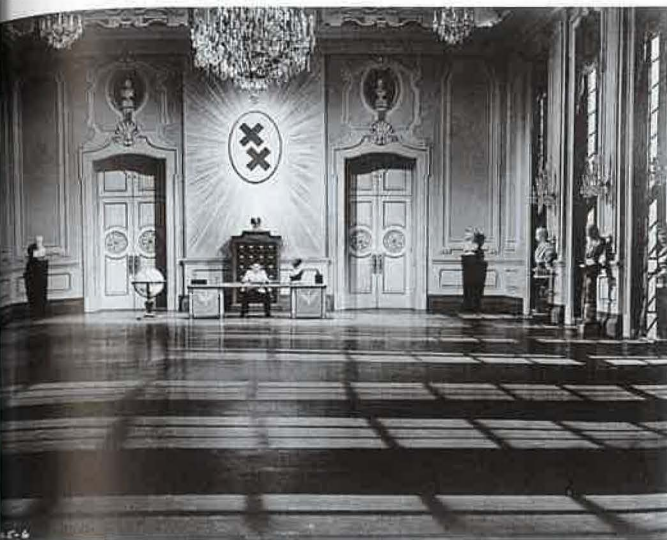
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Extreme long shot An extreme long shot from Charles Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940; cinematographers: Karl Struss and Roland Totheroh) leaves the dictator (Chaplin) overwhelmed by his surroundings. The effect makes this character, a lampoon of Adolf Hitler, ridiculous rather than menacing.

In a **long shot (LS)**, we see the character's full body (almost filling the frame but with some area above and below also visible) and some of the surroundings. Also known as the **full-body shot**, the LS is used frequently in musicals and comedies, allowing us to see the dexterity of such dancers as Gene Kelly and Donald O'Connor in Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly's *Singin' in the Rain* (1952; cinematographer: Harold Rosson) or the humorous physical high jinks of Charles Chaplin in his *Modern Times* (1936; cinematographers: Ira H. Morgan and Roland Totheroh).⁶

The **medium long shot (MLS)**, also known as the *two-shot*, the *plan américain*, or the *American shot* is neither a long shot nor a medium shot, but one in between. It is used to photograph one or more characters, usually from the knees up, as well as some of the background. This very essential shot permits the director to have two characters



Long shot Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly's *Singin' in the Rain* (1952; cinematographer: Harold Rosson), one of the most popular Hollywood musicals of all time, features several great dancers. Here, Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds) and Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly) are photographed in a long shot as they run through their rehearsal routine. We see the full bodies of both dancers (almost filling the frame but with some area above and below also visible), as well as some of the equipment on the studio's soundstage.



Medium long shot A representative medium long shot of "Sport" Matthew (Harvey Keitel, left) and Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro, right), taken from Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976; cinematographer: Michael Chapman). Because two figures are in the frame, this is also a two-shot.

in conversation and to shoot them from a variety of angles.

When the shot includes two characters, it is called a **two-shot**.

A **medium shot (MS)**, somewhere between the long shot and the close-up (which we discuss

⁶ As with the dancers, early film comedians such as Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd used the full-body shot to prove conclusively that they were responsible for their own comic stunts.



Medium shot In this medium shot from John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952; cinematographer: Winton C. Hoch), Sean Thornton (John Wayne) has just returned to the Irish town of Innisfree, where he was born, and sees for the first time Mary Kate Danaher (Maureen O'Hara). It's love at first sight, at least for him, but there will be plenty of brawls before we see them together in a peaceful MS.



Medium close-up The MCU provides more detail of facial expression than the MS, as you can see in this shot from Rouben Mamoulian's *Love Me Tonight* (1932; cinematographer: Victor Milner), in which Maurice Courtelin (Maurice Chevalier) admits to Princess Jeanette (Jeanette MacDonald) that he is not an aristocrat, but rather an ordinary tailor. After the princess gets over her temporary shock—reflected in this image—their affair continues happily.



Close-up The CU traditionally shows the full head (sometimes including the shoulders), as in this shot of John McFarland (John Robinson) in Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003; cinematographer: Harris Savides).

below), shows a character usually from the waist up, or her full figure if she is seated. The MS is the most frequently used type of shot because it replicates our human experience of proximity without intimacy; it provides more detail of the body than the LS does. Unlike the close-up, the MS can include several characters, but it reveals more nuance in the characters' faces than can be captured in the MLS.

The **medium close-up (MCU)** shows a character from the middle of the chest to the top of the head. It provides a view of the face that catches minor changes in expression and provides some detail about the character's posture.

The **close-up (CU)** is produced when the camera is shooting from very near to the subject. Although it traditionally shows the full head (sometimes including the shoulders), it can also be used to show a hand, eye, or mouth. When focused on a character's face, the close-up provides an exclusive view of a character's emotions or state of mind.

A variation on the close-up is the **extreme close-up (XCU or ECU)**, which is a very close shot of some detail. In John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940; cinematographer: Gregg Toland), Ma Joad (Jane Darwell) goes through her possessions before the family heads to California. As she picks up a



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Types of shots in *Jules and Jim* In François Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* (1962; cinematographer: Raoul Coutard), this scene follows immediately after the title characters have returned from a trip to the Adriatic, where they have seen a beautiful statue, which reminds them of the women they

love. Truffaut uses all the major shot types to give us multiple perspectives on Catherine (Jeanne Moreau), with whom both Jules (Oskar Werner) and Jim (Henri Serre) will be obsessed for the rest of the movie.



The eyes have it in *Persona* Cinematographer Sven Nykvist shot movies for Roman Polanski, Louis Malle, and Woody Allen, but is best known for the twenty-two films he shot for director Ingmar Bergman, including *Persona* (1966), which redefines the use of the close-up. About his approach to shooting close-ups, Nykvist said: "The truth always lies in the character's eyes. It is very important to light so the audience can see what's behind each character's eyes."⁷ This image from *Persona* perfectly exemplifies Nykvist's approach. Elisabet Vogler (Liv Ullmann), shown in this revealing close-up, is a woman who has withdrawn almost completely from the world and is under the care of a nurse. About such lighting, director Clint Eastwood agrees: "It's a question of looking *in* at a movie, rather than have it look *out* at you: the audience has to come to a film, be part of it."⁸ When you look into Elisabet Vogler's eyes, what do you see?

⁷ Stuart Samuels, "Obituary, Sven Nykvist 1922–2006," *Sight and Sound* (November 2006): 4.

⁸ Qtd. in Geoff Andrew, "Clint Eastwood: The Quiet American," *Sight and Sound* (September 2008): 22.



Extreme close-up Darren Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream* (2000; cinematographer: Matthew Libatique) uses the extreme close-up extensively to show the repetitive motions and rituals of drug use.

little ceramic dog, the camera frames an XCU on this object to emphasize that it reminds her of happier, more carefree times in her life. This detail might have been lost if Ford had used an MS or LS, but her recollections register clearly when isolated in a sustained XCU.

Filmmakers often mix shots of differing proximities in a single scene. In *Jules and Jim* (1962; cinematographer: Raoul Coutard), François Truffaut uses all the major shot types to give us multiple perspectives on Catherine (Jeanne Moreau), as both Jules (Oskar Werner) and Jim (Henri Serre) meet her for the first time. Truffaut celebrates the moment and pays tribute to the power of Moreau's legendary beauty by first introducing her in an LS on a staircase with two other women; gently reframing to an MCU; and concluding with a rapid montage of CUs of her face, some made with a zoom lens to exaggerate the power of the shot.

Depth

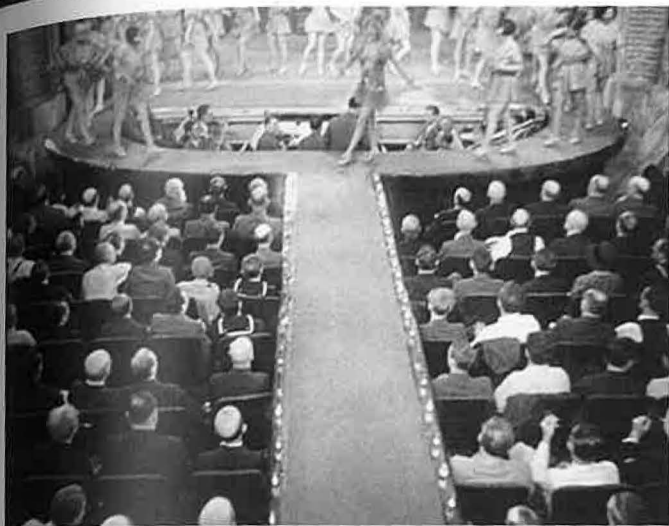
Because the image of the movie screen is two-dimensional and thus appears flat (in all but the few movies shot with 3-D cinematography), one of the most compelling challenges faced by cinematographers has been how to give that image an illusion of depth. From the earliest years of film history, filmmakers have experimented with achieving different illusions of depth. D. W. Griffith was a

master at using huge three-dimensional sets in such movies as *Intolerance* (1916; cinematographer: G. W. Bitzer). A more sustained effort to make the most of deep-space composition began in the late 1920s. Many directors and cinematographers during this decade, especially those who were directing musicals with large casts and big production budgets, experimented with the technique of creating lines of movement from background to foreground to foster the illusion of depth.

For example, in *Applause* (1929; cinematographer: George Folsey), Rouben Mamoulian created spatial depth by organizing a line of burlesque dancers to move from the stage in the back of the image, across the catwalk that ran through the audience in the middle of the image, to the viewer, sitting, presumably, in the right-hand corner of the foreground of the screen. Director Mervyn LeRoy



Illusion of depth During the Great Depression, director-choreographer Busby Berkeley helped bring to the screen a series of musical-comedy extravaganzas whose titles all began with *Gold Diggers*. The first—Mervyn LeRoy's *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933; cinematographer: Sol Polito), choreographed by Berkeley—begins on a prosaic stage ("real," "open" space), enters a realm of complete fantasy (representing what happens to the space in the minds of the characters, as shown here), and then returns to the stage on which it opened. Note that the costumes copy the structure on which the women are standing, whose form repeats the contours of the neon violins that they're playing. Furthermore, in keeping with the public's fascination with precision ensembles such as this, these actors' gowns, hairstyles, and smiles are identical.



[1]

Depth From the earliest years of film history, filmmakers have experimented with achieving different illusions of depth. [1] Rouben Mamoulian created a very effective illusion of spatial depth in *Applause* (1929; cinematographer: George Folsey) by organizing a line of burlesque dancers to move from the stage in the back of the image, across the runway that bisects the audience in the middle of the image, to the viewer, sitting, presumably, in the right-hand corner of the foreground of the screen. Even though it was not yet possible to maintain clear focus from the foreground to



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background, the illusion of depth is there. [2] Three years later, in his dazzling comedy *Trouble in Paradise* (1932; cinematographer: Victor Milner), Ernst Lubitsch adhered to the traditional method of the time: suggesting depth by using an LS, placing the two main characters in the foreground plane, and leaving the remainder of the image in a soft-focus background. In both of these examples, the cinematic space is arranged to draw the viewer's eyes either away from or toward the background.

achieved a more elaborate effect with Busby Berkeley's choreography in *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933).

Although these elaborately choreographed scenes reveal progress toward the goal of creating a cinematic image with greater depth, during the 1930s the traditional method of suggesting cinematic depth was to use an LS and place significant characters or objects in the foreground or middle-ground planes and then leave the remainder of the image in a soft-focus background. The filmmaker could also reverse this composition and place the significant figures in the background of the image with a landscape, say, occupying the foreground and middle ground. Thus, in both of these examples the cinematic space is arranged to draw the viewer's eyes toward or away from the background. With such basic illusions, our eyes automatically give depth to the successive areas of the image as they seem to recede in space.

Also during the 1930s, however, various cinematographers experimented with creating a deeper illusion of space through cinematographic rather than choreographic means. Of these cinematographers, none was more important than Gregg Toland, who was responsible for bringing the previous developments together, improving them, and using them most impressively in John Ford's *The Long Voyage Home* (1940) and soon after in Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941). By the time he shot these two films, Toland had already rejected the soft-focus, one-plane depth of the established Hollywood style; experimented with achieving greater depth; created sharper black-and-white images; used the high-powered Technicolor arc lights for black-and-white cinematography; used Super XX film stock, which produced a clearer image and was four times faster than previously available black-and-white stock; coated his lenses



Deep-focus cinematography and deep-space composition in *Citizen Kane*

Gregg Toland built on the work of previous directors, such as Allan Dwan, one of the most formally innovative of early film directors, who used deep-space composition in *The Iron Mask* (1929; cinematographers: Warren Lynch and Henry Sharp), a silent swashbuckler featuring Douglas Fairbanks. Dwan could open up any shot into a complex, three-dimensional space with strategically placed foreground, middle ground, and background figures or objects. Similarly, in this beautiful deep-space composition from Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), Toland exploits all three planes of depth along a line that draws our eye from screen right to screen left. In the foreground, we see the reporter Mr. Thompson (William Alland) in a closed telephone booth; in the middle ground, outside the booth, we see the headwaiter of the El Rancho nightclub; and in the background, Susan Alexander Kane (Dorothy Comingore), the subject of Thompson's visit. Each character is photographed in clear focus in a unified setting, yet each is in a separate physical, psychological, and emotional space.

(to cut down glare from the lights); and used a camera equipped with a **blimp** so that he could work in confined spaces.

In *Citizen Kane*, these methods came together in two related techniques: a deliberate use of **deep-space composition**, a total visual composition that can place significant information or subjects on all three planes of the frame and thus creates an illusion of depth, coupled with **deep-focus cinematography**, which, using the short-focal-length lens, keeps all three planes in sharp focus. Deep-space composition permits the filmmaker to exploit the



Deep-space composition An excellent example of the expressive potential of deep-space composition can be found in Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946; cinematographer: Ted Tetzlaff). Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman), an American counterspy working in Brazil to discover enemy secrets, marries Alexander Sebastian (Claude Rains), a German spy, at the request of her government. Sebastian and his mother, Madame Konstantin (Leopoldine Konstantin), eventually discover Alicia's duplicity, and in this scene they have already begun to kill her by poisoning her coffee. As Alicia complains of feeling ill, Madame Konstantin places a small cup on the table near her, putting it in the immediate foreground of the frame. The tiny cup, no more than a few inches tall, appears almost as large as Alicia's head in the middle ground, heightening the menace facing her and raising the level of suspense.

relative size of people and objects in the frame to convey meaning and conflict.

Toland's pioneering work on *Citizen Kane* had a profound influence on the look of subsequent movies, and helped to distance Hollywood even further from the editing-centered theories of the Russian formalist directors (e.g., Sergei Eisenstein) and to bring American moviemaking closer to the realism of such European directors as Jean Renoir. French film critic André Bazin emphasizes that deep-focus cinematography "brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality"; and "implies, consequently, both a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on

his part to the action in progress.”⁹ In preserving the continuity of space and time, deep-focus cinematography seems more like human perception.

Toland also understood that a scene involving deep-space composition did not necessarily have to be shot with deep-focus cinematography, as he demonstrated in William Wyler’s *The Little Foxes* (1941). Perhaps the best example is found in a scene in which Regina Giddens (Bette Davis) confronts her severely ill husband, Horace Giddens (Herbert Marshall), a man she detests for his overall opposition to her scheming brothers and their plan to expand her family’s wealth by exploiting cheap labor. The sequence takes place in their parlor after Horace has returned home from a long hospital stay for treatment of his serious heart condition. When Regina asks him to put more funds into strengthening the family enterprise, he tells her that he has changed his will, leaving her nothing but bonds, which, he does not realize, members of the family have already stolen for the same purpose. Realizing that a man she despises has unknowingly trapped her in a difficult and illegal situation, Regina retaliates by telling him that she has always hated him. During her tirade, Horace has the first seizures of a heart attack. While attempting to take his medicine, he drops the bottle; and when he asks Regina to get the spare bottle upstairs, she makes the decision to let him die and sits perfectly still as he staggers toward the stairs and collapses. As Horace struggles toward the stairs behind Regina, who is in the foreground, he grows progressively more out of focus, but he and his actions certainly are significant subject material. He goes out of focus for a specific reason—he is dying—and the shot is still very much deep-space composition, but not deep focus. Even though he is out of focus in the deep background of the frame, Horace remains significant to the outcome of the story.

The coupling of deep-space composition and deep-focus cinematography is useful only for

scenes in which images of extreme depth within the frame are required, because the planning and choreography required to make these images are complex and time-consuming. Most filmmakers employ less complicated methods to maximize the potential of the image, put its elements into balance, and create an illusion of depth. Perhaps most important among these methods is the compositional principle known as the **rule of thirds**. This rule, like so many other “rules” in cinema, is a convention that can be adapted as needed. It takes the form of a grid pattern that, when superimposed on the image, divides it into horizontal thirds representing the foreground, middle ground, and background planes and into vertical thirds that break up those planes into further elements. This grid assists the designer and cinematographer in visualizing the overall potential of the height, width, and depth of any cinematic space.

You can watch the rule of thirds in action in a motion picture by placing four strips of 1/4-inch masking tape on your television screen (to conform to the interior lines in the grid) and then looking at any movie being shown in the standard Academy aspect ratio (1.33:1). The lines will almost invariably intersect those areas of interest within the frame to which the designer and cinematographer wish to draw your attention. Simple as it is, the rule of thirds takes our natural human ability to create balance and gives it an artistic form. Furthermore, it helps direct our eyes to obvious areas of interest within a cinematic composition, reminding us yet again that movies result from a set of deliberate choices.

The rule of thirds, like other filmmaking conventions, is not a hard-and-fast law. Compositions that consciously deviate from the rule of thirds can be effective, too, especially when they contrast with other compositions in the same film. In Stanley Kubrick’s *Spartacus* (1960; cinematographer: Russell Metty), for example, the opening title sequence rejects the rule of thirds in favor of a series of perfectly centered compositions that complement the narrative and that contrast with the classically composed shots throughout the rest of the film.

Another common deviation from the rule of thirds is any shot that places the action extremely

⁹ André Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” in *What Is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–71), I, pp. 35–36.



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Use of deep-space composition in *The Little Foxes*

At the climax of William Wyler's *The Little Foxes* (1941; cinematographer: Gregg Toland), Horace (Herbert Marshall) responds to his wife's tirade [1], begins having a heart attack,

close to the camera, thus offering little or no visual depth. This is perhaps the most effective method for the filmmaker to indicate that this action is the most important thing at the moment—for example, at a turning point or climax. Such a composition occurs in the final shot of Lewis Milestone's *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946; cinematographer: Victor Milner).

Sometimes a filmmaker both uses the rule of thirds and partially rejects it in a single shot. Such shots are generally composed in depth, presenting one part of the action in the foreground and another, equally important part in either the middle ground or background. The shot may begin looking



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and rises [2] while Regina (Bette Davis) remains rigidly in place [3], offering Horace no help as he staggers to his death in the background, helpless and out of focus [4].

like a classically composed shot that is following the rule of thirds but then, because of the movement of several objects in the frame on all three planes, becomes less balanced and more complex. Such a shot is complex for a reason: the filmmaker is probably attempting to call special attention to the relationship between the action in the foreground and that in the middle ground or background in order to establish a theme or to convey a number of narrative ideas simultaneously. In the long shot from Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978; cinematographer: Néstor Almendros) pictured on page 241, composition of this sort establishes a very important hierarchical relationship



[1]

The rule of thirds Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1960; cinematographer: Russell Metty) offers many shots in which classical compositions take full advantage of the rule of thirds. For example, [1] as the Roman legion marches out of Rome, Marcus Licinius Crassus (Laurence Olivier) proclaims to Antoninus (Tony Curtis, *offscreen*), "There boy, is Rome; the might, the majesty, the terror of Rome." The center of the frame is uncluttered, and the composition provides a strong foreground (the veranda of the villa), middle ground (soldiers crossing on the other side of the river), and background (the beautiful homes on the distant hillside). Meanwhile, Crassus is placed almost directly at the upper-left intersection point of the frame.

[2] By contrast, the opening title sequence of the film, designed by one of Hollywood's great visual designers, Saul



[2]

Bass, relies on very strong bias toward the center of the frame, rejecting the rule of thirds. Because, at the beginning of *Spartacus*, Rome is at the height of its power and its central place in the world seems secure, this emphasis on the center of the frame makes thematic sense. But it also places the director's name in the center of the frame against a fully lighted, sculpted head—a clear acknowledgment of his power and central place in the world of the movie. With the exception of the credits for the production company and the movie's title, there is only one other individual—Alex North, the composer—whose name also appears in the exact middle of the screen. Yet even there, the head behind his name is not fully lit. Such are the important signals that can be sent by titles about an individual's significance in the production of a movie.



Composition with limited depth In the final scene of Lewis Milestone's *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946; cinematographer: Victor Milner), Walter O'Neil (Kirk Douglas) points a gun at Martha Ivers (Barbara Stanwyck), who places her thumb over his finger on the trigger and causes the gun to fire, killing her. The camera eye's proximity to the actors' bodies produces an image with no depth—just the beautifully balanced composition of their hands on the gun next to her waistline.



Composition in depth in *Days of Heaven* This shot from Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978; cinematographer: Néstor Almendros) establishes complex relationships, both spatially and thematically. The workers in the foreground are, as the direction of the woman's glance toward the house implies, curious about their employer, but they are physically (and culturally) removed from him. His house looms deep in the background; and although it is necessarily small within the frame, we can tell that it represents the position of power, mainly because it occupies the very edge of the high ground. Underscoring this relationship, the employer's agent walks (left) around the front of the car to explain that the workers are forbidden to go near the house.

between the characters in the foreground and the character (represented by his distant and visually aloof mansion) in the background.

In addition to helping filmmakers achieve distribution and balance in the general relationship of what we see on the screen, the rule of thirds helps cinematographers ensure that compositions flow appropriately from one shot to another. Without that visual consistency, the editor will be unable to establish continuity—though he or she may choose to preserve graphic discontinuity as part of telling the story. For the viewer, such visual continuity suggests meanings through the placement and interrelationships of figures on the screen.

Camera Angle and Height

Camera Angles

The camera's **shooting angle** is the level and height of the camera in relation to the subject being photographed. For the filmmaker, it is another framing element that offers many expressive possibilities. The normal height of the camera is eye level, which we take for granted because that's the way we see the world. Because our first impulse as viewers is to identify with the camera's point of view and because we are likely to interpret any deviation from an eye-level shot as somehow different, filmmakers must take special care to use other basic camera angles—high angle, low angle, Dutch angle, and aerial view—in ways that are appropriate to and consistent with a movie's storytelling.

The phrases *to look up to* and *to look down on* reveal a physical viewpoint, as well as connoting admiration or condescension. In our everyday experience, a high angle is a position of power over what we're looking at, and we intuitively understand that the subject of a high-angle view is inferior, weak, or vulnerable in light of our actual and cultural experiences. A filmmaker shooting a shot from a high angle must be aware of this traditional interpretation of that view, whether or not the shot will be used to confirm or undermine that interpretation. Even a slight upward or downward angle of a camera may be enough to express an air of inferiority or superiority.

Eye Level An eye-level shot is made from the observer's eye level and usually implies that the camera's attitude toward the subject being photographed is neutral. An eye-level shot used early in a movie—as part of establishing its characters, time, and place—occurs before we have learned the full context of the story, so we naturally tend to read its attitude toward the subject as neutral. Thus, when Miss Wonderly (Mary Astor) introduces herself to Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart) at the beginning of John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941; cinematographer: Arthur Edeson), the director uses an omniscient eye-level camera to establish a neutral client–detective relationship that seems to be what both characters want. This effect deliberately deceives us, as we learn only later in the film, when we discover that Miss Wonderly is not the innocent person she claims to be (as the eye-level angle suggested).

By contrast, an eye-level shot that occurs in *The Grifters* (1990; cinematographer: Oliver Stapleton), comes later in the movie, after the director, Stephen Frears, has established a narrative context for interpreting his characters and their situation. From the beginning of the film, we know that Lilly Dillon (Anjelica Huston) and her son, Roy (John



Eye-level shot In John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941; cinematographer: Arthur Edeson), this eye-level shot, used throughout the initial meeting of Miss Wonderly (Mary Astor) and Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart), leads us to the false belief that the facts of their meeting are "on the level."

Cusack), are grifters, or con artists. After an eight-year estrangement, they meet again, but each still regards suspiciously everything the other says or does. The eye-level shot reveals the hollow dialogue and tension of their reunion and is thus ironic, since they know, as we do, that their relationship is off balance (not “on the level”).

High Angle A **high-angle shot** (also called a *high shot* or *down shot*) is made with the camera above the action and typically implies the observer's sense of superiority to the subject being photographed. In Rouben Mamoulian's *Love Me Tonight* (1932; cinematographer: Victor Milner), Maurice Courtelin (Maurice Chevalier) finally admits to Princess Jeanette (Jeanette MacDonald) that he is not an aristocrat, but rather an ordinary tailor. Although the princess loves him, she runs from the room in confusion, and the camera looks down on Maurice, who is now left to assess his reduced status with the symbolic measuring tape in his hands.

Sometimes, however, a high-angle shot can be used to play against its traditional implications. In Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959; cinematographer: Robert Burks), one of the villains, Phillip Vandamm (James Mason), tells his collaborator, Leonard (Martin Landau), that he is taking his mistress, Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint), for a trip on his private plane. Vandamm knows that Kendall is part of an American spy ring that has discovered his selling of government secrets to the enemy, and he plans to kill her by pushing her out of the aircraft. As he speaks, the crane-mounted camera rises to a very high angle looking down at the two men, and Vandamm concludes, “This matter is best disposed of from a great height. Over water.” The overall effect of this shot depends completely on this unconventional use of the high angle: it does not imply superiority, but rather emphasizes Vandamm's deadly plan. Its ironic, humorous effect depends as well on James Mason's wry delivery of these lines.

Low Angle A **low-angle shot** (or *low shot*) is made with the camera below the action and typically places the observer in the position of feeling helpless in the presence of an obviously superior force, as when we look up at King Kong on the Empire State



[1]



[2]

High-angle shot [1] In this scene from Rouben Mamoulian's *Love Me Tonight* (1932; cinematographer: Victor Milner), the high-angle shot has the traditional meaning of making the subject seem inferior. After Maurice Courtelin (Maurice Chevalier) admits that he is not an aristocrat, but rather an ordinary tailor, the camera looks down on him as he is left to assess his future with a symbolic measuring tape in his hands. [2] This shot from Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959; cinematographer: Robert Burks), although taken from a high angle, makes Phillip Vandamm (James Mason) and Leonard (Martin Landau), who are planning to murder Vandamm's mistress by pushing her out of his private airplane, appear even more menacing than they have up to this point.

Building or up at the shark from the underwater camera's point of view in *Jaws*. In Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989; cinematographer: Ernest Dickerson), Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn), who both entertains and intimidates the neighborhood by playing loud



1



2

Low-angle shot Two faces, both shot at low angle, convey two different meanings. [1] A low-angle shot of Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn) from Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989; cinematographer: Ernest Dickerson) puts us in the position of Sal (Danny Aiello, not pictured), a pizzeria owner who is intimidated and angered by his boom box-carrying customer. [2] In Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980; cinematographer: John Alcott), a low-angle shot from an omniscient point of view reveals the depth of Wendy's (Shelley Duvall) panic and despair.

music on his boom box, appears menacing when photographed from a low, oblique angle during a confrontation with Sal (Danny Aiello), the owner of the neighborhood pizzeria.

However, filmmakers often play against the expectation that a subject shot from a low angle is menacing or powerful. In Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980; cinematographer: John Alcott), when Wendy (Shelley Duvall) discovers a manuscript that suggests her husband, Jack (Jack Nicholson), is insane, a low-angle shot emphasizes

her anxiety, fear, and vulnerability. The shot also reminds us that the visual and narrative context of an angle affects our interpretation of it. The shot places Jack's typewriter in the foreground, thus making it appear very large, which implies its power over her and the threatening nature of what she is seeing (even before it is revealed to us). The low angle also denies us the ability to see what is going on behind her at a moment that we fear (and expect) the newly mad Jack to creep up behind her—thus elevating the suspense and making a character seen in extreme low angle appear more vulnerable than any high-angle shot could have.

In most scenes, obviously, different angles are used together to convey more complex meanings. Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992; cinematographer: Ian Wilson), for example, uses alternating camera angles to convey and then resolve tensions between two characters. The scene begins with a confrontation between Fergus (Stephen Rea), an IRA gunman, and Jody (Forest Whitaker), a British-born black soldier whom Fergus and his terrorist cohorts have taken hostage. Power, race, and politics separate them, as confirmed by an alternating use of high- and low-angle shots from the perspectives of both characters during their dialogue. They start to relax when Jody shows Fergus a picture of his “wife,” and by the time Jody talks about his experiences as a cricket player, they are speaking as men who have much in common—a transition that is signaled by a series of shots taken at eye level. These final shots help demonstrate that the men have more in common than their differences had at first suggested.

Dutch Angle In a **Dutch-angle shot** (also called a *Dutch-tilt shot* or *oblique-angle shot*), the camera is tilted from its normal horizontal and vertical position so that it is no longer straight, giving the viewer the impression that the world in the frame is out of balance.¹⁰ Two classic films that use a vertiginously

¹⁰ The adjective *Dutch* (as in the phrases *Dutch uncle*, *Dutch treat*, and *Dutch auction*) indicates something out of the ordinary or, in this case, out of line. This meaning of *Dutch* seems to originate with the English antipathy for all things Dutch at the height of Anglo-Dutch competition during the seventeenth century. I am grateful to Russell Merritt for clarifying this for me.



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3



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4

Camera angles in *M* This scene from Fritz Lang's *M* (1931; cinematographer: Fritz Arno Wagner)—in which an innocent man becomes the object of a crowd's suspicions—uses eye-level, low-angle, and high-angle shots to provide a context for us to distinguish real threats from perceived ones. [1] A neutral (and accidental) meeting between a short man and a little girl occurs in a context of suspicion (the city of Berlin has suffered a number of child murders in a short span of time). [2] A high-angle shot from the perspective of a

tall man who has brusquely asked, "Is that your kid?" reinforces the short man's modest stature and relative powerlessness. [3] The short man's perspective, an exaggerated low-angle shot, makes the question "Why were you bothering that kid?" even more ominous than the man's tone of voice makes it. [4] Here we return to an LS, as the short man protests his innocence and a crowd—soon to be a mob—gathers round.

tilted camera are John Ford's *The Informer* (1935; cinematographer: Joseph H. August) and Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949; cinematographer: Robert Krasker). For the sequence in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935; cinematographer: John J. Mescall) in which Dr. Frankenstein (Colin Clive) and Dr. Pretorius (Ernest Thesiger) create a bride (Elsa

Lanchester) for the Monster (Boris Karloff), director James Whale creates a highly stylized mise-en-scène—a tower laboratory filled with grotesque, futuristic machinery—that he shoots with a number of Dutch angles. The Dutch angles accentuate the unnatural nature of the doctors' unnatural actions, which are both funny and frightening.



1

Dutch-angle shot In *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935; cinematographer: John J. Mescall), director James Whale uses Dutch-angle shots to enhance the campy weirdness of

Aerial View An **aerial-view shot** (or *bird's-eye-view shot*), an extreme type of point-of-view shot, is taken from an aircraft or very high crane and implies the observer's omniscience. A classic example of the aerial view comes, naturally enough, from Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963; cinematographer: Robert Burks). After showing us standard high-angle shots of a massive explosion at a gas station, the director cuts to a high aerial shot (literally a bird's-eye view) in which the circling birds seem almost gentle in contrast to the tragedy they have just caused below. Hitchcock said he used this aerial shot to show, all at once, the gulls massing for another attack on the town, the topography of the region, and the gas station on fire. Furthermore, he did not want to "waste a lot of footage on showing the elaborate operation of the firemen extinguishing the fire. You can do a lot of things very quickly by getting away from something."¹¹

Scale

Scale is the size and placement of a particular object or a part of a scene in relation to the rest—a

¹¹ Alfred Hitchcock, qtd. in François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), pp. 292–294.



2

the lab work in this film [1]. This scene culminates in one of the most famous Dutch-angle shots of all time—that of the Bride (Elsa Lanchester) first seeing the Monster [2].

relationship determined by the type of shot used and the position of the camera. Scale may change from shot to shot. From what you learned in the preceding sections, it should be clear that the type of shot affects the scale of the shot *and*, thus, the effect and meaning of a scene. In *Jurassic Park* (1993; cinematographer: Dean Cundey), as in most of his movies, Steven Spielberg exploits scale to create awe and delight. The director knows that we really want to see dinosaurs—the stars of the film, after all—and he slowly builds our apprehension by delaying this sight. When he introduces the first dinosaur, he maximizes—through the manipulation of scale and special-effects cinematography—the astonishment that characters and viewers alike feel.

At *Jurassic Park*, jeeps carrying the group arrive on a grassy plain, clearly establishing the human scale of the scene. But Drs. Grant (Sam Neill) and Sattler (Laura Dern), preoccupied with scientific talk, take a moment to realize that Hammond (Richard Attenborough) has just introduced them to a live dinosaur, as benign as it is huge, which looks down upon them. ELSs make the dinosaur seem even taller. When the dazed Grant asks, "How did you do this?" Hammond replies, "I'll show you." It's impossible to forget what Spielberg then shows



[1]



[2]

Scale In Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993; cinematographer: Dean Cundey), [1] the reaction of Dr. Sattler (Laura Dern, left), and Dr. Grant (Sam Neill, right) to their first dinosaur sighting prepares us for an impressive image onscreen, and we are not disappointed. In placing the reaction before the action itself, Spielberg heightens the suspense of the scene. [2] The scale of the brontosaurus is exaggerated by the framing of this shot, too, which implies that the beast is so gargantuan that it can't fit into the frame.

us: not just the first dinosaur, but also a spectacular vista in which numerous such creatures move slowly across the screen. Creating a sense of wonder is one of Spielberg's stylistic trademarks, and his use of scale here does just that as it also helps create meaning. Because this is a science-fiction film, we are prepared for surprises when we are introduced to a world that is partly recognizable and partly fantastic. Once the dinosaurs make their actual appearance, we know that humans, however powerful in their financial and scientific pursuits, are not alone among the many species on

Earth but also smaller than some and, thus, highly vulnerable.

Of course, the scale of small objects can be exaggerated for meaningful effect, too, as in the example from Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946) mentioned earlier (see page 238). When a tiny cup (or any other small object) looms larger than anything else in the frame, we can be sure that it is important to the film's meaning.

Camera Movement

The Moving Camera

Any movement of the camera within a shot automatically changes the image we see because the elements of framing that we have discussed thus far—camera angle, level, height, types of shots, and scale—are all modified when the camera moves within that shot. The moving camera, which can photograph both static and moving subjects, opens up cinematic space, and thus filmmakers use it to achieve many effects. It can search and increase the space, introduce us to more details than would be possible with a static image, choose which of these details we should look at or ignore, follow movement through a room or across a landscape, and establish complex relationships between figures in the frame—especially in shots that are longer than the average. It allows the viewer to accompany or follow the movements of a character, object, or vehicle, as well as to see the action from a character's point of view. The moving camera leads the viewer's eye or focuses the viewer's attention and, by moving into the scene, helps create the illusion of depth in the flat screen image. Furthermore, it helps convey relationships: spatial, causal, and psychological. When used in this way, the moving camera adds immeasurably to the director's development of the narrative and our understanding of it.

Within the first decade of movie history, D. W. Griffith began to exploit the power of simple camera movement to create associations within the frame and, in some cases, to establish a cause-and-effect relationship. In *The Birth of a Nation* (1915; cinematographer: G. W. Bitzer), within one shot, he

establishes a view of a Civil War battle, turns the camera toward a woman and small children on a wagon, and then turns back to the battle. From that instinctive, fluid camera movement, we understand the relationship between the horror of the battle and the misery that it has created for innocent civilians. Of course, Griffith could have cut between shots of the battle and the bystanders, but breaking up the space and time with editing would not achieve the same subtle effect as a single shot does.

In the 1920s, German filmmakers took this very simple type of camera movement to the next level, perfecting fluid camera movement within and between shots. In fact, F. W. Murnau, who is associated with some of the greatest early work with the moving camera in such films as *The Last Laugh* (1924; cinematographer: Karl Freund) and *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927; cinematographers: Charles Rosher and Karl Struss), referred to it as the *unchained camera*, thereby suggesting that it has a life of its own, with no limits to the freedom with which it can move. Since then, the moving camera has become one of the dominant stylistic trademarks of a diverse group of directors, including Orson Welles, Max Ophüls, Jean Renoir, Martin Scorsese, Otto Preminger, Lars von Trier, Terrence Malick, and Pedro Almodóvar.

Almodóvar uses the moving camera throughout *Talk to Her* (2002; cinematographer: Javier Aguirresarobe), perhaps most effectively at the very beginning of the movie. After a brief prologue photographed at a dance performance, we see a close-up of Benigno Martín (Javier Cámara), going about his work while he talks about this performance to someone we do not see. Although we don't yet know for certain where he works, we get a clue from his collarless blue shirt, one often worn by hospital nurses or orderlies. As the camera moves down from his face, we see that he is manicuring someone's nails, probably a woman's, but we don't yet know her identity or if she is interested in the story he is telling her. Still within the first shot, the camera moves to the right and reframes to a close-up of a woman, lying in a bed, her eyes closed and a serene look on her face.

The gradual unfolding of the context of this scene grabs our interest and prompts us to ask, as

each new detail is revealed by the moving camera, more questions about the relationship between these two people. After a series of shots immediately following this first one, we come to understand that the woman is Alicia (Leonor Watling), a young ballet student who has been in a coma in this hospital for four years, and that she is totally unaware of what is happening to and around her. Benigno, a respected member of the hospital staff, has fallen in love with her—a doomed endeavor it would seem, considering that he is homosexual and she is unlikely to recover. Throughout this complex story, Almodóvar uses the most subtle moving-camera shots to reveal the psychological relationship between Benigno and Alicia.

The smoothly moving camera helped change the way movies were made and, thus, the ways in which we see and interpret them. But before the camera was capable of smooth movement, directors and their camera operators had to find ways to create steady moving shots that would imitate the way the human eye/brain sees. When we look around a room or landscape or see movement through space, our eyes dart from subject to subject, from plane to plane, and so we “see” more like a series of rapidly edited movie shots than a smooth flow of information. Yet our eyes and brain work together to smooth out the bumps. Camera motion, however, must itself be smooth in order for its audience to make sense of (or even tolerate) the shots that result from that motion. The moving camera can also create suspense and even fear, as in Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968; cinematographer: William Fraker), where the camera moves through a luxurious Manhattan apartment, peering around corners or into rooms just enough to keep you on the edge of your seat without letting you see what you know (or think you know) is there.

There are exceptions, of course: during the 1960s, nonfiction filmmakers began what was soon to become a widespread use of the handheld camera, which both ushered in entirely new ways of filmmaking, such as *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema, and greatly influenced narrative film style. For the most part, however, cinematographers strive to ensure that the camera does not shake or jump while moving through a shot. To make steady moving shots,

the camera is usually mounted on a tripod, where it can move on a horizontal or vertical axis, or on a dolly, crane, car, helicopter, or other moving vehicle that permits it to capture its images smoothly.

The basic types of shots involving camera movement are the pan, tilt, tracking, dolly, and crane shots, as well as those made with the Steadicam, the handheld camera, or the zoom lens. Each involves a particular kind of movement, depends on a particular kind of equipment, and has its own expressive potential.

Pan Shot A pan shot is the horizontal movement of a camera mounted on the gyroscopic head of a stationary tripod. This head ensures smooth panning and tilting and keeps the frame level. The pan shot offers us a larger, more panoramic view than a shot taken from a fixed camera; guides our attention to characters or actions that are important; makes us aware of relationships between subjects that are too far apart to be shown together in the frame; allows us to follow people or objects; and attempts to replicate what we see when we turn our heads to survey a scene or follow a character. Pan shots are particularly effective in settings of great scope, such as the many circus scenes in Max Ophüls's *Lola Montès* (1955; cinematographer: Christian Matras) or the ballroom sequence in Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942; cinematographer: Stanley Cortez), where he used several pan shots that moved almost 360 degrees.

Tilt Shot A tilt shot is the vertical movement of a camera mounted on the gyroscopic head of a stationary tripod. Like the pan shot, it is a simple movement with dynamic possibilities for creating meaning. Orson Welles makes excellent use of this shot in *Citizen Kane* (1941; cinematographer: Gregg Toland). When Susan Kane (Dorothy Comingore) finally summons the psychological and emotional strength to leave her tyrannical husband, he reacts by destroying her bedroom. At the peak of his violent rage, he seizes the glass globe with an interior snow scene; the camera tilts upward from the ball to Kane's (Welles) face; he whispers "Rosebud" and leaves the room. The tilt links the roundness and mystery of the glass ball with Kane's round, bald



Tilt shot In Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941; cinematographer: Gregg Toland), the camera presents the first half of this shot [1], then tilts upward to present the second half [2]. Of course, Welles could have shown us both halves, even Kane's entire body, within one static frame. The camera movement directs our eyes, however, and makes the symbolism unmistakable.

head; furthermore, it reminds us that the first place we saw the glass ball was on Susan's dressing table in her rooming-house bedroom, thus further linking the meaning of *Rosebud* with her.

Dolly Shot A dolly shot (also known as a tracking shot or traveling shot) is one taken by a camera fixed to a wheeled support, generally known as a dolly. The dolly permits the cinematographer to make noiseless moving shots. When a dolly runs on tracks, the resulting shot is called a tracking shot. The dolly shot is one of the most effective (and



A dolly in action Camera operators race alongside a speeding chariot on a dolly during the filming of Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000; cinematographer: John Mathieson).



Tracking shot In Jean Renoir's *The Grand Illusion* (1937; cinematographer: Christian Matras), the contradictory aspects of Captain von Rauffenstein's (Erich von Stroheim) life are engagingly and economically captured by the long tracking shot that catalogs the objects in his living quarters. The pistol on top of a volume of Casanova's memoirs is an especially telling detail: von Rauffenstein is a lover and a fighter.

consequently most common) uses of the moving camera. When the camera is used to **dolly in** on (move toward) a subject, the subject grows in the frame, gaining significance not only through being bigger in the frame, but also through those moments in which we actually see it growing bigger.

This gradual intensification effect is commonly used at moments of a character's realization and/or decision, or as a point-of-view shot of what the character is having a realization about. The scene in Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946), illustrated on page 238, in which Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman) realizes that she is being poisoned via the coffee, uses both kinds of dolly-in movements, as well as other camera moves that explicitly illustrate cause and effect (the camera moves from the coffee to Bergman at the moment she complains about not feeling well, for example).

The **dolly out** movement (moving away from the subject) is often used for slow disclosure, which occurs when an edited succession of images leads from A to B to C as they gradually reveal the elements of a scene. Each image expands on the one before, thereby changing its significance with new information. A good example occurs in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop-Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964; cinematographer: Gilbert Taylor) when—in a succession of images—the serious, patriotic bomber pilot is revealed to be concentrating not on his instruments, but instead on a copy of *Playboy* magazine.

A **tracking shot** is a type of dolly shot that moves smoothly with the action (alongside, above, beneath, behind, or ahead of it) when the camera is mounted on a wheeled vehicle that runs on a set of tracks. Some of the most beautiful effects in the movies are created by tracking shots, especially when the camera covers a great distance. Director King Vidor used an effective lateral tracking shot in his World War I film *The Big Parade* (1925; cinematographers: John Arnold and Charles Van Enger) to follow the progress of American troops entering enemy-held woods. This shot, which has a documentary quality to it because it puts us in motion beside the soldiers as they march into combat, has been repeated many times in subsequent war films.

Jean Renoir used the moving camera to create the feeling of real space, a rhythmic flow of action, and a rich mise-en-scène. In *The Grand Illusion* (1937; cinematographer: Christian Matras), Renoir's brilliant film about World War I, we receive an intimate introduction to Captain von Rauffenstein (Erich von

Stroheim), the commandant of a German prison camp, through a long tracking shot (plus four other brief shots) that reveals details of his life.

Zoom The zoom is both a lens (as discussed earlier) and a type of camera movement. It has a variable focal length, which permits the camera operator during shooting to shift from the wide-angle lens (short focus) to the telephoto lens (long focus) or vice versa without changing the focus or aperture settings. It is not a camera movement *per se*, but a lens. Because the optics inside the lens are able to move in relation to each other and thus shift the focal length, the zoom can provide the illusion of the camera moving toward or away from the subject. One result of this shift is that the image is magnified (when shifting from short to long focal length) or demagnified by shifting in the opposite direction.

That magnification is the essential difference between **zoom-in** and dolly-in movements on a subject. When dollying, a camera actually moves through space; in the process, spatial relationships between the camera and the objects in its frame shift, causing relative changes in position between onscreen figures or objects. By contrast, because a zoom lens does not move through space, its depiction of spatial relationships between the camera and its subjects does not change. All a zoom shot does is magnify the image.

Zoom and Moving Camera Effects

The result of zoom shots, as we've noted before, can be "movement" that appears artificial and self-conscious. Of course, there are dramatic, cinematic, and stylistic reasons for using this effect, but for the most part, the artificiality of the zoom (and the fact that viewers naturally associate the zoom effect with its overuse in amateur home videos) makes it a technique that is rarely used well in professional filmmaking. When the zoom shot is used expressively, however, it can be breathtaking. In *Goodfellas* (1990; cinematographer: Michael Ballhaus), during the scene in which Henry Hill (Ray Liotta) meets Jimmy Conway (Robert De Niro) in a diner, director Martin Scorsese achieves a memorable effect with the moving camera and the zoom lens. He tracks *in* (while moving the zoom lens *out*)

and tracks *out* (while moving the zoom lens *in*) to reflect Henry's paranoid, paralyzed state of mind. As the camera and lens move against one another, the image traps Hill inside the hermetic world of the mob and us inside a world of spatial disorientation in an ordinary diner.

Crane Shot A **crane shot** is made from a camera mounted on an elevating arm that, in turn, is mounted on a vehicle capable of moving by its own power. A crane may also be mounted on a vehicle that can be pushed along tracks to smooth its movement. The arm can be raised or lowered to the degree that the particular crane permits. Shots made with a crane differ from those made with a camera mounted on a dolly or an ordinary track (each of which is, in theory, capable only of horizontal or vertical movement) because the crane has the full freedom of horizontal and vertical movement, as well as the capability of lifting the camera high off the ground. Thus, a filmmaker can use a crane to shoot with extraordinary flexibility. As equipment for moving the camera has become more versatile, crane shots have become more commonplace.

Any list of memorable crane shots would include a shot in Victor Fleming's *Gone with the Wind* (1939; cinematographer: Ernest Haller) in which the camera soars up over ground near the Atlanta railroad station to reveal the hundreds of Civil War dead, or the smooth, graceful shot in Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946; cinematographer: Ted Tetzlaff) in which the camera swoops down alongside a staircase and across a crowded ballroom. In Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004; cinematographer: Rodrigo Prieto), the Macedonian warrior Alexander the Great (Colin Farrell) looks up to see the eagle that is his personal symbol. The camera soars up to assume the eagle's point of view and then looks down over the field on which Alexander and his troops will shortly fight the Persians.

Perhaps the most famous crane shot in movie history occurs at the opening of Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958; cinematographer: Russell Metty). The scene takes place at night in Los Robles, a seedy town on the U.S.-Mexico border. After the Universal International logo dissolves from the screen, we see a close-up of a man's hand swinging



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The crane shot in *Touch of Evil* These stills from the opening crane shot in Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958; cinematographer: Russell Metty) show the progress of the camera over a wide-ranging space through a continuous long shot that ends only at the point where the car blows



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up [1-7]. A reaction shot of Mike and Susan Vargas (Charlton Heston and Janet Leigh) follows [8], and as the Vargases run toward the site of the explosion, the mystery at the heart of the movie begins to unfold.

toward the camera and setting a timer that will make the bomb he holds explode in about three minutes. The camera pans left to reveal two figures approaching the camera from the end of a long interior corridor; the bomber, Manelo Sanchez (Victor Millan), runs left into the frame, realizes that these people are his targets, and runs out of the frame to the right as the camera pans right to follow him. He places the bomb in the trunk of a luxurious convertible, the top of which is down, and disappears screen right just as the couple enters the frame at top left; the camera tracks backward and reframes to an LS.

As the couple gets into the car, the camera (mounted on a crane that is, in turn, mounted on a truck) swings to an extreme high angle. The car pulls forward alongside a building and turns left at the front of the building as the camera reaches the roof level at its back. We momentarily lose sight of the car, but the camera, which has oriented us to where the car is, merely pans left and brings it back into the frame as it moves left across an alley into a main street. The camera cranes down to an angle slightly higher than the car, which has turned left and now heads toward the camera on a vertical axis moving from background to foreground. When the car pauses at the direction of a policeman, who permits other traffic to cross in the foreground on a horizontal axis, the camera begins tracking backward to keep the car in the frame. The camera continues to track backward, reframes to an XLS, and pans slightly to the left. The car stops at an intersection.

A man and a woman ("Mike" Vargas, a Mexican narcotics agent played by Charlton Heston, and Susan Vargas, whom he has just married, played by Janet Leigh) enter the intersection at screen right and continue across the street as the camera lowers to an eye-level LS. The car turns left onto the street on which the Vargases are walking, and they scurry to get out of its way as the car moves out of the frame. They continue walking with the camera tracking slightly ahead of them; it keeps them in the frame as they pass the car, which is now delayed by a herd of goats that has stopped in another intersection. The camera continues to track backward, keeping the couple and the car in the frame; this becomes a deep-space composition with the car in

the background, crossway traffic in the middle ground, and the Vargas couple in the foreground. The Vargases reach the kiosk marking the entrance to the border crossing and pass it on the right, still walking toward the camera, which now rises, reframing into a high-angle LS that reveals the car driving past the left side of the kiosk. The frame now unites the two couples (one in the car, the other walking) as they move forward at the same time to what we, knowing that the bomb is in the car, anticipate will be a climactic moment.

The camera stops and reframes to an MS with the Vargases standing on the right and the car stopped on the left. While the first border agent begins to question the newlyweds, soon recognizing Vargas, the second agent checks the car's rear license plate. The agents and Vargas discuss smashing drug rings, but Vargas explains that he and his wife are crossing to the American side so that his wife can have an ice cream soda. Meanwhile, the driver of the targeted car, Mr. Linnekar (actor not credited), asks if he can get through the crossing. The Vargases walk out of the frame, continuing the discussion about drugs, then apparently walk around the front of the car and reenter the frame at the left side; the camera pans slightly left and reframes the Vargases, border agents, and Linnekar and Zita (Joi Lansing), his companion.

After a few moments of conversation, the Vargases walk away toward the back and then left of the frame; the car moves slowly forward; and Zita complains to one of the guards—in a moment of delicious black humor—that she hears a "ticking noise." As the car leaves the frame, the camera pans left to another deep-focus composition with the Vargases in the background, two military policemen walking from the background toward the camera, and pedestrians passing across the middle ground. The camera tracks forward and reframes to an MS; the Vargases embrace as the bomb explodes. Startled, they look up and see the car in flames.

The final two shots in this extraordinary sequence are, first, a rapid zoom-in on the explosion, and second, a low-angle, handheld shot of Vargas running toward the scene. These shots, more self-conscious and less polished than the preceding, fluid crane shots, cinematically and dramatically

shift the tone from one of controlled suspense to out-of-control chaos that changes the normal world and sets the scene for the story's development. This is also an excellent example of how movies exploit the establishment and breaking of narrative forms.

With extraordinary virtuosity, Welles has combined nearly all types of shots, angles, framings, and camera movements. He accomplishes the changes in camera height, level, angle, and framing by mounting the camera on a crane that can be raised and lowered smoothly from ground level to an extreme high angle, reframed easily, and moved effortlessly above and around the setting (parking lot, market arcade, street, intersections, border inspection area). Here the moving camera is both unchained and fearless, a thoroughly omniscient observer as well as a voyeur, particularly in its opening observations of the bomber. But what is the function of this cinematographic tour de force? Is it just one of Welles's razzle-dazzle attempts to grab the audience's attention, or does it create meaning?

The answer, of course, is that it has both purposes. Its virtuosity astonishes but with a point. In addition to witnessing the inciting device for the plot, we learn that Los Robles is a labyrinth of activity, lights, shadows, and mysteries, and that the destinies of Linnekar, Zita, Vargas, and Susan are in some way tangled. The odd and extreme camera angles (at both the beginning and the end of the scene) reinforce the air of mystery and disorient us within the cinematic space. All the while, the bold black-and-white contrasts pull us into the deep shadows of vice, corruption, and brutal crime.

Handheld Camera The last two shots in the scene from *Touch of Evil* (1958) described in the previous section were made with a handheld camera, a small, portable, lightweight instrument that is held by the camera operator during shooting. At one time, handheld cameras were limited to 8mm or 16mm film stock, but now they can handle a variety of film gauges. In contrast to the smooth moving-camera shots that we have been discussing, the inherent shakiness of the handheld camera can be exploited when a loss of control, whether in the situation or in the character's state of mind, is something the filmmaker wants to convey to the viewer.



Handheld camera The handheld camera is used to great advantage in keeping the viewer disoriented during Paul Greengrass's high-action thriller, *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004; cinematographer: Oliver Wood), as in this shot of Jason Bourne (Matt Damon) trying to elude the pursuing police.

Touch of Evil does just that, with an elaborately choreographed and fluid moving-camera sequence suddenly interrupted by an explosion, which is photographed with the shaky handheld. We feel that the world has changed because the way we see the world has shifted so dramatically.

However, the uses of the handheld camera go beyond that. After nearly fifty years of viewing news coverage of unfolding events, nonfiction films in the direct cinema style, and reality television shows, audiences have been conditioned to associate the look of handheld camera shots with documentary realism—that is, with the assumption that something is really happening and the photographer (and, thus, the viewer) is there. Narrative feature films can take advantage of that intuitive association to heighten or alter our experience of a particular event, such as the attack on the military base in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964; cinematographer: Gilbert Taylor), or cinematographer Haskell Wexler's influential documentary-style work in such movies as Milos Forman's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) and John Sayles's *Matewan* (1987), or the cinematographer Oliver Wood's astonishing, disorienting handheld shots in Paul Greengrass's *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004). Other movies that make effective use of the handheld camera include Stefan Ruzowitzky's *The Counterfeiters* (2007; cinematographer: Benedict Neuenfels), Matt Reeves's *Cloverfield* (2008; cinematographer: Michael Bonvillian), and

John Carney's *Once* (2006; cinematographer: Tim Fleming).

Steadicam From the beginning of the movies, movie cameras (handheld as well as those mounted on tripods, dollies, or other moving devices) have allowed filmmakers to approach their subjects, as when they move in for close-ups. But the handheld camera frequently produces a jumpy image, characteristic of avant-garde filmmaking and usually not acceptable in the mainstream. Thus, mainstream filmmakers embraced the **Steadicam**, a device, attached to the operator's body, that steadies the camera, avoids the jumpiness associated with the handheld camera, and is now much used for smooth, fast, and intimate camera movement. The Steadicam system, which is perfectly balanced, automatically compensates for any movements made by the camera operator, whether in running downstairs, climbing a hill, or maneuvering in tight places where dollies or tracks cannot fit.

The Steadicam is used so frequently that it has all but ceased to call attention to itself. But there are many great, exhilarating uses of this device that are worth remembering, including the work of Garrett Brown, the Steadicam operator on Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980; cinematographer: John Alcott), perhaps the most memorable being the long sequence that follows Danny Torrance's (Danny Lloyd) determined tricycle ride through the halls of the Overlook Hotel. This sequence may have influenced Matías Mesa, the Steadicam operator on Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003; cinematographer: Harris Savides), whose Steadicam-mounted camera unobtrusively follows the wanderings of students in the corridors of their high-school buildings.

Another memorable example is Larry McConkey's Steadicam shot of Henry and Karen (Ray Liotta and Lorraine Bracco) entering the Copacabana in Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990; cinematographer: Michael Ballhaus). As in *The Shining*, the camera stays behind the subjects as they enter the club's rear entrance and move through the kitchen and various service areas, where everyone knows and greets Liotta's character, to the club's main room, where a table is set up for the couple near the stage. This Steadicam



The smoothest moving camera The Steadicam, invented in the early 1970s, is not a camera, but rather a steadying mechanism on which any motion-picture camera can be mounted. In this image of the Steadicam Ultra2 model,¹² the operator wears a harness that is attached to an arm that, in turn, is attached to a vertical armature, here with the camera at the top and a counterbalance weight at the bottom. Unlike the handheld camera, this mechanism isolates the operator's movements from the camera, producing a very smooth shot even when the operator is walking or running quickly over an uneven surface.

¹² Steadicam and Ultra2 are trademarks of the Tiffen Company.

sequence is very different from the one used in *The Shining*. In the Kubrick film, the Steadicam (mounted on a wheelchair) takes us on a dizzying ride through the hotel's labyrinthine halls, echoing the actual labyrinth in the garden and emphasizing the intense mystery of the story. We are left breathless at the end of it. In the *Goodfellas* sequence, however, the Steadicam leads the viewer, like a guide, as we follow a brash, young gangster trying to impress his future wife as they enter the glamorous world of a New York nightclub.

Framing and Point of View

As the preceding discussion has illustrated, the framing of a shot—including the type of shot and its depth, camera angle and height, scale, and camera movement—has several major functions. In the most basic sense, framing controls what we see (explicitly, what is on the screen; implicitly, what we know has been left out) and how we see it (up close, far away, from above or below, and so on). Framing also calls attention to the technique of cinematography, allowing us to delight in the variety of possibilities that the director and cinematographer have at their disposal. It also implies point of view (POV), which can mean the POV of the screenwriter, director, or one or more characters, or the actual POV of the camera itself. Of course, all of these POVs can be used in any one movie.

The camera's POV, the eyes through which we view the action, depends on the physical position from which the camera shoots. In most movies, the camera is omniscient: virtually able to go anywhere and see anything, either at average human eye level or above it. Eye-level, high, and low shooting angles, however, raise questions of objectivity and subjectivity; sometimes, as we have seen, directors use them to play against our expectations, to control or mislead us. In looking at movies, we experience frequent shifts in the camera's POV. The dominant neutral POV gives us the facts and background that are the context in which the characters live. The **omniscient POV** shows what the omniscient camera sees, typically from a high angle; a **single character's POV**, in which the shot is made with the camera close to the line of sight of a character

(or animal or surveillance camera), shows what that person would be seeing of the action; and the **group POV** shows us what a group of characters would see at their level.

Julian Schnabel's *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007; cinematographer: Janusz Kaminski) is a highly concentrated example of a movie shot from the mental and visual POV of a single character. Jean-Dominique Bauby (Mathieu Amalric), the editor of a French magazine, suffered a massive stroke that has left him almost totally paralyzed (he can use one of his eyes), yet able to maintain his sense of humor (often black), remember and think, hear from one ear, move his face and head a little, and, most important to his therapy, use his left eyelid to blink for communication (one blink = yes; two = no). He also narrates the film through his interior monologue. (That monologue actually comes from the book that Bauby "wrote" by blinking his eyes for each letter to a collaborator who put the words on paper.) What's relevant here in terms of cinematography is that much of the film is shot from the position and angle of his left eye—what he calls "the only window to my cell." (There are also extreme close-up shots of his eye from a distance of a few inches away.) The images that Bauby and the viewer see simultaneously and identically are blurred, flickering, and bleached out. Bauby is in an extreme position, and the director and cinematographer have chosen a frame that is equally extreme. This movie's visual style meets the needs of this story, which is not a record of impending death, but rather the saga of Bauby's highly determined process of rebirth. The movie's consistent use of this POV might seem gimmicky with a different narrative, but here it rightly puts the emphasis on that character's eye, the "I" of his narration, and, of course, the camera's eye.

Consider a very fast and active scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963; cinematographer: Robert Burks), in which a classic use of camera angle and point of view establishes and retains the viewer's orientation as the townspeople of Bodega Bay become increasingly agitated because of random attacks by birds (see the photo spread on p. 258). During one such attack, frightened people watch from the window of a diner as a bird strikes a gas-station attendant, causing a gasoline leak



Can you hear me?

Unique camera/character POV in *The Diving Bell and The Butterfly*

As you can see from the clearly focused subtitle, this image is not out of focus. Rather the image records the POV of the main character, Jean-Dominique Bauby (Mathieu Amalric), in Julian Schnabel's *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007; cinematographer: Janusz Kaminski). Due to a massive stroke that has left him almost totally paralyzed and with vision in only one eye, he sees his world in blurred, flickering, and bleached-out images. Here, one of his doctors is examining the impaired eye. At the top left of the image, Bauby sees the bulb of the doctor's examining apparatus; in the middle, the doctor's left eye; at right, the doctor's cheek and ear.

that results in a tragic explosion. Chief among these spectators are Melanie Daniels (Tippi Hedren) and Mitch Brenner (Rod Taylor).

The basic pattern of camera angles alternates between shots from a high angle in the restaurant, looking out and down, to those from eye level, looking from the exterior through the window of the restaurant. These alternating points of view give the sequence its power. How does Hitchcock's use of alternating points of view create meaning in the sequence? It shows us (not for the first time) that the birds really do maliciously attack unsuspecting people. It also demonstrates that, at least in this cinematic world, people close to an impending tragedy—people like Mitch, Melanie, and the man with the cigar—can do virtually nothing to stop it.

 **Point of View**

Speed and Length of the Shot

Up to this point, we have emphasized the spatial aspects of how a shot is composed, lit, and pho-

tographed. But the image we see on the screen has both spatial *and* temporal dimensions. Its length can be as important as any other characteristic. Although a shot is one uninterrupted run of the camera, no convention governs what that length should be. Before the arrival of sound, the average shot lasted about five seconds; after sound arrived, that average doubled to approximately ten seconds. Nonetheless, a shot can (and should) be as long as necessary to do its part in telling the story.

By controlling the length of shots, not only do filmmakers enable each shot to do its work—establish a setting, character, or cause of a following event—but they also control the relationship of each shot to the others and, thus, to the rhythm of the film. The length of any shot is influenced by three factors: the screenplay (the amount of action and dialogue written for each shot), the cinematography (the duration of what is actually shot), and the editing (what remains of the length of the actual shot after the film has been cut and assembled).

Here we will concentrate on the second of these factors: the relationship between cinematography and time. What kind of time does the camera record? As you know from Chapter 4, when we see a movie, we are aware of basically two kinds of time: real time, time as we ordinarily perceive it in life outside the movie theater; and cinematic time, time as it is conveyed to us through the movie. Through a simple adjustment of the camera's motor, cinema can manipulate time with the same freedom and flexibility that it manipulates space and light.

Slow motion decelerates action by photographing it at a rate greater than the normal 24 fps (frames per second), so that it takes place in cinematic time less rapidly than the real action that took place before the camera. One effect of slow motion is to emphasize the power of memory, as in Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker* (1964; cinematographer: Boris Kaufman), in which Sol Nazerman (Rod Steiger), a pawnbroker living in the Bronx, remembers pleasant memories in Germany before the Nazis and the Holocaust. Martin Scorsese frequently uses slow motion to suggest a character's heightened awareness of someone or something.