The Shot: Mise-en-Scene

Of all the techniques of cinema, **mise-en-scene** is the one with which we are most familiar. After seeing a film, we may not recall the cutting or the camera movements, the dissolves or the offscreen sound. But we do remember the costumes in *Gone with the Wind* and the bleak, chilly lighting in Charles Foster Kane's Xanadu. We retain vivid impressions of the misty streets in *The Big Sleep* and the labyrinthine, fluorescent-lit lair of Buffalo Bill in *The Silence of the Lambs.* We recall Harpo Marx clambering over Edgar Kennedy's peanut wagon (*Duck Soup*), Katharine Hepburn defiantly splintering Cary Grant's golf clubs (*The Philadelphia Story*), and Michael J. Fox escaping high-school bullies on an improvised skateboard (*Back to the Future*). In short, many of our most sharply etched memories of the cinema turn out to center on mise-en-scene.

What Is Mise-en-Scene?

In the original French, *mise en scène* (pronounced meez-ahn-sen) means "putting into the scene," and it was first applied to the practice of directing plays. Film scholars, extending the term to film direction, use the term to signify the director's control over what appears in the film frame. As you would expect, mise-en-scene includes those aspects of film that overlap with the art of the theater: setting, lighting, costume, and the behavior of the figures. In controlling the mise-en-scene, the director *stages the event* for the camera.

Mise-en-scene usually involves some planning, but the filmmaker may be open to unplanned events as well. An actor may add a line on the set, or an unexpected change in lighting may enhance a dramatic effect. While filming a cavalry procession through Monument Valley for *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon,* John Ford took advantage of an approaching lightning storm to create a dramatic backdrop for the action (**4.1**). The storm remains part of the film's mise-en-scene even though Ford neither planned it nor controlled it; it was a lucky accident that helped create one of the film's most affecting passages. Jean Renoir, Robert Altman, and other directors have allowed their actors to improvise their performances, making the films' mise-en-scene more spontaneous and unpredictable.

4.1 *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon:* a thunderstorm in Monument Valley.

Realism

Before we analyze mise-en-scene in detail, one preconception must be brought to light. Just as viewers often remember this or that bit of mise-en-scene from a film, so they often judge mise-en-scene by standards of realism. A car may seem to be realistic for the period the film depicts, or a gesture may not seem realistic because "real people don't act that way."

Realism as a standard of value, however, raises several problems. Notions of realism vary across cultures, over time, and even among individuals. Marlon Brando's acclaimed realist performance in the 1954 film *On the Waterfront* looks stylized today. American critics of the 1910s praised William S. Hart's Westerns for being realistic, but equally enthusiastic French critics of the 1920s considered the same films to be as artificial as a medieval epic. Most important, to insist rigidly on realism for all films can blind us to the vast range of mise-en-scene possibilities.

Look, for instance, at the frame from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (**4.2**). Such a depiction of rooftops certainly does not accord with our conception of normal reality. Yet to condemn the film for lacking realism would be inappropriate, because the film uses stylization to present a madman's fantasy. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* borrows conventions of Expressionist painting and theater, and then assigns them the function of suggesting the madman's delusion.

It is best, then, to examine the *functions* of mise-en-scene in the films we see. While one film might use mise-en-scene to create an impression of realism, others might seek very different effects: comic exaggeration, supernatural terror, understated beauty, and any number of other functions. We should analyze mise-en-scene's function in the total film—how it is motivated, how it varies or develops, how it works in relation to other film techniques.

4.2 An Expressionist rooftop scene created from jagged peaks and slanted chimneys in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.*

The Power of Mise-en-Scene

Confining the cinema to some notion of realism would impoverish mise-en-scene. This technique has the power to transcend normal conceptions of reality, as we can see from a glance at the cinema's first master of the technique, Georges Méliès. Méliès's mise-en-scene enabled him to create a totally imaginary world on film.

A caricaturist and magician, Méliès became fascinated by the Lumière brothers' demonstration of their short films in 1895. (For more on the Lumières, see pp. 182–183.) After building a camera based on an English projector, Méliès began filming unstaged street scenes and moments of passing daily life. One day,

"When Buñuel was preparing The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, *he chose a tree-lined avenue for the recurring shot of his characters traipsing endlessly down it. The avenue was strangely stranded in open country and it perfectly suggested the idea of these people coming from nowhere and going nowhere. Buñuel's assistant said, 'You can't use that road. It's been used in at least ten other movies.' 'Ten other movies?' said Buñuel, impressed. 'Then it must be good.'"*

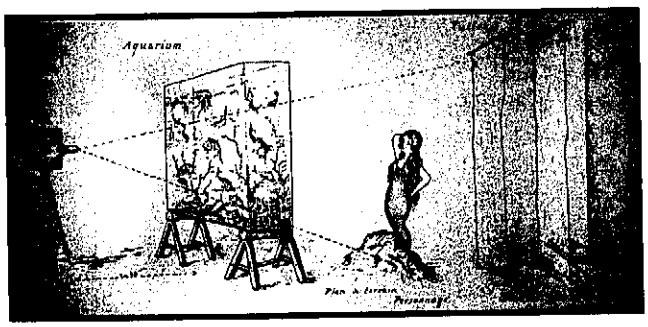
the story goes, he was filming at the Place de l'Opéra, and his camera jammed as a bus was passing. After some tinkering, he was able to resume filming, but by this time, the bus had gone and a hearse was passing in front of his lens. When Méliès screened the film, he discovered something unexpected: a moving bus seemed to transform instantly into a hearse. Whether or not the anecdote is true, it at least illustrates Méliès's recognition of the magical powers of mise-en-scene. He would devote most of his efforts to cinematic conjuring.

To do so would require preparation, since Méliès could not count on lucky accidents like the bus–hearse transformation. He would have to plan and stage action for the camera. Drawing on his experience in theater, Méliès built one of the first film studios—a small, crammed affair bristling with theatrical machinery, balconies, trapdoors, and sliding backdrops. He sketched shots beforehand and designed sets and costumes. The correspondence between his detailed drawings and the finished shots is illustrated in **4.3** and **4.4**. As if this were not enough, Méliès starred in his own films (often in several roles per film). His desire to create magical effects led Méliès to control every aspect of his films' mise-en-scene.

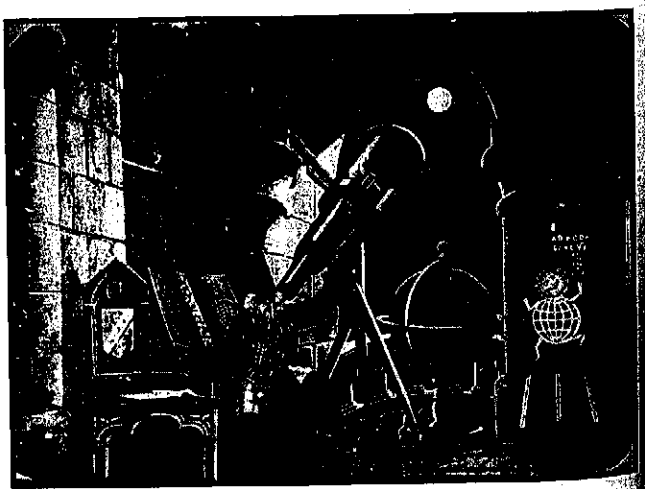
Such control was necessary to create the fantasy world he envisioned. Only in a studio could Méliès produce *The Mermaid* **(4.5)**. He could also surround himself (playing an astronomer) with a gigantic array of cartoonish cut-outs in *La Lune à un mètre* **(4.6)**.

4.3 Georges Méliès's design for the rocket-launching scene in *A Trip to the Moon* and . . .

4.4 . . . the scene in the film.



4.5 *The Mermaid* created an undersea world by placing a fish tank between the camera and an actress, some backdrops, and "carts for monsters."



4.6 The telescope, globe, and blackboard are all flat, painted cut-outs in *La Lune á une mètre.*

Méliès's "Star-Film" studio made hundreds of short fantasy and trick films based on such a control over every element in the frame, and the first master of mise-en-scene demonstrated the great range of technical possibilities it offers. The legacy of Méliès's magic is a delightfully unreal world wholly obedient to the whims of the imagination.

Aspects of Mise-en-Scene

What possibilities for selection and control does mise-en-scene offer the filmmaker? We can mark out four general areas: setting, costumes and makeup, lighting, and staging.

Setting

Since the earliest days of cinema, critics and audiences have understood that setting plays a more active role in cinema than it usually does in the theater. André Bazin writes,

> The human being is all-important in the theatre. The drama on the screen can exist without actors. A banging door, a leaf in the wind, waves beating on the shore can heighten the dramatic effect. Some film masterpieces use man only as an accessory, like an extra, or in counterpoint to nature, which is the true leading character.

Cinema setting can come to the forefront; it need not be only a container for human events but can dynamically enter the narrative action. (See 4.124, 4.127, 6.114, 6.124, 6.125, 8.135, and 8.136 for examples of settings without characters.)

The filmmaker may control setting in many ways. One way is to select an already existing locale in which to stage the action, a practice stretching back to the earliest films. Louis Lumière shot his short comedy *L'Arroseur arrosé* ("The Waterer Watered," **4.7**) in a garden, and Jean-Luc Godard filmed the exteriors for *Contempt* on the resort island of Capri, off the coast of Italy (**4.8**). At the close of World War II, Roberto Rossellini shot *Germany Year Zero* in the rubble of Berlin (**4.9**). Today filmmakers often go on location to shoot.

Alternatively, the filmmaker may construct the setting. Méliès understood that shooting in a studio increased his control, and many filmmakers followed his lead. In France, Germany, and especially the United States, the possibility of creating a wholly artificial world on film led to several approaches to setting.

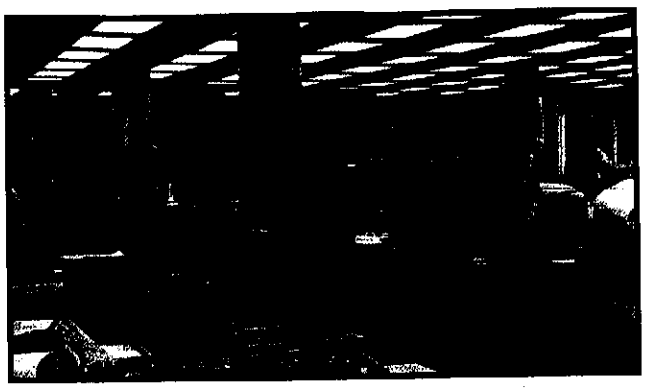
Some directors have emphasized authenticity. For example, Erich von Stroheim prided himself on meticulous research into details of locale for *Greed* (**4.10**). *All the President's Men* (1976) took a similar tack, seeking to duplicate the *Washington Post* office on a soundstage (**4.11**). Even wastepaper from the actual office

4.7 *L'Arroseur arrosé.*

4.8 The filmmakers constructed none of the setting in this shot from *Contempt*, but control of character placement and framing turn it into a nearly abstract composition.

4.9 *Germany Year Zero.*

4.10 Details like hanging flypaper and posters create a tavern scene in *Greed.*



4.11 Replicating an actual newsroom in *All the President's Men.*

4.12 The Babylonian sequences of *Intolerance* combined influences from Assyrian history, 19th-century biblical illustration, and modern dance.

4.13 In *Ivan the Terrible,* Part 2, the decor makes the characters seem to wriggle from one space to another.

4.14 In *Wings of Desire,* busy, colorful graffiti on a wall draw attention away from the man lying on the ground.

4.15 In *Bram Stoker's Dracula,* apart from the candles, the setting of this scene has been obliterated by darkness.

was scattered around the set. Other films have been less committed to historical accuracy. Though D. W. Griffith studied the various historical periods presented in *Intolerance,* his Babylon constitutes a personal image of that city **(4.12)**. Similarly, in *Ivan the Terrible,* Sergei Eisenstein freely stylized the decor of the czar's palace to harmonize with the lighting, costume, and figure movement, so that characters crawl through doorways that resemble mouseholes and stand frozen before allegorical murals **(4.13)**.

Setting can overwhelm the actors, as in Wim Wender's *Wings of Desire* **(4.14)**, or it can be reduced to nothing, as in Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* **(4.15)**.

The overall design of a setting can shape how we understand story action. In Louis Feuillade's silent crime serial *The Vampires,* a criminal gang has killed a courier on his way to a bank. The gang's confederate, Irma Vep, is also a bank employee, and just as she tells her superior that the courier has vanished, an imposter, in beard and bowler hat, strolls in behind them **(4.16)**. They turn away from us in surprise as he comes forward **(4.17)**. Working in a period when cutting to closer shots was rare in a French film, Feuillade draws our attention to the man by centering him in the doorway.

Something similar happens in a more crowded setting in Juzo Itami's *Tampopo.* The plot revolves around a widow who is trying to improve the food and service she offers in her restaurant. In one scene, a truck driver (in a cowboy hat) helps her by taking her to another noodle shop to study technique. Itami has staged the scene so that the kitchen and the counter serve as two arenas for the action. At first, the widow watches the noodle-man take orders, sitting by her mentor on the edge of the kitchen **(4.18)**. Quickly, the counter fills with customers calling out orders. The truck driver challenges her to match the orders with the customers, and she steps closer to the center of the kitchen **(4.19)**. After she calls out the orders correctly, she turns her back to us, and our interest shifts to the customers at the counter, who applaud her **(4.20)**.

As the *Tampopo* example shows, color can be an important component of settings. The dark colors of the kitchen surfaces make the widow's red dress stand out. Robert Bresson's *L'Argent* creates parallels among its various settings by the recurrence of drab green backgrounds and cold blue props and costumes **(4.21–4.23)**. In contrast, Jacques Tati's *Play Time* displays sharply changing color schemes. In the first portion of *Play Time,* the settings and costumes are mostly gray, brown, and black—cold, steely colors. Later in the film, however, beginning in the restaurant scene, the settings start to sport cheery reds, pinks, and greens. This change in the settings' colors supports a narrative development that shows an inhuman city landscape that is transformed by vitality and spontaneity.

A full-size setting need not always be built. Through much of the history of the cinema, filmmakers used miniature buildings to create fantasy scenes or simply to economize. Parts of settings could also be rendered as paintings and combined photographically with full-sized sections of the space. Now, digital special effects are used to fill in portions of the setting, such as cities in *The Phantom Menace* and *The Fifth Element* **(4.24)**. Since such special effects also involve cinematography, we look at them in the next chapter.

In manipulating a shot's setting, the filmmaker may create *props*—short for *property.* This is another term borrowed from theatrical mise-en-scene. When an object in the setting has a function within the ongoing action, we can call it a prop. Films teem with examples: the snowstorm paperweight that shatters at the beginning of *Citizen Kane,* the little girl's balloon in *M,* the cactus rose in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,* Sarah Connor's hospital bed turned exercise machine in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day.* Comedies teem with props used for humorous purposes **(4.25)**.

In the course of a narrative, a prop may become a motif. The shower curtain in *Psycho* is at first an innocuous part of the setting, but when the killer enters the bathroom, the curtain screens her from our sight. Later, after the murder, Norman Bates uses the curtain to wrap up the victim's body.

Alexander Payne created a story motif by repeating one type of prop in *Election.* The fussy, frustrated high-school teacher begins his day by cleaning out the

4.16 In *Les Vampires,* a background frame created by a large doorway . . .

4.17 . . . emphasizes the importance of an entering character.

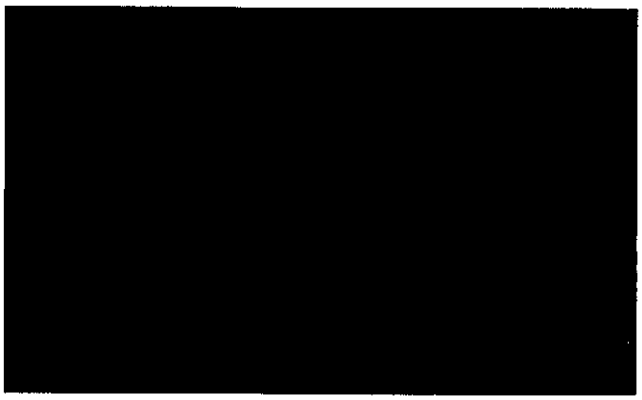
"The best sets are the simplest, most 'decent' ones; everything should contribute to the feeling of the story and anything that does not do this has no place. Reality is usually too complicated. Real locations contain too much that is extreme or contradictory and always require some simplifying: taking things away, unifying colors, etc. This strength through simplicity is much easier to achieve on a built set than in an existing location."

— Stuart Craig, art director, *Notting Hill*

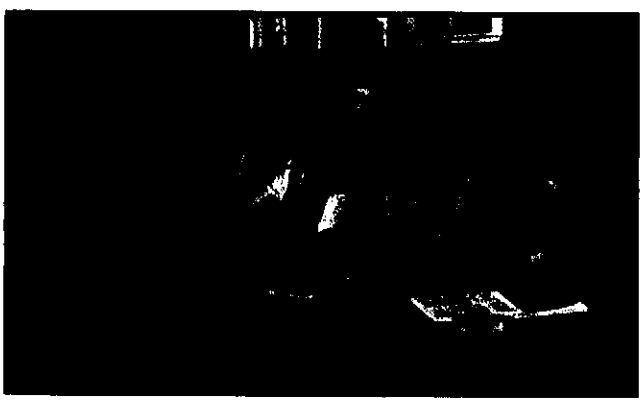
4.18 In *Tampopo,* at the start of the scene, the noodle counter, with only two customers, occupies the center of the action. The widow and her truck driver mentor stand inconspiciously at the left.

4.19 After the counter is full, the dramatic emphasis shifts to the kitchen when the widow rises and takes the challenge to name the customers' orders. Her red dress helps draw attention to her.

4.20 When she has triumphantly matched the orders, she gets a round of applause. By turning her away from us, Itami once more emphasizes the counter area, now filled with customers.



4.21 Color links the home in *L'Argent* . . .

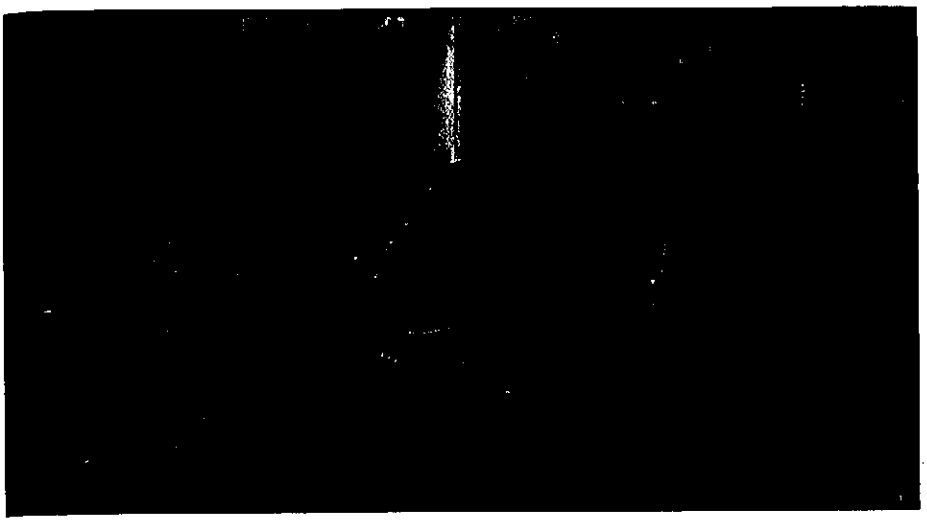


4.22 . . . to the school . . .

4.23 . . . and later to the prison.

faculty refrigerator (**4.26**). Soon afterward, he picks up hallway litter (**4.27**). At a major turning point in the plot, he decides to conceal a decisive ballot, which he crumples and secretly drops into a wastebasket (**4.28**). Payne calls this the motif of trash, "of throwing things away, since that's in fact the climax of the film. . . . So we establish it early on."

When the filmmaker uses color to create parallels among elements of setting, a color motif may become associated with several props, as in Souleymane Cissé's



4.24 *The Fifth Element* creates a collagelike city using computer graphics to join images from various sources.

4.25 The irresponsible protagonist of *Groundhog Day* eats an enormous breakfast made up of props that dominate the foreground of the diner setting.

Finye (*The Wind,* **4.29–4.31**). In these and other scenes, the recurrent use of orange creates a cluster of nature motifs within the narrative. Later in this chapter, we shall examine in more detail how elements of setting can weave through a film to form motifs within the narrative.

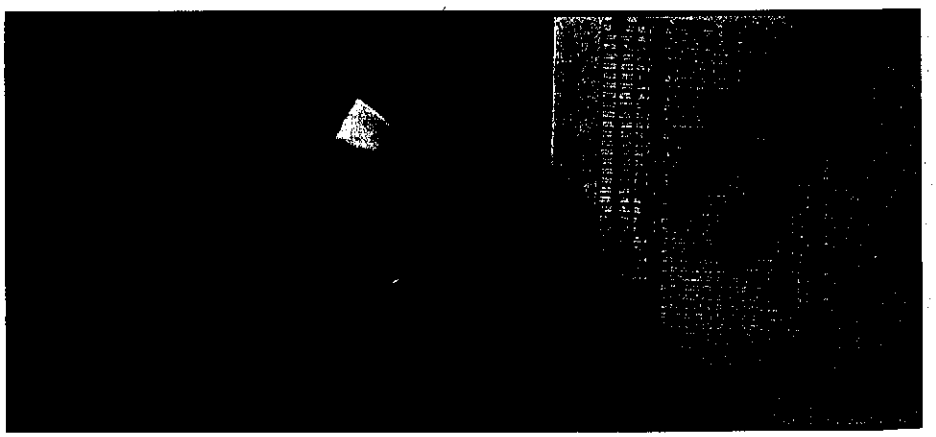
Costume and Makeup

Like setting, costume can have specific functions in the total film, and the range of possibilities is huge. Erich von Stroheim, for instance, was as passionately committed to authenticity of dress as of setting, and he was said to have created underwear that would instill the proper mood in his actors even though it was never to be seen in the film. In Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation,* a poignant moment occurs when the Little Sister decorates her dress with "ermine" made of cotton dotted with spots of soot (**4.32**). The costume displays the poverty of the defeated Southerners at the end of the Civil War.

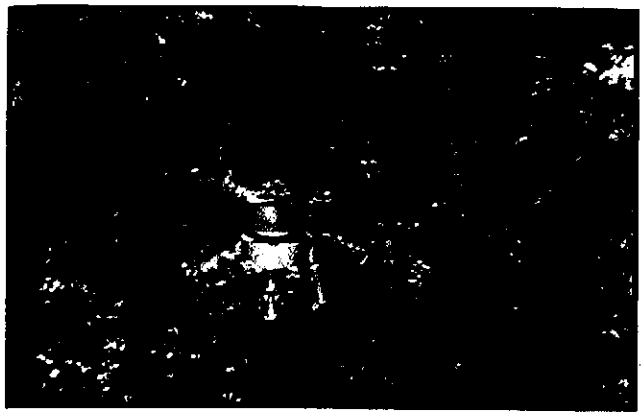
In other films, costumes may be quite stylized, calling attention to their purely graphic qualities. Throughout *Ivan the Terrible,* costumes are carefully orchestrated with one another in their colors, their textures, and even their movements. One shot of Ivan and his adversary gives their robes a plastic sweep and dynamism (**4.33**). In *Freak Orlando,* Ulrike Ottinger (herself a costume designer) boldly

4.26 In *Election,* as he discards spoiled leftovers, the teacher is suspiciously watched by the custodian—who will play an important role in his downfall.

4.27 He tosses a scrap of paper into the corridor trash bin.

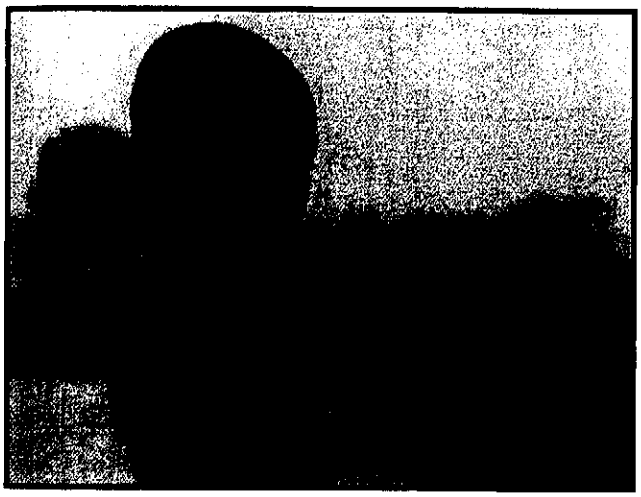


4.28 A close-up of the teacher's hand discarding the crucial vote for student council president.



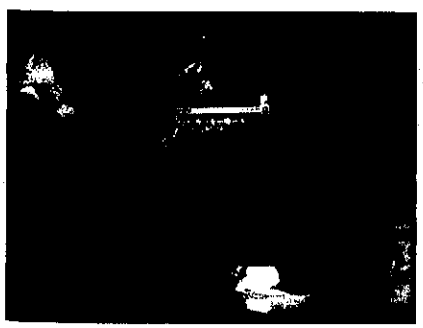
4.29 *Finye* begins with a woman carrying an orange calabash as the wind rustles through weeds.

4.30 Later, the vengeful grandfather prepares to stalk his grandson's persecutor by dressing in orange and making magic before a fire.

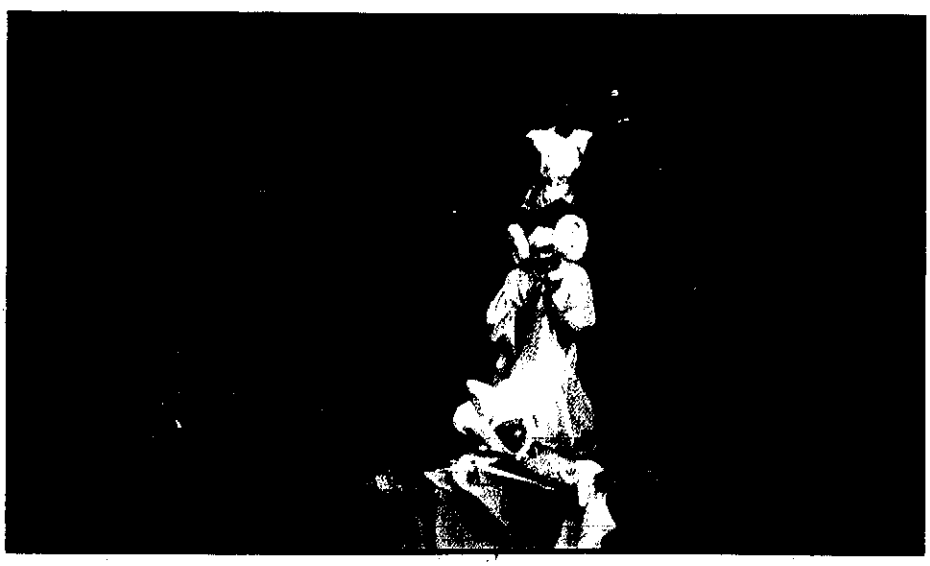


4.31 At the end, the little boy passes his bowl to someone offscreen—possibly the couple seen earlier.

4.32 In *The Birth of a Nation,* the Little Sister realizes how shabby her dress remains despite her attempts to add festive trimming.



4.33 The sweeping folds of a priest's lightweight black robe contrast with the heavy cloak and train of the czar's finery in *Ivan the Terrible.*

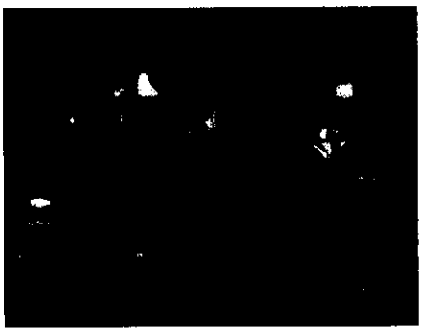


4.34 Stylized costumes in *Freak Orlando.*

4.35 In *8½*, sunglasses shield Marcello from the world.

uses costumes to display the spectrum's primary colors in maximum intensity **(4.34)**.

Costumes can play important motivic and causal roles in narratives. The film director Guido in Fellini's *8½* persistently uses his dark glasses to shield himself from the world **(4.35)**. To think of Dracula is to recall how his billowing cape enwraps his victims. When Hildy Johnson, in *His Girl Friday,* switches from her role of aspiring housewife to that of reporter, her hats change as well **(4.36, 4.37)**. In the runaway bus section of *Speed,* during a phone conversation with Jack, the villain Howard refers to Annie as a "Wildcat"; Jack sees Annie's University of Arizona sweater and realizes that Howard has hidden a video camera aboard the bus. A costume provides the clue that allows Jack to outwit Howard.



4.36 Hildy's stylish hat with a low-dipping brim worn early in *His Girl Friday* . . .

4.37 . . . is replaced by a "masculine" hat with its brim pushed up, journalist-style, when she returns to work.

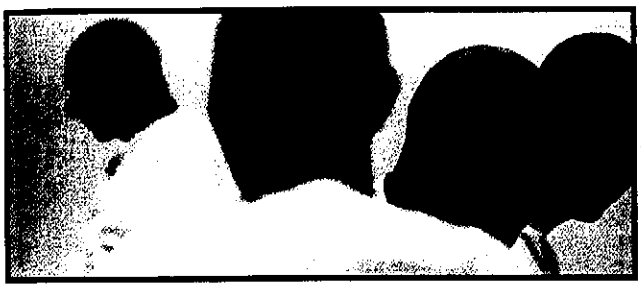
As we have already seen in *Tampopo* and *L'Argent* (p. 118), costume is often coordinated with setting. Since the filmmaker usually wants to emphasize the human figures, setting may provide a more or less neutral background, while costume helps pick out the characters. Color design is particularly important here. The *Freak Orlando* costumes (4.34) stand out boldly against the neutral gray background of an artificial lake. In *The Night of the Shooting Stars,* luminous wheat fields set off the hard black-and-blue costumes of the fascists and the peasants **(4.38)**. The director may instead choose to match the color values of setting and costume more closely. One shot in Fellini's *Casanova* creates a color gradation that runs from bright red costumes to paler red walls, the whole composition capped by a small white accent **(4.39)**. This "bleeding" of the costume into the setting is carried to a kind of limit in the prison scene of *THX 1138,* in which George Lucas strips both locale and clothing to stark white on white **(4.40)**.

Ken Russell's *Women in Love* affords a clear example of how costume and setting can contribute to a film's overall narrative progression. The opening scenes portray the characters' shallow middle-class life by means of saturated primary and complementary colors in costume and setting **(4.41)**. In the middle portions of the film, as the characters discover love on a country estate, pale pastels predominate **(4.42)**. The last section of *Women in Love* takes place around the Matterhorn, and the characters' ardor has cooled. Now the colors have become even paler, dominated by pure black and white **(4.43)**. By integrating with setting, costume may function to reinforce narrative and thematic patterns.

Many of these points about costume apply equally to a closely related area of mise-en-scene, the actors' makeup. Makeup was originally necessary because actors' faces would not register well on early film stocks. Up to the present, it has been used in various ways to enhance the appearance of actors on the screen. Over

4.38 The climactic skirmish of *The Night of the Shooting Stars.*

4.39 *Casanova:* subtle color gradations and a dramatic accent in the distance.



4.40 Heads seem to float in space as white costumes and settings blend in *THX 1138.*

4.41 Bright colors in an early scene of *Women in Love* give way . . .

4.42 . . . to the softer hues of trees and fields . . .

4.43 . . . and finally to a predominantly white-and-black scheme.

4.44 Light, blank backgrounds focus attention on the actors' faces in many shots of *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc.*

4.45 In *Ivan the Terrible,* Part 1, makeup shapes the eyebrows and hollows the eye sockets to emphasize Ivan's piercing gaze.

the course of film history, a wide range of possibilities has emerged. Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* was famous for its complete avoidance of makeup (**4.44**). This film relied on close-ups and tiny facial changes to create an intense religious drama. On the other hand, Nikolai Cherkasov did not look particularly like Eisenstein's conception of Czar Ivan IV, so he wore a wig and false beard, nose, and eyebrows for *Ivan the Terrible* (**4.45**). Changing actors to look like historical personages has been one common function of makeup.

Today makeup usually tries to pass unnoticed, but it also accentuates expressive qualities of the actor's face. Since the camera may record cruel details that would pass unnoticed in ordinary life, any unsuitable blemishes, wrinkles, and sagging skin will have to be hidden. The makeup artist can sculpt the face, making it seem narrower or broader by applying blush and shadow. Viewers expect that female performers will wear lipstick and other cosmetics, but the male actors are often wearing makeup, too (**4.46, 4.47**).

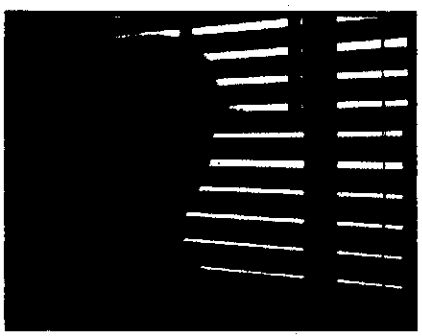
Film actors rely on their eyes to a very great extent (see box, p. 134), and makeup artists can often enhance eye behavior. Eyeliner and mascara can draw attention to the eyes and emphasize the direction of a glance. Nearly every actor will also have expressively shaped eyebrows. Lengthened eyebrows can enlarge the face, while shorter brows make it seem more compact. Eyebrows plucked in a slightly rising curve add gaiety to the face, while slightly sloping ones hint at sadness. Thick, straight brows, commonly applied to men, reinforce the impression of a hard, serious gaze. Thus eye makeup can assist the actor's performance (**4.48, 4.49**).

In recent decades, the craft of makeup has developed in response to the popularity of horror and science fiction genres. Rubber and plasticine compounds create bumps, bulges, extra organs, and layers of artificial skin in such films as David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (**4.50**). In such contexts, makeup, like costume, becomes important in creating character traits or motivating plot action.

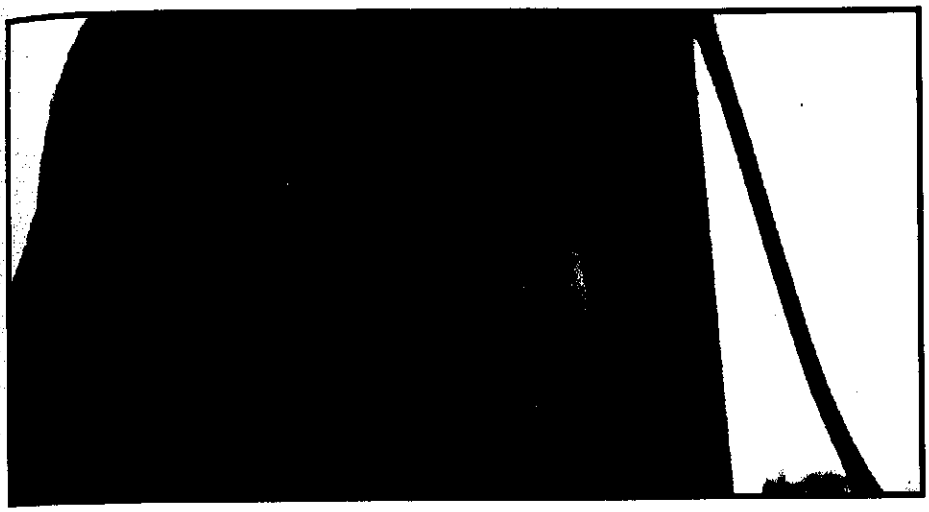
Lighting

Much of the impact of an image comes from its manipulation of lighting. In cinema, lighting is more than just illumination that permits us to see the action. Lighter and darker areas within the frame help create the overall composition of each shot and thus guide our attention to certain objects and actions. A brightly illuminated patch may draw our eye to a key gesture, while a shadow may conceal a detail or build up suspense about what may be present. Lighting can also articulate textures: the curve of a face, the grain of a piece of wood, the tracery of a spider's web, the sheen of glass, the sparkle of a gem.

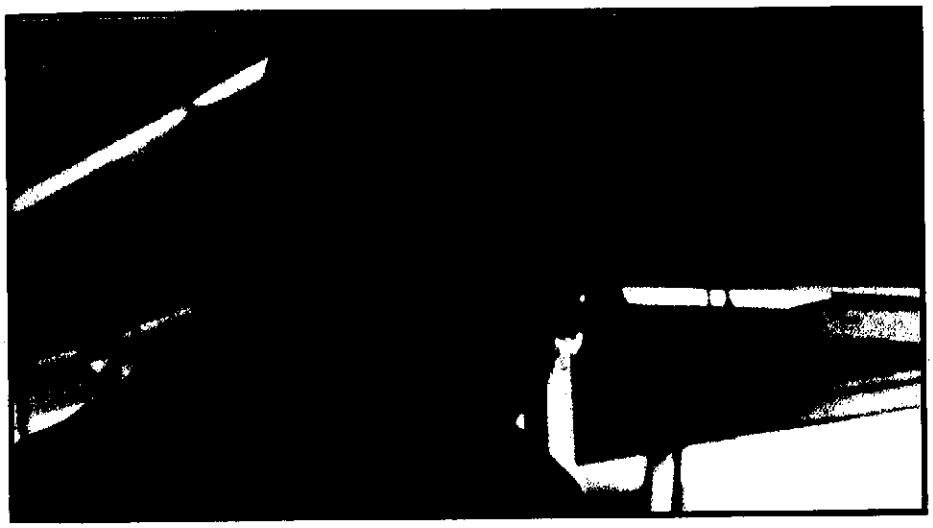
4.46 In *Heat,* Al Pacino's makeup gives him slightly rounded eyebrows and, with the help of the lighting, minimizes the bags under his eyes.



4.47 In *The Godfather Part III,* made five years before *Heat,* Pacino looks older. Not only has his hair been whitened, but the makeup, again assisted by the lighting, gives him more sunken and baggy eyes, more hollow cheeks, and a longer, flatter chin.



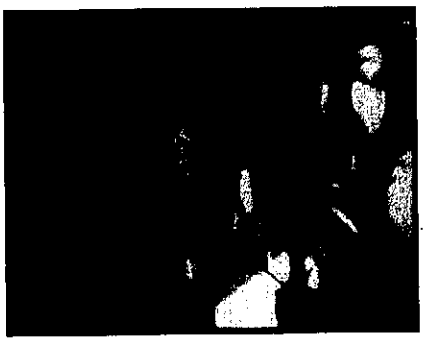
4.48 In *Speed,* Sandra Bullock's eyeliner, shadow, and arched brows make her eyes vivid and give her an alert expression.



4.49 For the same scene, the eyeliner on Keanu Reeves makes the upper edges of his eyes stand out. Note also the somewhat fierce curve of the eyebrows, accentuating his slight frown.

4.50 Jeff Goldblum, nearly unrecognizable under grotesque makeup, during his transformation into *The Fly.*

4.51 In *The Cheat,* Cecil B. DeMille suggested a jail cell by casting a bright light on a man's face and body through unseen bars.



4.52 Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket.*

Lighting shapes objects by creating highlights and shadows. A highlight is a patch of relative brightness on a surface. The man's face in **4.51** and the edge of the fingers in **4.52** display highlights. Highlights provide important cues to the texture of the surface. If the surface is smooth, like glass or chrome, the highlights tend to gleam or sparkle; a rougher surface, like a coarse stone facing, yields more diffuse highlights.

There are two basic types of shadows, each of which is important in film composition: *attached* shadows, or *shading,* and *cast* shadows. An attached shadow occurs when light fails to illuminate part of an object because of the object's shape or surface features. If a person sits by a candle in a darkened room, patches of the face and body will fall into darkness. Most obviously, the nose often creates a patch of darkness on an adjoining cheek. This phenomenon is shading, or attached shadow. But the candle also projects a shadow on the wall behind. This is a cast shadow, because the body blocks out the light. The shadows in 4.51, for example, are cast shadows, made by bars between the actor and the light source. But in 4.52, the small, dark patches on the hand are attached shadows, for they are caused by the three-dimensional curves and ridges of the hand itself.

"Light is everything. It expresses ideology, emotion, colour, depth, style. It can efface, narrate, describe. With the right lighting, the ugliest face, the most idiotic expression can radiate with beauty or intelligence."

— Frederico Fellini, director

4.53 Attached shadows on faces create a dramatic composition in John Huston's *Asphalt Jungle.*

As these examples suggest, highlights and shadows help create our sense of a scene's space. In 4.51, a few shadows imply an entire prison cell. Lighting also shapes a shot's overall composition. One shot from John Huston's *Asphalt Jungle* welds the gang members into a unit by the pool of light cast by a hanging lamp **(4.53)**. At the same time, it sets up a scale of importance, emphasizing the protagonist by making him the most frontal and clearly lit figure.

A shot's lighting affects our sense of the shape and texture of the objects depicted. If a ball is lit straight on from the front, it appears round. If the same ball is lit from the side, we see it as a half-circle. Hollis Frampton's short film *Lemon* consists primarily of light moving around a lemon, and the shifting shadows create dramatically changing patterns of yellow and black. This film almost seems designed to prove the truth of a remark made by Josef von Sternberg, one of the cinema's masters of film lighting: "The proper use of light can embellish and dramatize every object."

For our purposes, we can isolate four major features of film lighting: its quality, direction, source, and color.

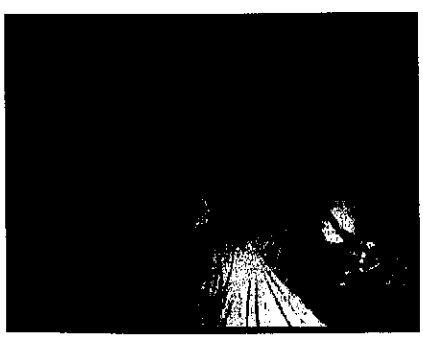
Lighting *quality* refers to the relative intensity of the illumination. *Hard* lighting creates clearly defined shadows, crisp textures, and sharp edges, whereas *soft* lighting creates a diffused illumination. In nature, the noonday sun creates hard light, while an overcast sky creates soft light. The terms are relative, and many lighting situations will fall between the extremes, but we can usually recognize the differences **(4.54, 4.55)**.

The *direction* of lighting in a shot refers to the path of light from its source or sources to the object lit. "Every light," wrote von Sternberg, "has a point where it is brightest and a point toward which it wanders to lose itself completely. . . . The journey of rays from that central core to the outposts of blackness is the adventure and drama of light." For convenience we can distinguish among frontal lighting, sidelighting, backlighting, underlighting, and top lighting.

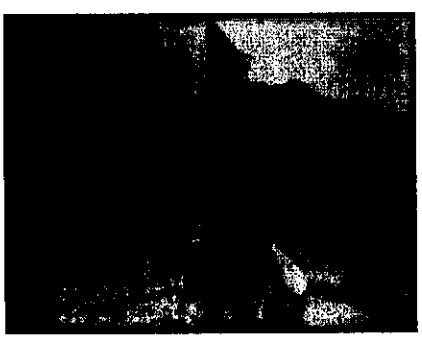
Frontal lighting can be recognized by its tendency to eliminate shadows. In **4.56**, from Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise,* the result of such frontal lighting is a fairly flat-looking image. Contrast **4.57**, from *Touch of Evil,* in which Orson Welles uses a hard **sidelight** (also called a *crosslight*) to sculpt the character's features.

Backlighting, as the name suggests, comes from behind the subject filmed. It can be positioned at many angles: high above the figure, at various angles off to the side, pointing straight at the camera, or from below. Used with no other sources of light, backlighting tends to create silhouettes, as in **4.58**. Combined with more frontal sources of light, the technique can create an unobtrusively illuminated contour. This use of backlighting is called *edge lighting* or *rim lighting* **(4.59)**.

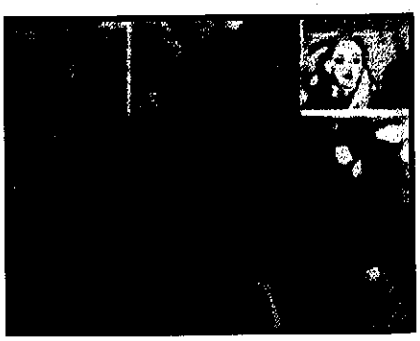
As its name implies, **underlighting** suggests that the light comes from below the subject. In **4.60**, the underlighting suggests an offscreen flashlight. Since



4.54 In this shot from Satyajit Ray's *Aparajito,* Apu's mother and the globe she holds are emphasized by hard lighting, while . . .



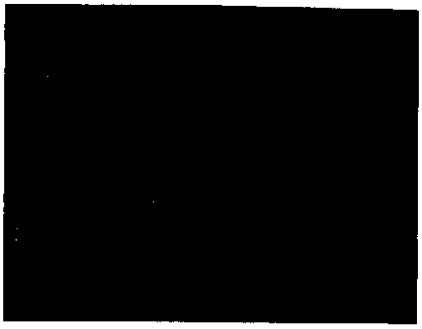
4.55 . . . in another shot from the same film, softer lighting blurs contours and textures and makes for more diffusion and gentler contrasts between light and shade.



4.56 In *La Chinoise,* frontal lighting makes the actress's shadow fall directly behind her, where we cannot see it.

4.57 In *Touch of Evil,* sidelight creates sharp attached shadows by the character's nose, cheek, and lips, while long cast shadows appear on the file cabinets at the left.

4.58 In Godard's *Passion,* the lamp and window provide backlighting that presents the woman almost entirely in silhouette.



4.59 In *Wings,* a narrow line of light makes each actor's body stand out from the background.

4.60 In *The Sixth Sense,* a flashlight lights the boy's face from below, enhancing our empathy with his fright as he feels the presence of a ghost.

4.61 Top lighting in Josef von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express.*

4.62 Apparent and hidden light sources in *The Miracle Worker.*

underlighting tends to distort features, it is often used to create dramatic horror effects, but it may also simply indicate a realistic light source, such as a fireplace. As usual, a particular technique can function differently according to context.

Top lighting is exemplified by **4.61**, where the spotlight shines down from almost directly above Marlene Dietrich's face. Von Sternberg frequently used such a high frontal light to bring out the line of his star's cheekbones. (Our earlier example from *Asphalt Jungle* in Figure 4.53 provides a less glamorous instance of top lighting.)

Lighting can also be characterized by its *source.* In making a documentary, the filmmaker may be obliged to shoot with the light available in the actual surroundings. Most fictional films, however, use extra light sources to obtain greater control of the image's look. In most fictional films, the table lamps and streetlights you see in the mise-en-scene are not the principal sources of illumination for the filming. But these visible sources of light will motivate the lighting decisions made in production. The filmmaker will usually strive to create a lighting design that is consistent with the sources in the setting. In **4.62**, from *The Miracle Worker,* the window in the rear and the lantern in the right foreground are purportedly the sources of illumination, but you can see the many studio lights used in this shot reflected as tiny white dots in the glass lantern.

Directors and cinematographers manipulating the lighting of the scene will start from the assumption that any subject normally requires two light sources:

4.63 Strong key and soft fill light combined in *The Bodyguard.*

4.64 *Bezhin Meadow.*

a **key light** and a **fill light**. The key light is the primary source, providing the dominant illumination and casting the strongest shadows. The key light is the most directional light, and it usually corresponds to the motivating light source in the setting. A fill is a less intense illumination that "fills in," softening or eliminating shadows cast by the key light. By combining key and fill, and by adding other sources, lighting can be controlled quite exactly.

The key lighting source may be aimed at the subject from any angle, as our examples of lighting direction have indicated. As one shot from *Ivan the Terrible* shows (4.77), underlighting may be the key source, while a softer and dimmer fill falls on the setting behind the figure.

Lights from various directions can be combined in any way. A shot may use key and fill lights without backlighting. In the frame from *The Bodyguard* **(4.63)**, a strong key light from offscreen left throws a dramatic shadow on the wall at the right. The dim fill light inconspicuously shows the back wall and ceiling of the set, but leaves the right side of the actor's head dark.

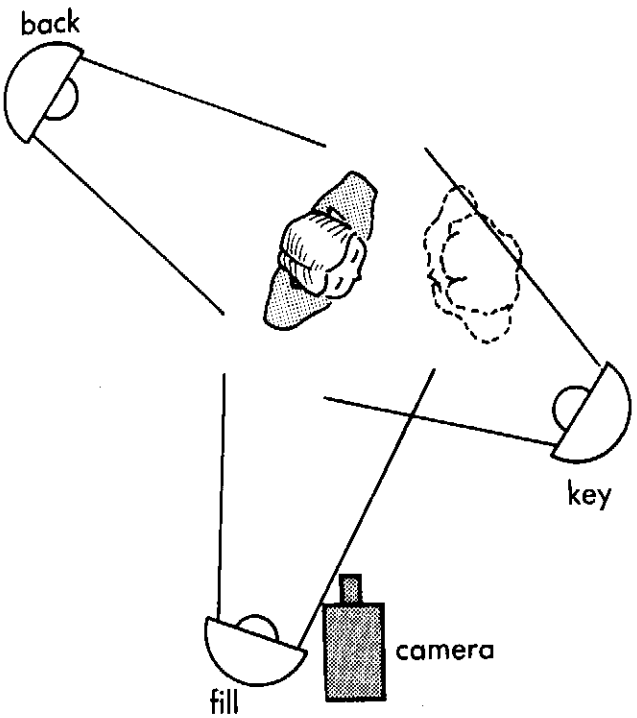
In **4.64**, from *Bezhin Meadow,* Eisenstein uses a number of light sources and directions. The key light falling on the figures comes from the left side, but it is hard on the face of the old woman in the foreground and softened on the face of the man because a fill light comes in from the right. This fill light falls on the woman's forehead and nose.

Classical Hollywood filmmaking developed the custom of using at least three light sources per shot: key light, fill light, and backlight. The most basic arrangement of these lights on a single figure is shown in **4.65**. The *backlight* comes from behind and above the figure, the *key light* comes diagonally from the front, and a *fill light* comes from a position near the camera. The key will usually be closer to the figure or brighter than the fill. Typically, each major character in a scene will have his or her own key, fill, and backlight. If another actor is added (as in the dotted figure in 4.65), the key light for one can be altered slightly to form the backlight for the other, and vice versa, with a fill light on either side of the camera.

In **4.66**, the Bette Davis character in *Jezebel* is the most important figure, and the **three-point lighting** centers attention on her: a bright backlight from the rear upper right highlights her hair and edge-lights her left arm. The key light is off left, making her right arm brightly illuminated. A fill light comes from just to the right of the camera. It is less bright than the key. This balanced lighting creates mild shading, modeling Davis's face to suggest volume rather than flatness. (Note the slight shadow cast by her nose.) Davis's backlight and key light serve to illuminate the woman behind her at the right, but less prominently. Other fill lights, called *background* or *set lighting,* fall on the setting and on the crowd at the left rear. Three-point lighting emerged during the studio era of Hollywood filmmaking, and it is still widely used, as in **4.67**, from Steven Spielberg's *Catch Me If You Can.*

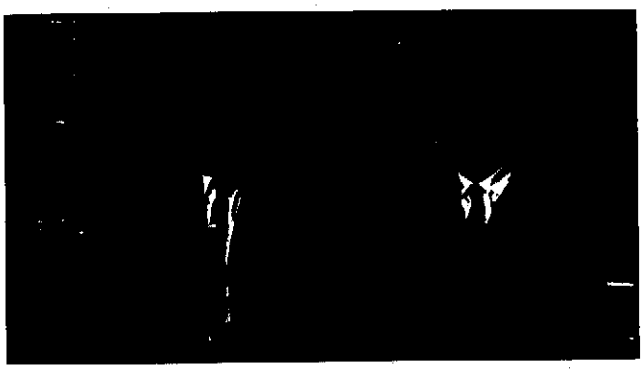
"When taking close-ups in a colour picture, there is too much visual information in the background, which tends to draw attention away from the face. That is why the faces of the actresses in the old black and white pictures are so vividly remembered. Even now, movie fans nostalgically recall Dietrich . . . Garbo . . . Lamarr . . . Why? Filmed in black and white, those figures looked as if they were lit from within. When a face appeared on the screen over-exposed—the high-key technique, which also erased imperfections—it was as if a bright object was emerging from the screen."

— Nestor Almendros, cinematographer



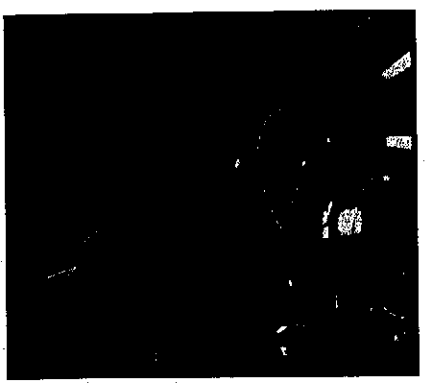
4.65 Three-point lighting, one of the basic techniques of Hollywood cinema.

4.66 The three-point system's effect as it looks on the screen in *Jezebel.*



4.67 In *Catch Me If You Can,* the ne'er-do-well father can't suppress a grin at his son's impersonation, and the high-key lighting accentuates the upbeat tone of the scene.

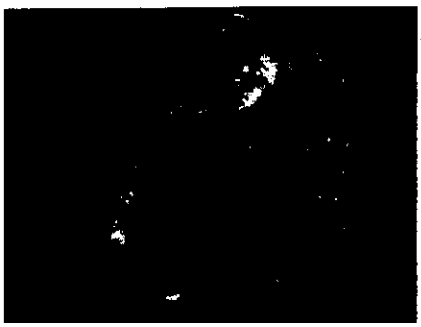
4.68 *Back to the Future:* day . . .



4.69 . . . versus night.

You may have already noticed that this three-point lighting system demands that the lamps be rearranged virtually every time the camera shifts to a new framing of the scene. In spite of the great cost involved, most Hollywood films have a different lighting arrangement for each camera position. Such variations in the light sources do not conform to reality, but they do enable filmmakers to create clear compositions for each shot.

Three-point lighting was particularly well suited for the high-key lighting used in classical Hollywood cinema and other filmmaking traditions. **High-key lighting** refers to an overall lighting design that uses fill light and backlight to create low contrast between brighter and darker areas. Usually, the light quality is soft, making shadow areas fairly transparent. The frames from *Jezebel* (4.66) and from *Catch Me If You Can* (4.67) exemplify high-key lighting. Hollywood directors and cinematographers have relied on this for comedies, adventure films, and most dramas.



4.70 In *Kanal,* low-key lighting creates a harsh highlight on one side of the woman's face, a deep shadow on the other.

> *"When I started watching films in the 1940s and 1950s, Indian cinematography was completely under the influence of Hollywood aesthetics, which mostly insisted on the 'ideal light' for the face, using heavy diffusion and strong backlight. I came to resent the complete disregard of the actual source of light and the clichéd use of backlight. Using backlight all the time is like using chili powder in whatever you cook."*
>
> — Subrata Mitra, cinematographer

High-key lighting is not used simply to render a brightly lit situation, such as a dazzling ballroom or a sunny afternoon. High-key lighting is an overall approach to illumination that can suggest different lighting conditions or times of day. Consider, for example, two frames from *Back to the Future.* The first shot **(4.68)** uses high-key illumination matched to daylight and a brightly lit malt shop. The second frame **(4.69)** is from a scene set in a room at night, but it still uses the high-key approach, as can be seen from the lighting's softness, its low contrast, and its detail in shadow areas.

Low-key illumination creates stronger contrasts and sharper, darker shadows. Often the lighting is hard, and fill light is lessened or eliminated altogether. The effect is of *chiaroscuro,* or extremely dark and light regions within the image. An example is **4.70**, from Andrzej Wajda's *Kanal.* Here the fill light and background light are significantly less intense than in high-key technique. As a result, shadow areas on the left third of the screen remain hard and opaque. In **4.71**, a low-key shot from Leos Carax's *Mauvais sang,* the key light is hard and comes from the side. Carax eliminates both fill and background illumination, creating very sharp shadows and a dark void around the characters.

As our examples indicate, low-key lighting has usually been applied to somber or mysterious scenes. It was common in horror films of the 1930s and films noirs (dark films) of the 1940s and 1950s. The low-key approach was revived in the 1980s in such films as *Blade Runner* and *Rumble Fish* and continued in the 1990s in films noirs like *Se7en* and *The Usual Suspects.* In *El Sur* **(4.72)**, Victor Erice's low-key lighting yields dramatic chiaroscuro effects that portray the adult world as a child imagines it.

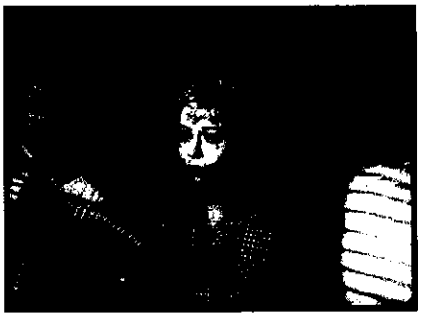
When the actors move, the director must decide whether to alter the lighting. By overlapping several different key lights, the filmmaker can maintain a constant intensity as actors move around the set. Although constant lighting is not particularly realistic, it has advantages, the main one being that distracting shadows and highlights do not move across actors. At the end of Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria,* for example, the heroine moves diagonally toward us, accompanied by a band of singing young people **(4.73, 4.74)**. Alternatively, the filmmaker may have his or her figures move through patches of light and shadow. The sword fight in *Rashomon* is intensified by the contrast between the ferocious combat and the cheerfully dappled lighting pouring into the glade **(4.75)**.

We tend to think of film lighting as limited to two colors—the white of sunlight or the soft yellow of incandescent interior lamps. In practice, filmmakers who choose to control lighting typically work with as purely white a light as they can. By use of filters placed in front of the light source, the filmmaker can color the onscreen illumination in any fashion. There may be a realistic source in the scene

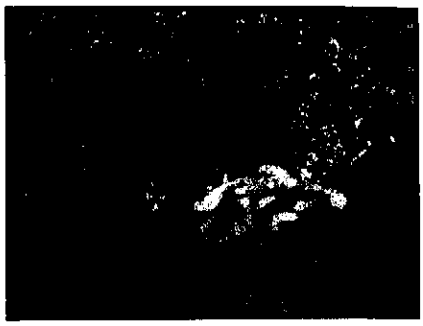
4.71 In *Mauvais sang,* a single key light without any fill on the actress's face leaves her expression nearly invisible.

4.72 Low-key lighting in *El Sur* suggests a child's view of the adult world as full of mystery and danger.

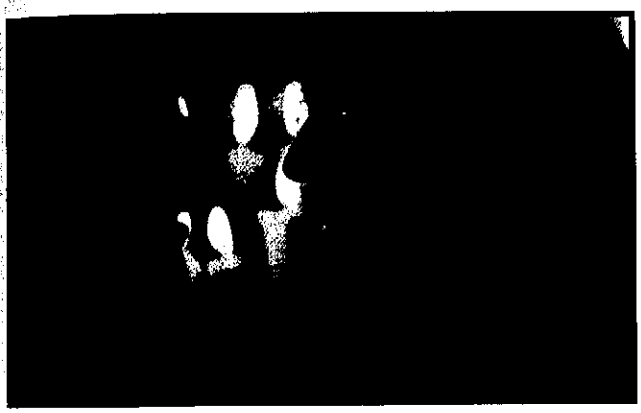
4.73 In *Nights of Cabiria,* the heroine is surrounded by a band young street musicians.



4.74 As she walks, the lighting on her face does not change, enabling us to notice slight changes in her expression.



4.75 Dappled lighting in *Rashomon.*



4.76 An orange filter suggests that all the light in this scene from *The Green Room* comes from candles.

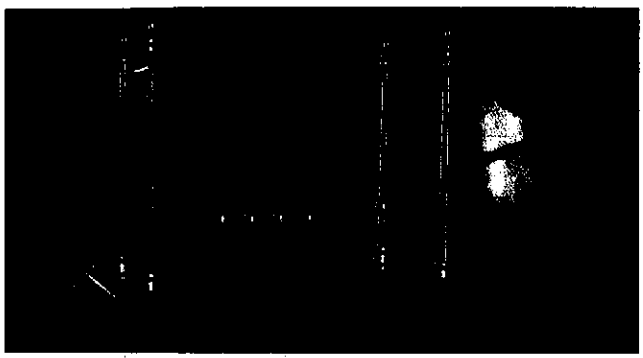
4.77 In *Ivan the Terrible,* a character's fear registers on his face . . .

4.78 . . . but a blue light also suddenly and briefly shines on it until it disappears and the scene continues.

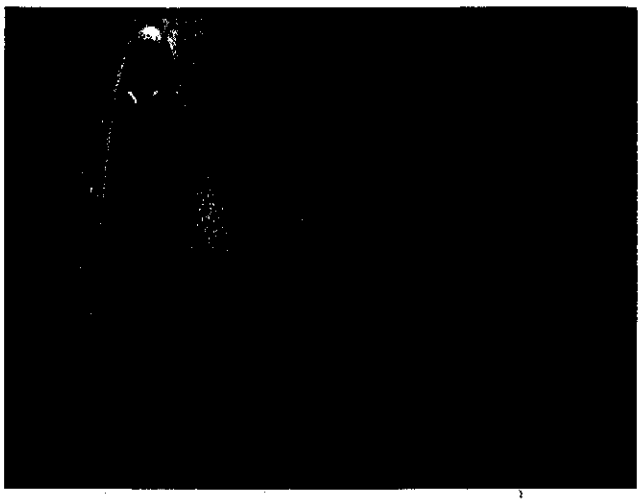
to motivate the hue of the light. For example, cinematographers often use filters over lighting equipment to suggest the orange tint of candlelight, as in François Truffaut's *The Green Room* **(4.76)**. But colored light can also be unrealistic in its motivation. Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible,* Part 2, uses a blue light suddenly cast on an actor, nondiegetically, to suggest the character's terror and uncertainty **(4.77, 4.78)**. Such a shift in stylistic function—using colored light to perform a function usually confined to acting—is all the more effective because it is so unexpected.

Most film lighting is applied during shooting, but computer-generated imagery allows filmmakers to create virtual lighting designs. Powerful 3D programs enable filmmakers to add broad overall illumination or strongly directional effects. Spotlights can sprinkle highlights on shiny metal, while "shader" tools model objects with attached shadows. In normal filming, filmmakers must reduce the vast amount of visual information in front of the camera, using lighting to clarify and simplify the space. In contrast, digital lighting is built up little by little from simple elements. For this reason, it is very time-consuming; a program may need a day and a night to render moving cast shadows in a single shot. Still, new software and faster computers are likely to accelerate the work process.

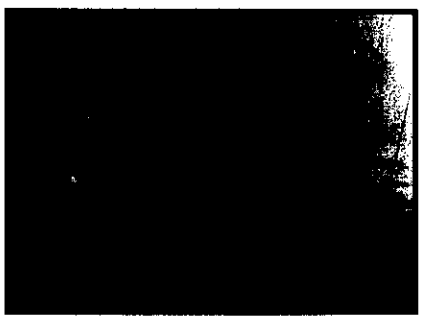
We are used to ignoring the illumination of our everyday surroundings, so film lighting is also easy to take for granted. Yet the look of a shot is centrally controlled by light quality, direction, source, and color. The filmmaker can manipulate and combine these factors to shape the viewer's experience in a great many ways. No component of mise-en-scene is more important than "the drama and adventure of light."



4.79 In *The Hudsucker Proxy,* when the mailboy Norville proposes his new toy idea, the clicking balls on his boss's desktop suddenly and inexplicably stop.



4.80 The abstract film *Parabola* uses lighting and a pure background to emphasize sculptural forms.



4.81 The actors strike weary poses in *Seven Samurai.*

4.82 In *White Heat,* Cody Jarrett (James Cagney) bursts up from the prison mess table after learning of his mother's death.

Staging: Movement and Performance

The director may also control the behavior of various figures in the mise-en-scene. Here the word *figures* covers a wide range of possibilities, since the figure may represent a person but could also be an animal (Lassie, the donkey Balthasar, Donald Duck), a robot (R2D2 and C3PO in the *Star Wars* series), an object (**4.79**), or even a pure shape (**4.80**). Mise-en-scene allows such figures to express feelings and thoughts; it can also dynamize them to create various kinetic patterns.

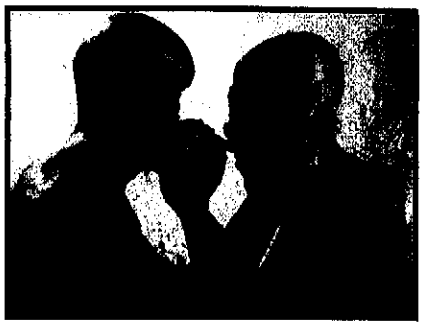
In **4.81**, from *Seven Samurai,* the samurai have won the battle with the bandits. Virtually the only movement in the frame is the driving rain, but the slouching postures of the men leaning on their spears express their tense weariness. In contrast, in *White Heat,* explosive movement and ferocious facial expression present an image of psychotic rage (**4.82**).

In cinema, facial expression and movement are not restricted to human figures. Chapter 10 will discuss animation's flexibility in combining abstract drawings or three-dimensional objects with highly dynamic movement. For example, in science fiction and fantasy films, monsters and robots may be given expressions and gestures through the technique of *stop-action* (also called *stop-motion*). Typically, a small-scale model is made with articulated parts. In filming, it is posed as desired, and a frame or two is shot. Then the figure is adjusted slightly and another frame or two is exposed, and so on. The result on screen is a continuous, if sometimes jerky, movement. The horrendous onslaught of ED-209, the crime-fighting robot in *Robocop,* was created by means of a 12-inch miniature filmed in stop-action (**4.83**). (A full-scale but unmoving model was also built for long shots.) Stop-action can also be used for more abstract and unrealistic purposes, as in Jan Švankmajer's *Dimensions of Dialogue* (**4.84**).

The filmmaker can stage action without three-dimensional objects moving in real space. Drawings of characters who never existed, like Aladdin or Daffy Duck, can be used in animated films. Dinosaurs and fabulous monsters created only as models can be scanned and made to move in a lifelike fashion through computer-generated imagery (see 1.29).

Acting and Actuality Although abstract shapes and animated figures can become important in the mise-en-scene, the most intuitively familiar cases of figure expression and movement are actors playing roles. Like other aspects of mise-en-scene, the performance is created in order to be filmed. An actor's performance

4.83 A miniature used in *Robocop.*



4.84 A conversation between clay figures degenerates as they begin to claw each other to bits in *Dimensions of Dialogue.*

consists of visual elements (appearance, gestures, facial expressions) and sound (voice, effects). At times, of course, an actor may contribute only visual aspects, as in the silent era. Similarly, an actor's performance may sometimes exist only on the sound track of the film; in *A Letter to Three Wives,* Celeste Holm's character, Addie Ross, speaks a narration over the images but never appears on the screen.

Acting is often approached as a question of realism. But concepts of realistic acting have changed over film history. Today we may think that the performances of Russell Crowe and Renee Zellweger in *Cinderella Man* or those given by Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal in *Brokeback Mountain* are reasonably close to people's real-life behavior. Yet in the early 1950s, the New York Actors Studio style, as exemplified by Marlon Brando's performances in *On the Waterfront* and *A Streetcar Named Desire,* was also thought to be extremely realistic. Fine though we may still find Brando's work in these films, it seems deliberate, heightened, and quite unrealistic. The same might be said of the performances, by professional and amateur actors alike, in post–World War II Italian neorealist films. These were hailed when they first appeared as almost documentary depictions of Italian life, but many of them now seem to us to contain polished performances suitable to Hollywood films. Already, major naturalistic performances of the 1970s, such as Robert De Niro's protagonist in *Taxi Driver,* seem quite stylized. Who can say what the acting in *The Insider, In the Bedroom,* and other recent films will look like in a few decades?

Changing views of realism are not the only reason to be wary of this as a concept for analyzing acting. Often, when people call a performance unrealistic, they are evaluating it as bad. But not all films try to achieve realism. Since the performance an actor creates is part of the overall mise-en-scene, films contain a wide variety of acting styles. Instead of assuming that acting must be realistic, we should try to understand what kind of acting style the film is aiming at. If the functions of acting in the film are best served by a nonrealistic performance, that is the kind that the skillful actor will strive to present. Obvious examples of nonrealistic acting style can be found in *The Wizard of Oz,* for fantasy purposes. (How would a real Wicked Witch behave?) Moreover, realistic performance will always be only one option in film acting. In mass-production filmmaking from Hollywood, India, Hong Kong, and other traditions, overblown performances are a crucial source of the audience's pleasure. Viewers do not expect narrowly realistic acting from Jim Carrey or from martial-arts stars such as Jet Li or Jackie Chan.

Finally, when we watch any fictional film, we are to some degree aware that the performances on the screen are the result of the actors' skills and decisions. (See "A Closer Look.") When we use the phrase "larger than life" to describe an effective performance, we seem to be tacitly acknowledging the actor's deliberate craft. In analyzing a particular film, it is usually necessary to go beyond assumptions about realism and consider the functions and purposes that the actor's craft serves.

"I get impatient with many Hollywood films because there's this assumption that meaning or emotion is contained in those few square inches of an actor's face and I just don't see it that way at all. I think there's a power in withholding information, revealing things gradually. Letting the audience discover things within the frame in time, in the way they stand."

— Alison Maclean, director, *Crush*

THE FILM ACTOR'S TOOLKIT

We might think that the most important task facing an actor is reading dialogue in a convincing and stirring way. Certainly, voice and delivery are very important in cinema, but considered in terms of mise-en-scene, the actor is always part of the overall visual design. Many film scenes contain little or no dialogue, but at every moment onscreen, the actor must be in character. The actor and director shape the performance pictorially.

At all times, film actors use their faces. This was most evident before movies had sound, and theorists of the silent film were full of praise for the subtle facial acting of Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo, and Lillian Gish. Since some basic facial expressions (happiness, fear, anger) are understood easily across cultures, it's not surprising that silent film could become popular around the world. Today, with mainstream fiction films using many close-ups (see pp. 43–44), actor's faces are hugely enlarged, and the performers must control their expressions minutely.

The most expressive parts of the face are the brows, mouth, and eyes. All work together to signal how the character is responding to the dramatic situation. In *Jerry Maguire*, the accountant Dorothy Boyd accidentally meets Jerry at an airport baggage conveyor. She has a crush on him, partly because she admires the courageous mission statement he has issued to the sports agency they work for. As he starts to back off from the statement, she eagerly quotes it from memory; Renee Zellwegger's earnest smile and steady gaze suggest that she takes the issues more seriously than Jerry does **(4.85)**. This impression is confirmed when Jerry says, "Uh-huh," and studies her skeptically, his fixed smile signaling social politeness rather than genuine pride **(4.86)**. This encounter sets up one premise of the film—that Jerry's idealistic impulses will need constant shoring up, for he might at any moment slip back into being "a shark in a suit."

The eyes hold a special place in film. In any scene, crucial story information is conveyed by the direction of a character's glance, the use of eyelids, and the shape of the eyebrows. One of Chaplin's most heartrending moments comes in *City Lights*, when the blind flower girl, now sighted, suddenly realizes that he's her benefactor. Chaplin twirls a flower in his teeth, so we can't see the shape of his mouth; we must read yearning in his brows and rapt, dark gaze **(4.87)**.

4.85 Perky and sincere, Dorothy pledges allegiance to Jerry Maguire's idealistic memo.

4.86 Jerry smiles politely, but his sideways glance and brows suggest that he is a bit put off by her earnestness.

Normally, we don't stare intently at the people we talk with. We glance away about half the time to gather our thoughts, and we blink 10–12 times a minute. But actors must learn to look directly at each other, locking eyes and seldom blinking. If an actor glances away from the partner in the conversation, it suggests distraction or evasion. If an actor blinks, it suggests a reaction to what is happening in the scene (surprise, or anxiety). Actors playing forceful characters often stare fixedly. Anthony Hopkins said this of playing Hannibal Lecter: "If you don't blink you can keep the audience mesmerized." (See 10.1, 10.3.) In our *Jerry Maguire* scene, the protagonists watch each other fixedly. When Jerry does close his eyes in response to Dorothy's praise, it indicates his nervousness about confronting the issues that his mission statement raised.

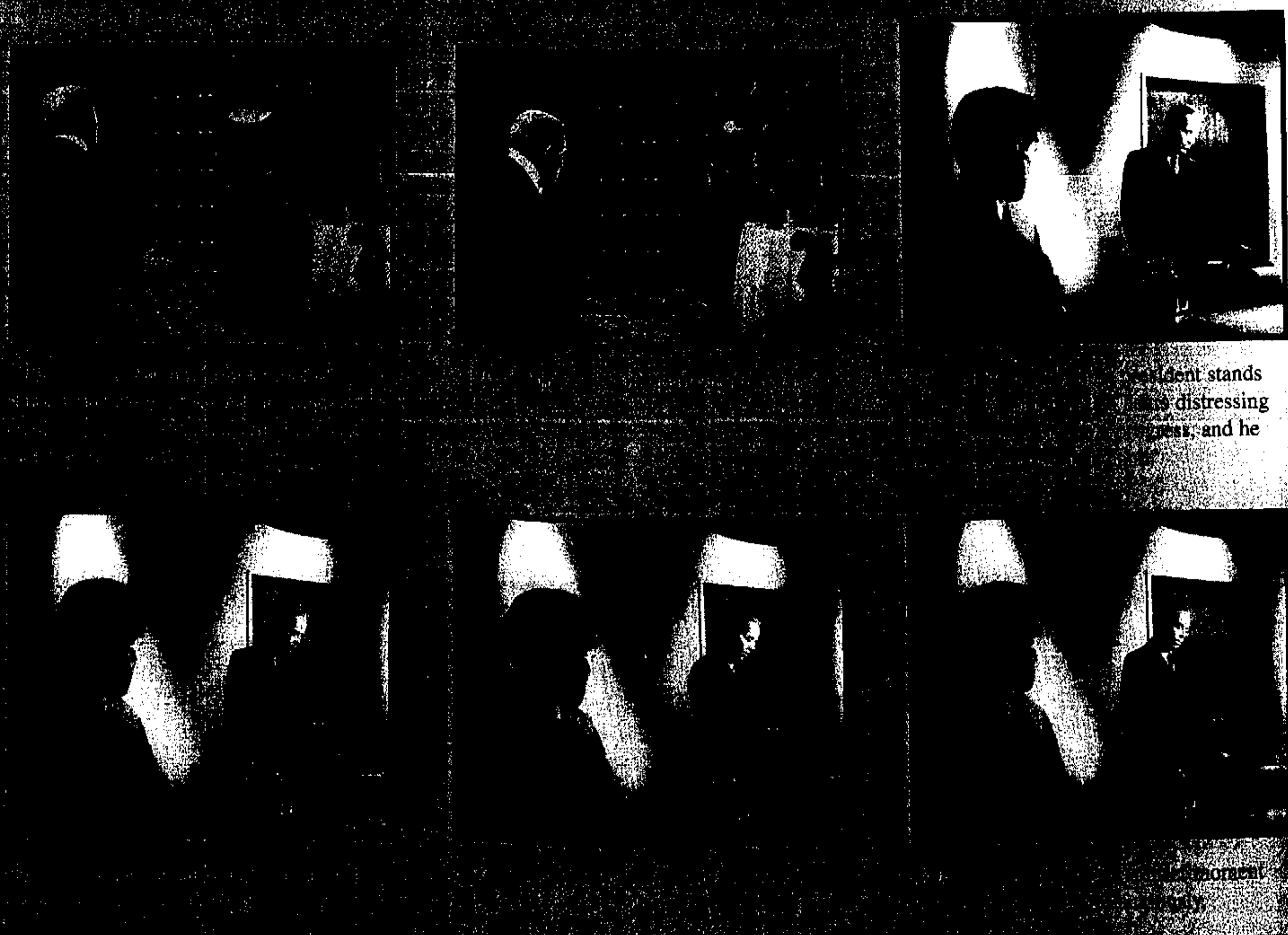
Actors act with their bodies as well. How a character walks, stands, or sits conveys a great deal about personality and attitude. In fact, during the 18th and 19th centuries, *attitude* was used to refer to the way a person stood. Stage acting gave early film a repertoire of postures that could express a character's state of mind. In the 1916 Italian film *Tigre Reale* (*The Royal Tigress*), the diva Pina Menichelli plays a countess with a shady past. At one point, she confesses this in a florid attitude that expresses noble suffering **(4.88)**. While few actors today would resort to this stylized posture, early film audiences would have accepted it as vividly expressive, like a movement in dance. Menichelli plays the rest of the scene more quietly, but she still employs expressive attitudes **(4.89, 4.90)**.

Chaplin's and Menichelli's gestures show that hands are important tools of the film actor. Hands are to the body what eyes are to the face: They focus our attention and evoke the character's thoughts and feelings. Actress Maureen O'Hara said of Henry Fonda, "All he had to do was wag his little finger and he could steal a scene from anybody." A good example can be seen in the doomsday thriller *Fail-Safe*. Henry Fonda plays the U.S. president, who has learned that an American warplane has been accidentally sent to bomb the Soviet Union. Fonda stands erect at the phone as he hears distressing news about the plane's progress, and he hangs up with his left hand **(4.91–4.94)**. By keeping most of the shot still and bare, director Sidney Lumet has given Fonda's fingers the main role, letting them express the president's measured prudence but also suggesting the strain of the crisis.

4.87 In the climax of *City Lights*, by concealing his mouth with the flower he twirls nervously, Chaplin obliges us to find his hope expressed in the upper part of his face.

4.88 In *Tigre Reale*, Menichelli's right hand seizes her hair, as if pulling her head back in agony; but her body still expresses defiance, thrust forward and standing firm as the left hand grips her waist.

continued



Acting: Functions and Motivation In 1985, Hollywood observers were surprised that Steve Martin wasn't nominated for an Academy Award for *All of Me.* In that film, Martin portrays a man whose body is suddenly inhabited on the right side by the soul of a woman who has just died. Martin used sudden changes of voice, along with acrobatic pantomime, to suggest a split body. In 1999, a similar outcry occurred when Jim Carrey was not nominated for an Oscar for *The Truman Show,* a comedy about a man who is unaware that his entire life has been broadcast as a sitcom on television. Neither Martin nor Carrey could be expected to perform realistically in the narrow sense of the word, since the situations they portray could not exist in the real world. Yet in the context of each of these fantasy-comedies, the performance is completely appropriate.

In films like *All of Me* and *The Truman Show,* a more muted and superficially realistic performance would clearly be inappropriate to the context established by the genre, the film's narrative, and the overall mise-en-scene. This suggests that a performance, realistic or not, should be examined according to its *function* in the context of the film.

We can consider performance along two dimensions. A performance will be more or less *individualized,* and it will be more or less *stylized.* Often we have both in mind when we think of a realistic performance: it creates a unique character, and it does not seem too exaggerated or too underplayed. Marlon Brando's portrayal of Don Vito Corleone in *The Godfather* is quite individualized. Brando gives the Godfather a complex psychology, a distinctive appearance and voice, and a string of facial expressions and gestures that make him significantly different from the

standard image of a gang boss. As for stylization, Brando keeps Don Vito in the middle range. His performance is neither flat nor flamboyant; he isn't impassive, but he doesn't chew the scenery either.

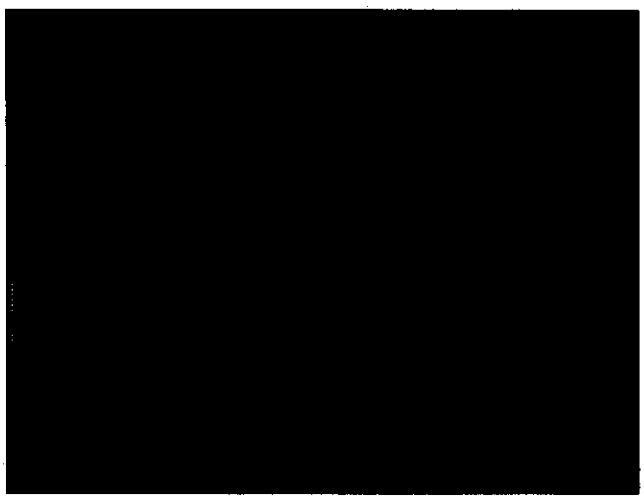
But this middle range, which we often identify with realistic performance, isn't the only option. On the individuality scale, films may create broader, more anonymous *types.* Classical Hollywood narrative was built on ideologically stereotyped roles: the Irish cop on the beat, the black servant, the Jewish pawnbroker, the wisecracking waitress or showgirl. Through *typecasting,* actors were selected and directed to conform to type. Often, however, skillful performers gave these conventions a freshness and vividness. In the Soviet cinema of the 1920s, several directors used a similar principle, called *typage.* Here the actor was expected to portray a typical representative of a social class or historical movement (**4.95, 4.96**).

Whether more or less typed, the performance can also be located on a continuum of stylization. A long tradition of film acting strives for a resemblance to what is thought of as realistic behavior. This sense of realism may be created by giving the actors small bits of business to perform while they speak their lines. Frequent gestures and movements by the actors add plausibility to the humor of Woody Allen's films (**4.97**). More intense and explicit emotions dominate *Winchester 73,* in which James Stewart plays a man driven by a desire for revenge (**4.98**).

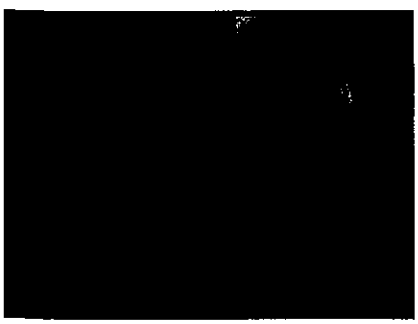
Psychological motivation is less important in a film like *Trouble in Paradise,* a sophisticated comedy of manners in which the main concern is with more stereotypical characters in a comic situation. In **4.99**, two women competing for the same man pretend to be friendly. Again, the performances are perfectly appropriate to the genre, narrative, and overall style of the film.

4.95 The opening of Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* presents the cartoonish cliché of the top-hatted capitalist . . .

4.96 . . . while in contrast the workers are later presented as earnest and resolute.



4.97 Verisimilitude in acting: Mia Farrow as Hannah, Diane Wiest as her sister Holly, and Carrie Fisher as their friend April set a table, chatting about the other guests in *Hannah and Her Sisters.*



4.98 In *Winchester 73,* Jimmy Stewart's mild manner occasionally erupts into explosions of anger, revealing him as on the brink of psychosis.

4.99 The exaggerated smiles and gestures in *Trouble in Paradise* are amusing because we know that each woman is trying to deceive the other.

4.100 Nikolai Cherkasov's dramatically raised arm and thrown-back head are appropriate to the heightened style of *Ivan the Terrible.*

Comedy doesn't provide the only motivation for greater stylization. *Ivan the Terrible* is a film that heightens every element—music, costume, setting—to create a larger-than-life portrait of its hero. Nikolai Cherkasov's broad, abrupt gestures fit in perfectly with all of these other elements to create an overall unity of composition **(4.100)**.

Some films may combine different degrees of stylization. *Amadeus* contrasts a grotesque, giggling performance by Tom Hulce as Mozart with Murray Abraham's suave Salieri. Here the acting sharpens the contrast between the older composer's decorous but dull music and the young man's irrepressible but offensive genius.

Films like *Caligari, Ivan the Terrible,* and *Amadeus* create stylized performances through extroversion and exaggeration. The director can also explore the possibilities of very muted performances. Compared to normal practice, highly restrained acting can seem quite stylized. Robert Bresson is noted for such restrained performances. Using nonprofessional actors and drilling them in the details of the characters' physical actions, Bresson makes his actors quite inexpressive by conventional standards **(4.101, 4.102)**. Although these performances may upset our expectations, we soon realize that such restraint focuses our attention on details of action we never notice in most movies.

Acting in the Context of Other Techniques By examining how an actor's performance functions in the context of the overall film, we can also notice how acting cooperates with other film techniques. For instance, the actor is always a

4.101 Playing the heroine of *Au Hasard Balthasar,* Anna Wiazemsky looks without expression at her would-be seducer, who wants her to get in his car . . .

4.102 . . . and glances downward, still without registering her thoughts, before getting into the car.

4.103 In *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* Cesare's body echoes the tilted tree trunks, his arms and hands their branches and leaves.

4.104 Jean Seberg in *Breathless,* an inexpressive performance or an enigmatic one?

graphic element in the film, but some films underline this fact. In *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* Conrad Veidt's dancelike portrayal of the somnambulist Cesare makes him blend in with the graphic elements of the setting (**4.103**). As we shall see in our examination of the history of film styles, the graphic design of this scene in *Caligari* typifies the systematic distortion characteristic of German Expressionism.

In *Breathless,* director Jean-Luc Godard juxtaposes Jean Seberg's face with a print of a Renoir painting (**4.104**). We might think that Seberg is giving a wooden performance, for she simply poses in the frame and turns her head. Indeed, her acting in the entire film may seem flat and inexpressive. Yet her face and general demeanor are visually appropriate for her role, a capricious American woman unfathomable to her Parisian boyfriend.

The context of a performance may also be shaped by the technique of film editing. Because a film is shot over a period of time, actors perform in bits. This can work to the filmmaker's advantage, since these bits can be selected and combined to build up a performance in ways that could never be accomplished on the stage. If a scene has been filmed in several shots, with alternate takes of each shot, the editor may select the best gestures and expressions and create a composite performance better than any one sustained performance could be. Through the addition of sound and the combination with other shots, the performance can be built up still further. The director may simply tell an actor to widen his or her eyes and stare offscreen. If the next shot shows a hand with a gun, we are likely to think the actor is depicting fear.

Camera techniques also create a controlling context for acting. Film acting, as most viewers know, differs from theatrical acting. At first glance, that suggests that cinema always call for more underplaying, since the camera can closely approach the actor. But cinema actually calls for a stronger interplay between restraint and emphasis.

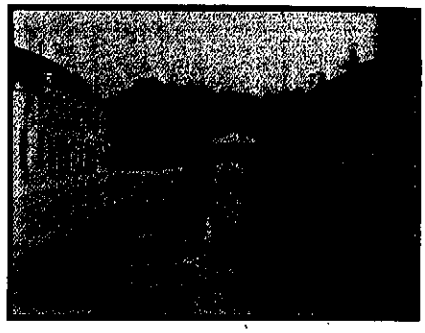
In a theater, we are usually at a considerable distance from the actor on the stage. We certainly can never get as close to the theater actor as the camera can put us in a film. But recall that the camera can be at *any* distance from the figure. Filmed from very far away, the actor is a dot on the screen—much smaller than an actor on stage seen from the back of the balcony. Filmed from very close, the actor's tiniest eye movement may be revealed.

Thus the film actor must behave differently than the stage actor does, but not always by being more restrained. Rather, she or he must be able to *adjust to each type of camera distance.* If the actor is far from the camera, he or she will have to gesture broadly or move around to be seen as acting at all. But if the camera and actor are inches apart, a twitch of a mouth muscle will come across clearly. Between these extremes, there is a whole range of adjustments to be made.

Basically, a scene can concentrate on either the actor's facial expression or on pantomimic gestures of the body. Clearly, the closer the actor is to the camera, the more the facial expression will be visible and the more important it will be (although the filmmaker may choose to concentrate on another part of the body, excluding the face and emphasizing gesture). But if the actor is far away from the camera, or turned to conceal the face, his or her gestures become the center of the performance.

Thus both the staging of the action and the camera's distance from it determine how we will see the actors' performances. Many shots in Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem* show the two main characters from a distance, so that their manner of walking constitutes the actors' performances in the scene (**4.105**). In conversation scenes, however, we see their faces clearly, as in **4.106**.

Such factors of context are particularly important when the performers are not actors, or even human beings. Framing, editing, and other film techniques can make trained animals give appropriate performances. Jonesy, the cat in *Aliens,* seems threatening because his hissing movement has been emphasized by lighting, framing, editing, and the sound track (**4.107**). In animated films, the



4.105 In this long shot from *The Spider's Strategem,* the stiff, upright way in which the heroine holds her parasol is one of the main facets of the actress's performance . . .

4.106 . . . while in a conversation scene we can see details of her eye and lip movements.

> *"You can ask a bear to do something like, let's say, 'Stand up,' and the bear stands up. But you cannot say to a bear, 'Look astonished.' So you have him standing up, but then you have to astonish him. I would bang two saucepans, or get a chicken from a cage, then shake it so it squawked, and the bear would think, 'What was that?' and 'click' I'd have that expression."*
>
> — Jean-Jacques Annaud, director, *The Bear*

4.107 A cat "acting" in *Aliens.*

4.108 Devil and thief puppets in *The Mascot.*

filmmaker's manipulation must go further, as in Ladislav Starevich's *The Mascot.* There a conversation between a devil and a thief includes subtle facial expressions and gestures, all created through the frame-by-frame manipulation of puppets **(4.108)**.

As with every element of a film, acting offers an unlimited range of distinct possibilities. It cannot be judged on a universal scale that is separate from the concrete context of the entire film's form.

Putting It All Together: Mise-en-Scene in Space and Time

Sandro and Claudia are searching for Anna, who has mysteriously vanished. Anna is Claudia's friend and Sandro's lover, but during their search, they've begun to drift from their goal of finding her. They've also begun a love affair. In the town of Noto, they stand on a church rooftop near the bells, and Sandro says he regrets giving up architectural design. Claudia is encouraging him to return to his art when suddenly he asks her to marry him.

She's startled and confused, and Sandro comes toward her. She is turned away from us. At first, only Sandro's expression is visible as he reacts to her plea "Why can't things be simpler?" **(4.109)**. Claudia twists her arms around the bell rope, then turns away from him, toward us, grasping the rope and fluttering her hand. Now we can see that she's quite distraught. Sandro, a bit uneasy, turns away as she says anxiously, "I'd like to see things clearly" **(4.110)**.

Brief though it is, this exchange in Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* ("The Adventure") shows how the tools of mise-en-scene—setting, costume, lighting, performance, and staging—can work together smoothly. We've considered them separately in order to examine the contribution each one makes, but in any shot, they mesh. They unfold on the screen in space and time, fulfilling several functions.

Most basically, the filmmaker has to guide the audience's attention to the most important areas of the image. We need to spot the items important for the ongoing action. The filmmaker also wants to build up our interest by arousing curiosity and suspense. And the filmmaker tries to add expressive qualities, giving the shot an emotional coloration. Mise-en-scene helps the filmmaker achieve all these purposes.

How did Antonioni guide our attention in the Claudia–Sandro exchange? First, we're watching the figures, not the railing behind them. Based on the story so far, we expect Sandro and Claudia to be the objects of interest. At other points in the film, Antonioni makes his couple tiny figures in massive urban or seaside landscapes. Here, however, his mise-en-scene keeps their intimate interchange foremost in our minds.

4.109 A striking instance of frontality in *L'Avventura:* The characters alternate . . .

4.110 . . . turning their backs on the camera.

Consider the first image merely as a two-dimensional picture. Both Sandro and Claudia stand out against the pale sky and the darker railing. They're also mostly curved shapes—heads and shoulders—and so they contrast with the geometrical regularity of the rails. In the first frame, light strikes Sandro's face and suit from the right, picking him out against the rails. His dark hair is well positioned to make his head stand out against the sky. Claudia, a blonde, stands out against the railing and sky less vividly, but her polka-dot blouse creates a distinctive pattern. And considered only as a picture, the shot roughly balances the two figures, Sandro in the left half and Claudia in the right.

It's hard to think of the shot as simply two-dimensional, though. We instinctively see it as portraying a space that we could move around in. Claudia seems closer to us because her body masks things farther away, a spatial cue called *overlap*. She's also somewhat larger in the frame than Sandro, which reinforces our sense that she's closer. The rope slices across the bottom third of the frame, separating her from him (overlap again). Sandro himself overlaps the railing, which in turn overlaps the sky and the town. We get a sense of distinct planes of space, layers lying closer to or farther from us. Elements of mise-en-scene like costume, lighting, setting, and figure placement create this sense of a three-dimensional arena for the action.

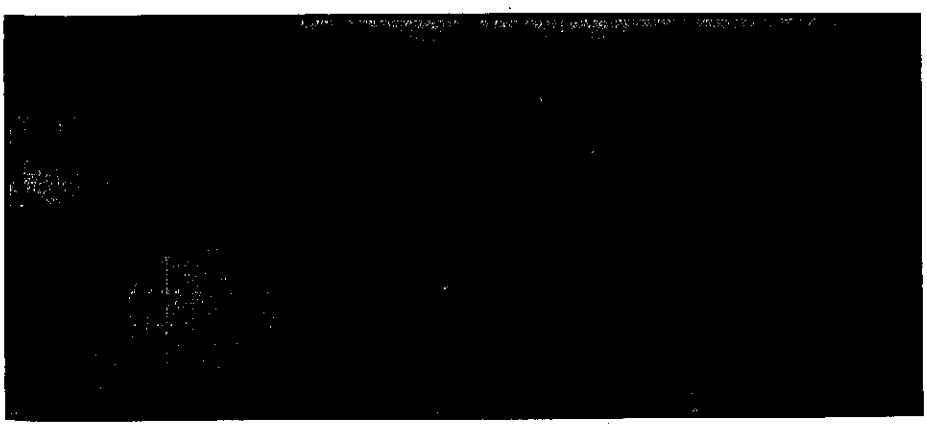
Antonioni has used mise-en-scene to emphasize his characters and their interaction. But that interaction unfolds in time, and it gives him an opportunity to guide our attention while building up suspense and expressing emotion. Claudia is turned away from us when Sandro presses her to marry him, and the rope is taut between them (4.109). How will she respond?

Antonioni starts by giving Claudia a bit of business. She twists the rope around her arms and slips it over her back. This could be a hint that she's drawn to Sandro's proposal. At the same time, she hesitates. For as soon as he presses her, she turns away from him (4.110).

We know that faces give us access to characters' thoughts and emotions. Another filmmaker might have had Claudia already facing us when Sandro asked, so we'd see her response immediately. Antonioni instead makes things uncertain for a moment. He has concealed Claudia's reaction and then lets her turn toward us. To make sure that we watch her and not Sandro at this moment, Antonioni has him turn away when she gestures and speaks ("I'd like to see things clearly"). Our attention is riveted on her.

Soon enough, Sandro turns back toward the camera, so we can see his reaction, but already Claudia's anxiety has flashed out at us. Her complex relation to Sandro—attraction (sliding under the bell rope) and uncertainty (turning away tensely)—has been presented to us concretely.

This is only one moment in a complex scene and complex film, but it shows how various elements of mise-en-scene can cooperate to create a specific effect—



4.111 Narrative expectations guide our eye to the main characters in *Tootsie*.

4.112 A limited palette emphasizes this symmetrical composition in *Life on a String.*

the delayed revelation of a character's emotion. That revelation couldn't have occurred without the director's choices about what to show us at particular points. When we look at an image, we look purposefully. What we notice is guided by our expectations about what might be significant.

Often the form of the whole film sets up our expectations. If a shot shows a crowd, we will tend to scan it looking for a character we recognize from earlier scenes. In **4.111**, although there are several people in the foreground of this shot from *Tootsie,* we will likely notice Julie (Jessica Lange) and Dorothy Michaels (Dustin Hoffman) quickly, since they are our main characters. Similarly, we notice Les, seen here for the first time, because he and Dorothy are exchanging smiles. Similarly, sound can become an important factor controlling our attention, as we shall see in Chapter 7. In addition to the film's story context, there are several ways directors can guide our expectations about what to notice. In the spirit of trying to grasp all the options on the mise-en-scene menu, let's look in more detail at the spatial and temporal possibilities.

Space

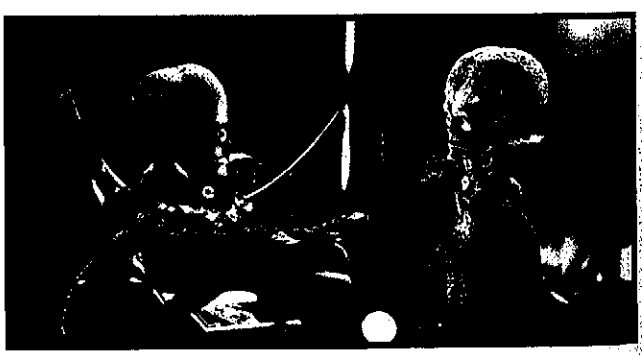
"The audience is only going to look at the most overriding thing in the frame. You must take charge of and direct their attention. It's also the principle of magic: what is the single important thing? Make it easy for them to see it, and you're doing your job."

— David Mamet, director

Screen Space In many respects, a film shot resembles a painting. It presents a flat array of colors and shapes. Before we even start to read the image as a three-dimensional space, mise-en-scene offers many cues for guiding our attention and emphasizing elements in the frame.

Take something as simple as balancing the shot. Filmmakers often try to distribute various points of interest evenly around the frame. They assume that viewers will concentrate more on the upper half of the frame, probably because that's

4.113 *Mars Attacks!:* centering a single character . . .



4.114 . . . and balancing two.

where we tend to find characters' faces. Since the film frame is a horizontal rectangle, the director usually tries to balance the right and left halves. The extreme type of such balancing is bilateral symmetry. In the battle scene in *Life on a String,* Chen Kaige stages the action symmetrically (**4.112**).

More common than such near-perfect symmetry is a loose balancing of the shot's left and right regions. The simplest way to achieve compositional balance is to center the frame on the human body. Filmmakers often place a single figure at the center of the frame and minimize distracting elements at the sides, as in **4.113**. Many of our earlier illustrations display this flexible balance. Other shots may counterweight two or more elements, encouraging our eye to move back and forth, as in **4.114** and our *L'Avventura* dialogue (4.109, 4.110).

Balanced composition is the norm, but unbalanced shots can also create strong effects. In *Bicycle Thieves,* the composition emphasizes the father's new job by massing most of the figures on the right. They don't balance the son, but he seems even more vulnerable by being such an ineffective counterweight (**4.115**). A more drastic example occurs in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il Grido* (**4.116**), where two strong elements, the hero and a tree trunk, are grouped on the right side of the shot. One could argue that the shot creates a powerful urge for the audience to see the woman's hidden face.

Sometimes the filmmaker will leave the shots a little unbalanced, in order to prime our expectation that something will change position in the frame. The cinema of the 1910s offers intriguing examples. Very often a doorway in the back of the set allowed the director to show that new characters were entering the scene, but

4.115 This composition from *Bicycle Thieves* emphasizes the father's new job by massing most of the figures on the right.

4.116 In *Il Grido,* instead of balancing the couple, the composition centers the man. If there were no tree in the frame, the shot would still be somewhat weighted to the right, but the unexpected vertical of the trunk makes that side even heavier.

4.117 From quite early in cinema history, filmmakers used unbalanced compositions to prepare the viewer for new narrative developments. In Yevgenii Bauer's *The Dying Swan* (1916), the young ballerina receives a tiara from an admirer.

4.118 She admires herself in a mirror, in a notably decentered framing.

4.119 As the ballerina lowers her arm, the door opens and her father appears.

4.120 Her father comes to the front area and balances the composition.

4.121 In V. I. Pudovkin's *Mother,* the spectator concentrates on the man's face rather than on the darkness surrounding it.

then figures closer to the camera had to be rearranged to permit a clear entrance. The result was a subtle unbalancing and rebalancing of the composition (**4.117–4.120**). In Chapter 6, we'll see how cutting can create a balance between two shots with relatively unbalanced compositions.

The filmmaker can guide our attention by use of another time-tested strategy, the principle of contrast. Our eyes are biased toward registering differences and changes. In most black-and-white films, light costumes or brightly lit faces stand out while darker areas tend to recede (**4.121**). If there are several light shapes in the frame, we'll tend to look from one to the other. But if the background is light, black elements will become prominent, as Sandro's hair does in our *L'Avventura* scene (4.109). The same principles work for color. A bright costume element shown against a more subdued setting is likely to draw the eye. Jiří Menzel exploits this principle in *Larks on a String* (**4.122**). Another pertinent principle is that when lightness values are equal, warm colors in the red-orange-yellow range tend to attract attention, while cool colors like purple and green are less prominent. In Yilmaz Güney's *Yol,* for example, the setting and the characters' outfits are already quite warm in hue, but the hot pink vest of the man in the central middle ground helps make him the primary object of attention (**4.123**).

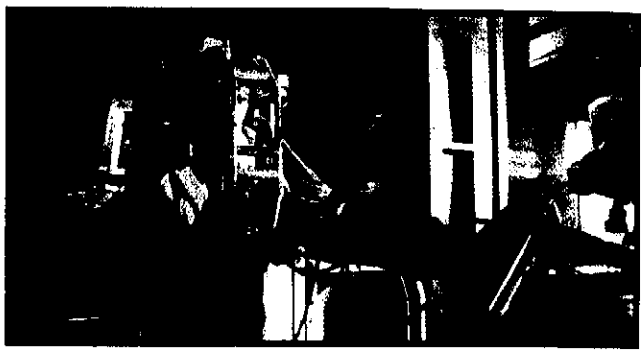
Color contrasts don't have to be huge, because we're sensitive to small differences. What painters call a *limited palette* involves a few colors in the same range, as in our earlier example from Fellini's *Casanova* (4.39). Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract* employs a limited palette from the cooler end of the spectrum (**4.124**). An extreme case of the principle is sometimes called **monochromatic** color design. Here the filmmaker emphasizes a single color, varying it only in purity or lightness. We've already seen an example of monochromatic mise-en-scene in the white décor and costumes of *THX 1138* (4.40). In a monochromatic design, even the slightest fleck of a contrasting color will catch the viewer's attention. The color design of *Aliens* is dominated by metallic tones, so even a dingy yellow can mark the stiltlike loader as an important prop in the narrative (**4.125**).

Film has one resource that painting lacks. Our tendency to notice visual differences shifts into high gear when the image includes *movement.* In the *L'Avventura* scene, the turning of Claudia's head became a major event, but we are sensitive to far smaller motions in the frame. Normally, for instance we ignore the movement of scratches and dust on a film. But in David Rimmer's *Watching for the Queen,* in which the first image is an absolutely static photograph (**4.126**), the jumping bits of dust on the film draw our attention. In **4.127**, from Yasujiro Ozu's *Record of a Tenement Gentleman,* many items compete for our attention. But the moment that a scrap of

4.122 In *Larks on a String,* the junkyard setting provides earthy grays and blacks against which the characters' lighter clothes stand out sharply.

4.123 Warm colors guide the eye in *Yol.*

4.124 *The Draughtsman's Contract* uses a limited palette of green, black, and white.



4.125 *Aliens* uses warm colors like yellow sparingly.

newspaper flaps, it immediately attracts the eye because it is the only motion in the frame.

When several moving elements appear on the screen, as in a ballroom dance, we are likely to shift our attention among them, according to other cues or depending on our expectations about which one is most salient to the narrative action. In **4.128**, from John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln,* Lincoln is moving much less than the dancers we see in front of him. Yet he is framed centrally, as the major character, and the dancers pass rapidly through the frame. As a result, we are likely to concentrate on his gestures and facial expressions, however slight they might be compared to the energetic action in the foreground.

4.126 *Watching for the Queen* emphasizes scratches and dust.

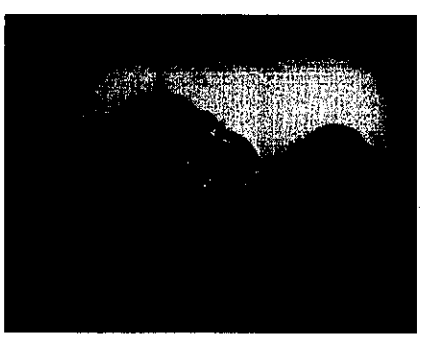
4.127 A tiny movement in *Record of a Tenement Gentleman.*

Scene Space Looking at a film image as a two-dimensional picture helps us appreciate the artistry of filmmakers, but it requires some effort. We find it easier to immediately see the edges and masses on the screen as a three-dimensional space, like the one we live in. The elements of the image that create this impression are called *depth cues.*

Depth cues are what enabled us to understand the encounter of Sandro and Claudia as taking place in a realistic space, with layers and volume. We develop our understanding of depth cues from our experience of real locales and from our earlier experience with pictorial media. In cinema, depth cues are provided by lighting, setting, costumes, and staging—that is, by all the aspects of mise-en-scene.

Depth cues suggest that a space has both *volume* and several distinct *planes.* When we speak of an object as having volume, we mean that it is solid and occupies a three-dimensional area. A film suggests volume by shape, shading, and movement. In 4.104 and **4.129**, we do not think of the actors' faces as flat cutouts, like paper dolls. The shapes of those heads and shoulders suggest solid people. The

4.128 Emphasizing a background figure in *Young Mr. Lincoln.*



4.129 Shading and shape suggest volume in Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc.*

4.130 A flat composition in Norman McLaren's *Begone, Dull Care.*

attached shadows on the faces suggest the curves and recesses of the actors' features and give a modeling effect. We assume that if the actor in 4.104 turned her head, we would see a profile. Thus we use our knowledge of objects in the world to discern volume in filmic space.

An abstract film, because it can use shapes that are not everyday objects, can create compositions without a sense of volume. The shapes in **4.130** give us no depth cues for volume—they are unshaded, do not have a recognizable shape, and do not move in such a way as to reveal new views that suggest roundness.

Depth cues also pick out *planes* within the image. Planes are the layers of space occupied by persons or objects. Planes are described according to how close to or far away from the camera they are: foreground, middle ground, background.

Only a completely blank screen has a single plane. Whenever a shape—even an abstract one—appears, we will perceive it as being in front of a background. In 4.130, the four red S shapes are actually painted right on the frame surface, as is the lighter, textured area. Yet the textured area seems to lie behind the four shapes. The space here has only two planes, as in an abstract painting. This example, like our *L'Avventura* scene, suggests that one of the most basic depth cues is **overlap**. The curling S shapes have edges that overlap the background plane, block our vision of it, and thus seem to be closer to us. In 4.115, the people overlap the ladders, so we understand that they are closer to the camera than the ladders are, while in 4.116, the tree overlaps the figure of the woman.

Through overlap, a great many planes can be defined. In 4.56, from Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise,* three distinct planes are displayed: the background of fashion cutouts, the woman's face that overlaps that background, and her hand, which overlaps her lower face. In the three-point lighting approach, edge-lighting accentuates the overlap of planes by emphasizing the contour of the object, thus sharply distinguishing it from the background. (See again 4.59, 4.64, and 4.66.)

Color differences also create overlapping planes. Because cool or pale colors tend to recede, filmmakers commonly use them for background planes such as setting. Similarly, because warm or saturated colors tend to come forward, such hues are often employed for costumes or other foreground elements, as in Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* (**4.131**). (See also 4.29, 4.34, and 4.125.)

Animated films can achieve brighter and more saturated color than most live-action filming, so depth effects can be correspondingly more vivid. In Chuck Jones's *One Froggy Evening* (**4.132**), the luminous yellow of the umbrella and the

4.131 In *Sambizanga,* the heroine's dress has very warm and fairly saturated colors, making it stand out distinctly against the pale background.

4.132 Vivid colors emphasize the sense of extreme depth in *One Froggy Evening.*

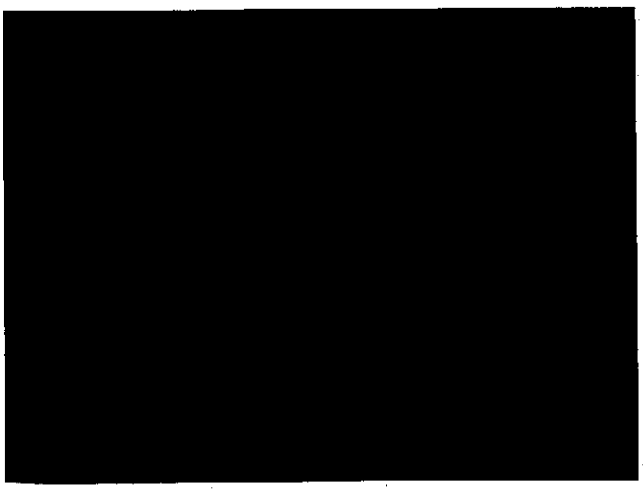
frog's brilliant green skin make him stand out against the darker red of the curtain and the earth tones of the stage floor.

Because of the eye's sensitivity to differences, even quite muted color contrasts can suggest three-dimensional space. In *L'Argent* (4.21–4.23), Robert Bresson uses a limited, cool palette and relatively flat lighting. Yet the compositions pick out several planes by means of overlapping slightly different masses of black, tan, and light blue. Our shot from *Casanova* (4.39) articulates planes by means of slightly differing shades of red. In *The Draughtsman's Contract* (4.124), much of our sense of distant space is created by strong black verticals and by horizontal strips of various shades of green. Together these colors define distinct layers in this scene.

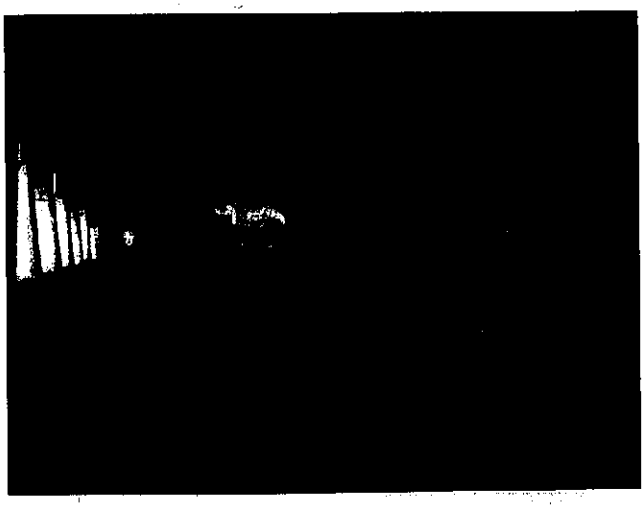
In cinema, *movement* is one of the most important depth cues, since it strongly suggests both planes and volumes (4.128). **Aerial perspective**, or the hazing of more distant planes, is yet another depth cue. Typically, our visual system assumes that sharper outlines, clearer textures, and purer colors belong to foreground elements. In landscape shots, the blurring and graying of distant planes can be caused by actual atmospheric haze, as in Güney's *The Wall* **(4.133)**. Even when such haze is a minor factor, our vision typically assigns strong color contrasts to the foreground, as in the *Sambizanga* shot (4.131). In addition, very often lighting is manipulated in conjunction with lens focus to blur the background planes **(4.134)**.

In **4.135**, the mise-en-scene provides several depth cues: overlap of edges, cast shadows, and **size diminution**. That is, figures and objects farther away from us are seen to get proportionally smaller; the smaller the figure appears, the farther away

4.133 Fog emphasizes the distance between the foreground and background trees in *The Wall.*



4.134 In Michael Curtiz's *The Charge of the Light Brigade,* aerial perspective is artificially created through diffused lighting of the background and a lack of clear focus beyond the foreground character.



4.135 Depth cues in Straub and Huillet's *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach.*

we believe it to be. This reinforces our sense of there being a deep space with considerable distances between the various planes.

The same illustration dramatically displays *linear perspective.* We will consider perspective relations in more detail in the next chapter, since they derive as much from properties of the camera lens as they do from mise-en-scene. For now, we can simply note that a strong impression of depth emerges when parallel lines converge at a distant vanishing point. *Off-center* linear perspective is illustrated in 4.135; note that the vanishing point is not the geometrical center. *Central* perspective is exemplified in 4.124 from *The Draughtsman's Contract.*

In many of the examples already given, you may have noticed that mise-en-scene serves not simply to direct our attention to foreground elements but rather to create a dynamic relation between foreground and background. In 4.56, for instance, Godard keeps our attention on the whole composition by using prominent backgrounds. Here the pictures behind the actress's head lead us to scan the various small shapes quickly.

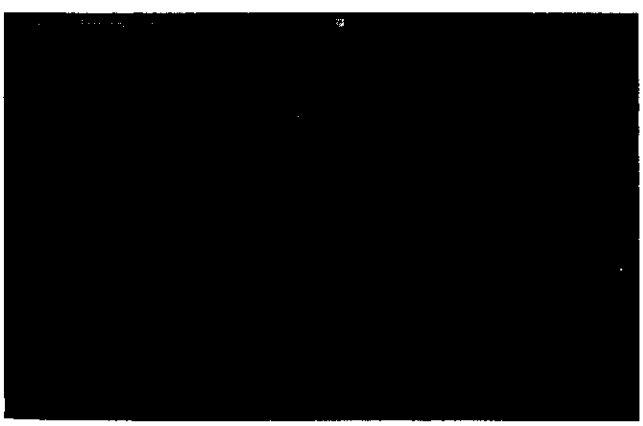
The *La Chinoise* shot is a **shallow-space** composition. In such shots, the mise-en-scene suggests comparatively little depth, and the closest and most distant planes seem only slightly separated. The opposite tendency is **deep-space** composition, in which a significant distance seems to separate planes. Our earlier example from *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (4.135) exemplifies deep-space mise-en-scene. Often a director creates a deep-space composition by making the foreground plane quite large and the background plane quite distant **(4.136)**.

Shallow and deep mise-en-scene are relative. Most compositions present a moderately deep space, falling between the extremes we have just considered. Sometimes a composition manipulates depth cues to make a space appear deeper or shallower than it really is—creating an optical illusion **(4.137)**.

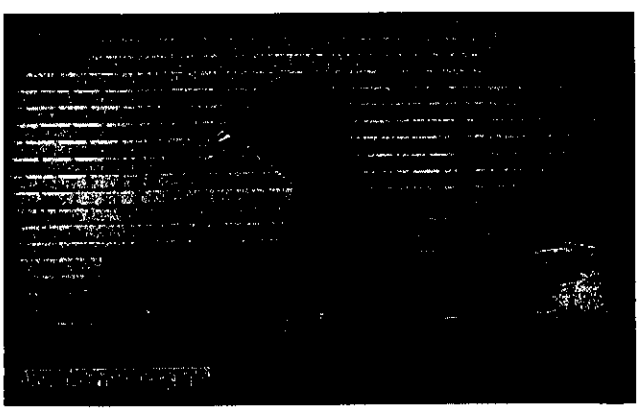
At this point, you might want to return to shots illustrated earlier in this chapter. You will notice that these images use depth cues of overlap, movement, cast shadows, aerial perspective, size diminution, and linear perspective to create distinctive foreground/background relations.

The fact that our vision is sensitive to differences allows filmmakers to guide our understanding of the mise-en-scene. All the cues to story space interact with one another, working to emphasize narrative elements, direct our attention, and set up dynamic relations among areas of screen space. We can see this interaction clearly in two shots from Carl Dreyer's *Day of Wrath.*

In the first shot, the heroine, Anne, is standing before a grillwork panel **(4.138)**. She is not speaking, but since she is a major character in the film, the narrative already directs us to her. Setting, lighting, costume, and figure expression create



4.136 Several scenes of Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* create large foreground and distant background planes.



4.137 Leo Carax flattens space in *Boy Meets Girl* by making the actor in the foreground seem to blend into the advertisement on the wall behind.

pictorial cues that confirm our expectations. The setting yields a screen pattern of horizontal and vertical lines that intersect in the delicate curves of Anne's face and shoulders. The lighting yields a patch of brightness on the right half of the frame and a patch of darkness on the left, creating pictorial balance. Anne is the meeting point of these two areas. Her face becomes modeled by the relatively strong key lighting from the right, a little top lighting on her hair, and relatively little fill light. Coordinated with the lighting in creating the pattern of light and dark is Anne's costume—a black dress punctuated by white collar, and a black cap edged with white—that again emphasizes her face.

The shot is comparatively shallow, displaying two major planes with little distance between them. The background sets off the more important element, Anne. The rigid geometrical grid in the rear makes Anne's slightly sad face the most expressive element in the frame, thus encouraging our eye to pause there. In addition, the composition divides the screen space horizontally, with the grid pattern running across the top half and the dark, severe vertical of Anne's dress dominating the lower half. As is common, the upper zone is the stronger because the character's head and shoulders occupy it. Anne's figure is positioned slightly off center, but with her face turned so as to compensate for the vacant area on the right. (Imagine how unbalanced the shot would look if she were turned to face us squarely and the same amount of space were left empty on the right.) Thus compositional balance reinforces the shot's emphasis on Anne's expression. In all, without using motion, Dreyer has channeled our attention by means of lines and shapes, lights and darks, and the foreground and background relations in the mise-en-scene.

In the second example, also from *Day of Wrath,* Dreyer coaxes our attention into a to-and-fro movement (**4.139**). Again, the plot guides us, since the characters and the cart are crucial narrative elements. Sound helps too, since Martin is at the moment explaining to Anne what the cart is used for. But mise-en-scene also plays a role. Size diminution and cast shadows establish basic foreground/background relations, with Anne and Martin on the front plane and the cart of wood in the background. The space is comparatively deep (though the foreground is not as exaggeratedly close as that in *Ashes and Diamonds,* 4.136). The prominence of the couple and the cart is reinforced by line, shape, and lighting contrasts. The figures are defined by hard edges and by dark costumes within the predominantly bright setting. Unlike most shots, this puts the human figures in the lower half of the frame, which gives that zone an unusual importance. The composition thus creates a vertical balance, counterweighting the cart with the couple. This encourages us to glance up and down between the two objects of our attention.

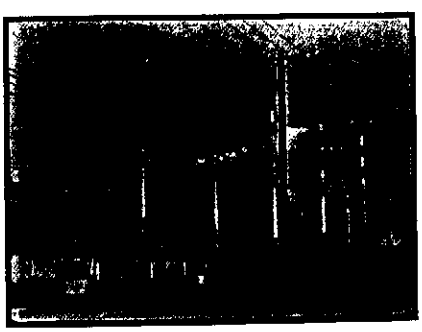
Similar processes are at work in color films. In one shot of Yasujiro Ozu's *An Autumn Afternoon* (**4.140**), our attention is concentrated on the bride in the center foreground. Here many depth cues are at work. Overlap locates the two figures in two foreground planes, setting them against a series of more distant planes. Aerial perspective makes the tree foliage somewhat out of focus. Movement creates depth when the bride lowers her head. Perspective diminution makes the more distant objects smaller. The figure and the bright silver, red, and gold bridal costume stand out strikingly against the muted, cool colors of the background planes. Moreover, the colors bring back a red-and-silver motif that began in the very first shot of the film (**4.141**).

In all these cases, compositional elements and depth cues have functioned to focus our attention on the narrative elements. But this need not always be the case. Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac* uses a limited palette of dark and metallic hues, and warmer colors tend to stand out (**4.142**). Such a distracting use of color becomes a stylistic motif in the film.

4.138 *Day of Wrath:* concentrating on a single figure.

4.139 *Day of Wrath:* dividing attention between foreground and background figures.

4.140 A simple shot from *An Autumn Afternoon* employs several depth cues.



4.141 The striped smokestacks establish a color motif for *An Autumn Afternoon.*

Time

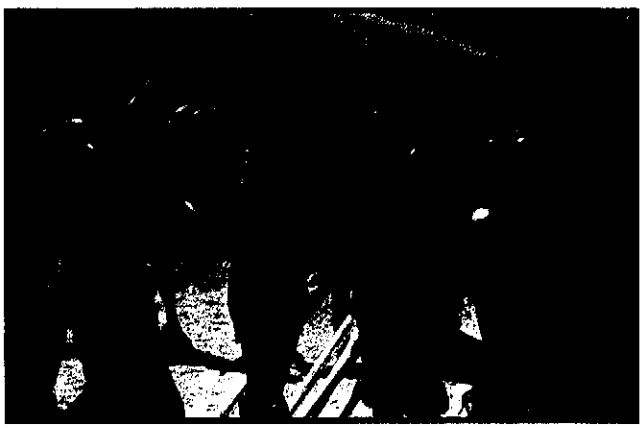
Cinema is an art of time as well as space. So we shouldn't be surprised to find that many of our examples of two-dimensional composition and three-dimensional

scenic space have unfolded over time. The director's control over mise-en-scene governs not only *what* we see but *when* we see it, and for how long. In our *L'Avventura* scene between Sandro and Claudia on the rooftop, the timing of the characters' movements—Sandro turning away just as Claudia turns toward us—contributes to the effect of a sudden, sharp revelation of her anxiety.

The director shapes the speed and direction of movement within the shot. Since our eyes are attuned to noticing changes, we can pick up the slightest cues. In **4.143**, from Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles,* the protagonist simply peels potatoes. This feminist film traces, in painstaking detail, the everyday routines of a Belgian housewife. The composition of this shot strongly centers Jeanne, and no competing movements distract us from her steady and efficient preparation of a meal. The same rhythm is carried throughout the film, so that when she does start to vary her habits, we are prepared to notice even the slight errors she makes under emotional pressure.

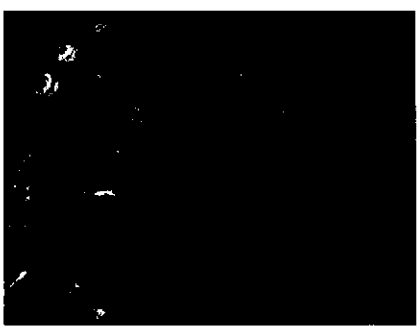
A far busier shot is **4.144**, from Busby Berkeley's *42nd Street.* This overhead view presents strongly opposed movements. The central and outer rings of dancers circle in one direction, while the second ring turns in a contrary direction. The dancers also swing strips of shiny cloth back and forth. The result is a partially abstract composition, but it's easy to grasp because the movement of the wheels within wheels has a geometrical clarity.

The dancers in *42nd Street* are synchronized to a considerable degree, but **4.145**, from Jacques Tati's *Play Time,* contains movements of differing speeds, with different visual accents. Moreover, they occur on different planes and follow



4.142 In *Lancelot du Lac,* a group of conversing knights is centered and balanced in the foreground planes, yet a pinkish-purple saddle blanket on a passing horse momentarily draws our eyes away from the action.

4.143 Slow, quiet movement in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles.*



4.144 Synchronized rhythm in *42nd Street.*

4.145 Competing rhythms of movement in a busy shot from *Play Time.*

contrasting trajectories. These diverse movements accord with Tati's tendency to cram his compositions with gags that compete for our attention.

As we have already seen, we scan any film frame for information. This scanning brings time sharply into play. Only a very short shot forces us to try to take in the image all at once. In most shots, we get an initial overall impression that creates formal expectations. These expectations are quickly modified as our eye roams around the frame.

As we'd expect, our scanning of the shot is strongly affected by the presence of movement. A static composition, such as our first shot from *Day of Wrath* (4.138), may keep pulling our attention back to a single element (here, Anne's face). In contrast, a composition emphasizing movement becomes more time-bound because our glance may be directed from place to place by various speeds, directions, and rhythms of movements. In the second image from *Day of Wrath* (4.139), Anne and Martin are turned from us (so that expression and gesture are minimized), and they are standing still. Thus the single movement in the frame—the cart—catches our attention. But when Martin speaks and turns, we look back at the couple, then back at the cart, and so on, in a shuttling, dynamic shift of attention.

Our time-bound process of scanning involves not only looking to and fro across the screen but also, in a sense, looking into its depths. A deep-space composition will often use background events to create expectations about what is about to happen in the foreground. "Composing in depth isn't simply a matter of pictorial richness," British director Alexander Mackendrick has remarked. "It has value in the narrative of the action, the pacing of the scene. Within the same frame, the director can organize the action so that preparation for what will happen next is seen in the background of what is happening now."

Our example from *The Dying Swan* (4.117-4.120) illustrates MacKendrick's point. The same principle is used in **4.146–4.148**, from *Three Kings*. Here the frame starts off unbalanced, and the fact that it includes a background doorway prepares us for the scene's dramatic development. In addition, any movement from

4.146 In this shot from *Three Kings*, Chief Elgin comes in to tell the partying GIs that their superior is coming. Normally, when a character is looking offscreen left, he or she is set a little off center toward the right. But Elgin is set to the left, leaving the tent flap behind him prominent. Without being aware of it, we expect some action to develop there.

4.147 Confirming Elgin's warning, the superior officer bursts into the background.

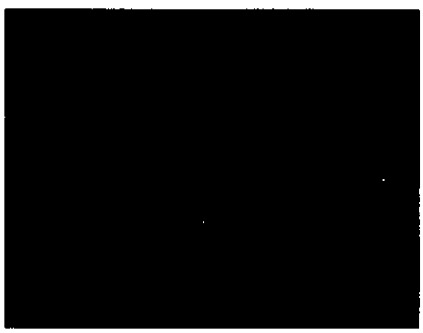
4.148 The officer comes forward, which is always a powerful way to command the viewer's attention. He moves aggressively into close-up, ramping up the conflict as he demands to know where the men got alcohol.

background to foreground is a strong attention-getter. At moments like these, the mise-en-scene is preparing us for what will happen, and by arousing our expectations, the style engages us with the unfolding action.

The *Dying Swan* and *Three Kings* examples also illustrate the power of *frontality.* In explaining one five-minute shot in his film *Adam's Rib,* George Cukor signaled this. He remarked how the defense attorney was positioned to focus our attention on her client, who's reciting the reasons she shot her husband **(4.149)**. Katharine Hepburn "had her back to the camera almost the whole time, but that had a meaning: she indicated to the audience that they should look at Judy Holliday. We did that whole thing without a cut."

All other things being equal, the viewer expects that more story information will come from a character's face than from a character's back. The viewer's attention will thus usually pass over figures that are turned away and fasten on figures that are positioned frontally. A more distant view can exploit frontality, too. In Hou Hsiao-hsien's *City of Sadness,* depth staging centers the Japanese woman coming to visit the hospital, and a burst of bright fabric also draws attention to her **(4.150)**. Just as important, the other characters are turned away from us. It's characteristic of Hou's style to employ long shots with small changes in figure movement. The subdued, delicate effect of his scenes depends on our seeing characters' faces in relation to others' bodies and the overall setting.

Frontality can change over time to guide our attention to various parts of the shot. We've already seen alternating frontality at work in our *L'Avventura* scene, when Sandro and Claudia turn to and away from us (4.109, 4.110). When actors are in dialogue, a director may allow frontality to highlight one moment of one actor's performance, then give another performer more prominence **(4.151, 4.152)**. This device reminds us that mise-en-scene can borrow devices from theatrical staging.



4.149 In *Adam's Rib,* the wife who has shot her husband is given the greatest emphasis by three-point lighting, her animated gestures, and her frontal positioning. Interestingly, the exact center of the frame is occupied by a nurse in the background, but Cukor keeps her out of focus and unmoving so that she won't distract from Judy Holliday's performance.

4.150 Although she is farther from the camera, the woman visiting the hospital in *City of Sadness* draws our eye partly because she is the only one facing front.

4.151 In a conversation in *The Bad and the Beautiful,* our attention fastens on the studio executive on the right because the other two characters are turned away from us . . .

4.152 . . . but when the producer turns to the camera, his centered position and frontal posture emphasize him.

4.153 Mise-en-scene in the widescreen frame in *Rebel Without a Cause.*

4.154 Jim comes forward, drawing our attention and arousing expectations of a dramatic exchange.

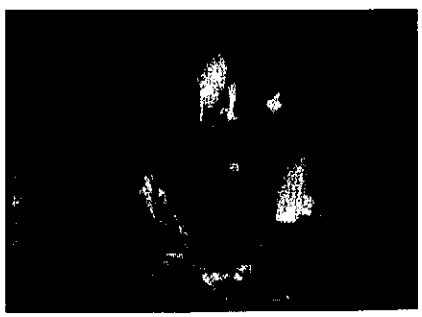
4.155 Jim offers Plato his jacket, his action centered and his brightly lit white shirt making him the dominant player. Judy remains a secondary center of interest, segregated by the office window and highlighted by her bright red coat.

4.156 Judy turns abruptly, and her face's frontal position signals her interest in Jim.

A flash of frontality can be very powerful. In the opening scene of *Rebel Without a Cause,* three teenagers are being held at the police station **(4.153)**. They don't know one another yet. When Jim sees that Plato is shivering, he drunkenly comes forward to offer Plato his sport coat **(4.154, 4.155)**. Jim's frontality, forward movement, bright white shirt, and central placement emphasize his gesture. Just as Plato takes the coat, Judy turns and notices Jim for the first time **(4.156)**. Like Claudia's sudden turn to the camera in our first example, this sudden revelation spikes our interest. It prepares us for the somewhat tense romance that will develop between them in later scenes. Overall, the scene's setting, lighting, costume, and staging cooperate to develop the drama.

The director can also achieve a strong effect by denying frontality, keeping us in suspense about what a character's face reveals. At a climactic moment in Kenji Mizoguchi's *Naniwa Elegy,* some of the cues for emphasis are reversed **(4.157, 4.158)**. We get a long shot rather than a closer view, and the character is turned from us and moving away from the camera, through patches of darkness. Ayako is confessing to her suitor that she's been another man's mistress. Her withdrawal conveys a powerful sense of shame, and we, like her friend, have to judge her sincerity based on her posture and voice. In this and our other examples, several techniques of mise-en-scene dovetail from moment to moment in order to engage us more vividly with the action.

4.157 At the height of the drama in *Naniwa Elegy,* Kenji Mizoguchi has the heroine move away from us, into depth . .



4.158 . . . and as she passes through patches of distant darkness, our curiosity about her emotional state intensifies.

Narrative Functions of Mise-en-Scene in *Our Hospitality*

Our Hospitality, like most of Buster Keaton's films, exemplifies how mise-en-scene can economically advance the narrative and create a pattern of motifs. Since the film is a comedy, the mise-en-scene also creates gags. *Our Hospitality,* then,

All of these devices for narrative economy considerably unify the film, but some other elements of mise-en-scene function as specific motifs. For one thing, there is the repeated squabble between the anonymous husband and wife. On his way to his estate, Willie passes a husband throttling his wife. Willie intervenes to protect her; the wife proceeds to thrash Willie for butting in. On Willie's way back, he passes the same couple, still fighting, but studiously avoids them. Nevertheless, the wife aims a kick at him as he passes. The mere repetition of the motif strengthens the film's narrative unity, but it functions thematically, too, as another joke on the contradictions surrounding the idea of hospitality.

Other motifs recur. Willie's first hat is too tall to wear in a jouncing railway coach. (When it gets crushed, he swaps it for the trademark flat Keaton hat.) Willie's second hat serves to distract the Canfields when Willie coaxes his dog to fetch it. There is also a pronounced water motif in the film. Water as rain conceals from us the murders in the prologue and later saves Willie from leaving the Canfield home after dinner ("It would be the death of anyone to go out on a night like this!"). Water as a river functions significantly in the final chase. And water as a waterfall appears soon after Willie's arrival in the South (**4.164**). This waterfall initially protects Willie by hiding him (**4.165, 4.166**) but later threatens both him and the Canfield daughters as they are nearly swept over it (4.172).

4.164 After an explosion demolishes a dam, the water spills over a cliff and creates a waterfall.

4.165 The new waterfall begins to hide Willie as he sits fishing . . .

4.166 . . . and by the time the Canfields rush into the foreground, he is invisible.

Two specific motifs of setting help unify the narrative. First there is the recurrence of an embroidered sampler hanging on the Canfield wall: "Love Thy Neighbor." It appears initially in the prologue of the film, when seeing it motivates Canfield's attempt to stop the feud. It then plays a significant role in linking the ending back to the beginning. The sampler reappears at the end when Canfield, enraged that Willie has married his daughter, glances at the wall, reads the inscription, and resolves to halt the years of feuding. His change in attitude is motivated by the earlier appearance of the motif.

The film also uses gun racks as a motif. In the prologue, each feuder goes to his mantelpiece to get his pistol. Later, when Willie arrives in town, the Canfields hurry to their gun rack and begin to load their pistols. Near the end of the film, when the Canfields return home after failing to find Willie, one of the sons notices that the gun rack is now empty. And, in the final shot, when the Canfields accept the marriage and lay down their arms, Willie produces from all over his person a staggering assortment of pistols taken as a precaution from the Canfields' own supply. Thus mise-en-scene motifs unify the film through their repetition, variation, and development.

Yet *Our Hospitality* is more than a film whose narrative system relates economically to patterns of mise-en-scene. It is a comedy, and one of the funniest. We should not be surprised to find, then, that Keaton uses mise-en-scene for gags. Indeed, so unified is the film that most of the elements that create narrative economy also function to yield comic effects.

The mise-en-scene bristles with many individually comic elements. Settings are exploited for amusement—the ramshackle McKay estate, the Broadway of 1830, the specially cut train tunnel that just fits the old-fashioned train and its smokestack (**4.167**). Costume gags also stand out. Willie's disguise as a woman is exposed by a gap in the rear of his skirt; later, Willie puts the same costume on a horse to distract the Canfields. Most strongly, comedy arises from the behavior of the figures. The railroad engineer's high kick unexpectedly swipes off his conductor's hat (**4.168**). The elder Canfield sharpens his carving knife with ferocious energy, just inches from Willie's head. When Willie lands at the bottom of the river, he stands there looking left and right, his hand shading his eyes, before he realizes where he is. Later, Willie scuds down the river, leaping out of the water like a fish and skidding across the rocks.

Perhaps the only aspect of mise-en-scene that competes with the comic brilliance of the figures' behavior is the film's use of deep space for gags. Many of the shots we have already examined function to create comedy as well: The engineer

stands firmly oblivious to the separation of train cars from the engine (see 4.161) just as Willie is unaware that the Canfield boy is lurking murderously in the foreground (4.163).

Even more striking, though, is the deep-space gag that follows the demolition of the dam. The Canfield boys have been searching the town for Willie. In the meantime, Willie sits on a ledge, fishing. As the water bursts from the dam and sweeps over the cliff, it completely engulfs Willie (4.165). At that very instant, the Canfield brothers step into the foreground from either side of the frame, still looking for their victim (4.166). The water's concealment of Willie reduces him to a neutral background for the movement of the Canfields. This sudden eruption of new action into the scene surprises us, rather than generating suspense, since we were not aware that the Canfield sons were so close by. Here surprise is crucial to the comedy.

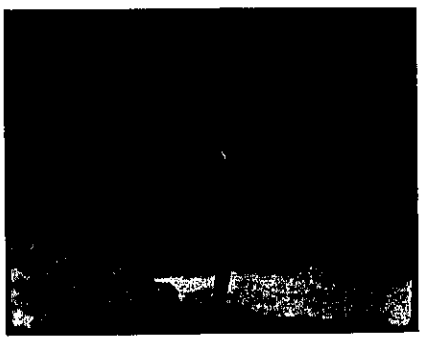
However appealing the individual gags are, *Our Hospitality* patterns its comic aspects as strictly as it does its other motifs. The film's journey pattern often arranges a series of gags according to a formal principle of theme and variations. For instance, during the train trip South, a string of gags is based on the idea of people encountering the train. Several people turn out to watch it pass, a tramp rides the rods, and an old man chucks rocks at the engine. Another swift series of gags takes the train tracks themselves as its theme. The variations include a humped track, a donkey blocking the tracks, curled and rippled tracks, and finally no tracks at all.

But the most complex theme-and-variations series can be seen in the motif of "the fish on the line." Soon after Willie arrives in town, he is angling and hauls up a minuscule fish. Shortly afterward, a huge fish yanks him into the water **(4.169)**. Later in the film, through a series of mishaps, Willie becomes tied by a rope to one of the Canfield sons. Many gags arise from this umbilical-cord linkage, especially one that results in Canfield's being pulled into the water as Willie was earlier.

Perhaps the single funniest shot in the film occurs when Willie realizes that since the Canfield boy has fallen off the rocks **(4.170)**, so must he **(4.171)**. But even after Willie gets free of Canfield, the rope remains tied around his waist. So in the film's climax, Willie is dangling from a log over the waterfall **(4.172)**. Here again, one element fulfills multiple functions. The fish-on-the-line device advances the narrative, becomes a motif unifying the film, and takes its place in a pattern of parallel gags involving variations of Willie on the rope. In such ways, *Our Hospitality* becomes an outstanding example of the integration of cinematic mise-en-scene with narrative form.

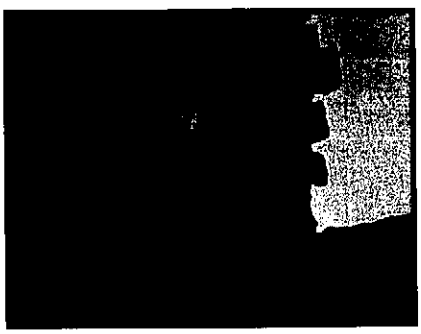
4.167 The tunnel cut to fit the old-fashioned train.

4.168 As the engineer, Keaton's father, Joe, used his famous high-kick vaudeville stunt for this gag.



4.169 The motif begins as Willie is jerked into the water.

4.170 Tied to Willie, the Canfield boy falls off the cliff . . .



4.171 . . . and Willie braces himself to be pulled after.

4.172 Willie dangles like a fish on the end of a pole.

Summary

The viewer who wants to study mise-en-scene should look for it systematically. We should watch, first of all, for how setting, costume, lighting, and the behavior of the figures present themselves in a given film. As a start, we should try to trace only one sort of element—say, setting or lighting—through a scene.

We should also reflect on the patterning of mise-en-scene elements. How do they function? How do they constitute motifs that weave their ways through the entire film? In addition, we should notice how mise-en-scene is patterned in space and time to attract and guide our attention through the process of watching the film and to create suspense or surprise.

Finally, we should try to relate the system of mise-en-scene to the large-scale form of the film. Hard-and-fast prejudices about realism are of less value here than an openness to the great variety of mise-en-scene possibilities. Awareness of those possibilities will better help us to determine the functions of mise-en-scene.

Where to Go from Here

On the Origins of Mise-en-Scene

As a concept, mise-en-scene dates back to the 19th-century theater. For a historical introduction that is relevant to film, see Oscar G. Brockett and Robert R. Findlay, *Century of Innovation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973). The standard film works are Nicolas Vardac, *Stage to Screen* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), and Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

On Realism in Mise-en-Scene

Many film theorists have seen film as a realistic medium par excellence. For such theorists as Siegfried Kracauer, André Bazin, and V. F. Perkins, cinema's power lies in its ability to present a recognizable reality. The realist theorist thus often values authenticity in costume and setting, naturalistic acting, and unstylized lighting. "The primary function of decor," writes V. F. Perkins, "is to provide a believable environment for the action" (*Film as Film* [Baltimore: Penguin, 1972], p. 94). André Bazin praises the Italian neorealist films of the 1940s for "faithfulness to everyday life in the scenario, truth to his part in an actor" (*What Is Cinema?* vol. 2 [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970], p. 25).

Though mise-en-scene is always a product of selection and choice, the realist theorist may value the filmmaker who creates a mise-en-scene that *appears* to be reality. Kracauer suggests that even apparently unrealistic song-and-dance numbers in a musical can seem impromptu (*Theory of Film* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1965]), and Bazin considers a fantasy film such as *The Red Balloon* realistic because here "what is imaginary on the screen has the spatial density of something real" (*What Is Cinema?* vol. 1 [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966], p. 48).

These theorists set the filmmaker the task of representing some historical, social, or aesthetic reality through the selection and arrangement of mise-en-scene. Though this book postpones the consideration of this problem—it lies more strictly in the domain of film theory—the realist controversy is worth your examination. Christopher Williams, in *Realism and the Cinema* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), reviews many issues in the area.

Computer Imaging and Mise-en-Scene

Digital, or *3D,* animation typically involves a few widely used programs, such as Maya for creating movement and Renderman for adding surface texture. Animators deal with specific needs of their projects by developing new software for such effects as fire, water, and moving foliage. The figures to be animated are created either by scanning every surface of a maquette (a detailed model, such as the dinosaur in 1.29) or by using motion capture ("mocap"), filming actors or animals in neutrally colored costumes covered with dots, which are the only things visible to the camera. The dots are connected by lines to create a "wire-frame" moving image, and the computer gradually adds more detailed layers to build a textured, three-dimensional, moving figure. Backgrounds can also be created digitally, using matte-painting programs. For figure animation, see *The Art of Maya: An Introduction to 3D Computer Graphics,* 3d ed. (Alias Systems, 2005), which includes a CD-ROM with introductory material.

For fiction feature films, 3D animation became viable with *digital compositing,* used for the T-1000 cyborg in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day.* Here a grid was painted on the actor's body, and the actor was filmed executing movements. As the film was scanned, the changing grid patterns were translated into a digital code similar to that used on compact discs. Then new actions could be created on the computer frame by frame. For a discussion, see Jody Duncan, "A Once and Future War," *Cinefex* 47 (August 1991): 4–59. Since *Terminator 2,* sophisticated software programs have enabled directors to create "actors" wholly from models that can be scanned into a computer and then animated. The most famous early example is the gallimimus herd in *Jurassic Park.* The phases of the imaging process for this film are explained in Jody Duncan, "The Beauty in the Beasts," *Cinefex* 55 (August 1993): 42–95. Both analog image synthesis and digital compositing were used in *The Matrix;* for background, see Kevin H. Martin, "Jacking into the Matrix," *Cinefex* 79 (October 1999): 66–89. The rendering of realistic human and humanlike characters depended on finding a way to create the elusively translucent quality of skin. Such figures as Jar Jar Binks in *Star Wars Episode 1: The Phantom Menace* and especially Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings* finally achieved this goal. See *Cinefex* 78 (July 1999), completely devoted to *The Phantom Menace;* Joe Fordham, "Middle-Earth Strikes Back," *Cinefex* 92 (January 2003): 70–142; and Joe Fordham, "Journey's End," *Cinefex* 96 (January 2004): 55–142.

The combination of live-action filming with computer animation has created a fresh range of cinematic effects. Méliès' urge to dazzle the audience with the magical powers of mise-en-scene continues to bear fruit.

Particular Aspects of Mise-en-Scene

On costume, see Elizabeth Lees, *Costume Design in the Movies* (London: BCW, 1976), and Edward Maeder, ed., *Hollywood and History: Costume Design in Film* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1987). See also Vincent J.-R. Kehoe, *The Technique of the Professional Make-Up Artist* (Boston: Focal Press, 1995).

Léon Barsacq, with careful assistance by Elliott Stein, has produced the best history of setting to date, *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions: A History of Film Design* (New York: New American Library, 1976). Other major studies of decor in the cinema are Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron, *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Dietrich Meumann, ed., *Film Architecture: Set Designs from "Metropolis" to "Blade Runner"* (Munich: Prestel, 1996); and C. S. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History of Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998). For insightful interviews with set designers, see Vincent LoBrutto, *By Design* (New York: Praeger, 1992), and Peter Ettedgui, *Production Design & Art Direction* (Woburn, MA: Focal Press, 1999). An excellent overview is offered by Vincent LoBrutto in *The Filmmaker's Guide to Production Design* (New York: Allworth, 2002). Pascal Pinteau's gorgeously illustrated *Special Effects: An Oral History* (New York: Abrams, 2003) covers not only models and digital effects but also make-up, setting, and even theme park rides.

A wide-ranging analysis of performance in film is Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979). This book is complemented by Charles Affron, *Star Acting: Gish, Garbo, Davis* (New York: Dutton, 1977), and James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Useful practical guides are Patrick Tucker, *Secrets of Screen Acting* (New York: Routledge, 1994), and Tony Barr, *Acting for the Camera* (New York: Perennial, 1986). The ways in which a performance can be integrated with a film's overall form are considered in two other manuals, *The Film Director's Intuition: Script Analysis and Rehearsal Techniques,* by Judith Wilson (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese, 2003), and Delia Salvi's *Friendly Enemies: Maximizing the Director–Actor Relationship* (New York: Billboard, 2003). Michael Caine's *Acting in Film: An Actor's Take on Movie Making* (New York: Applause Books) offers excellent and detailed discussion; see also the accompanying video, *Michael Caine on Acting in Film.*

Two fine surveys of lighting are Kris Malkiewicz, *Film Lighting: Talks with Hollywood's Cinematographers and Gaffers* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1986); and Gerald Millerson, *Lighting for Television & Film,* 3d ed. (Boston: Focal Press, 1999). John Alton's *Painting with Light* (New York: Macmillan, 1949) and Gerald Millerson's *Technique of Lighting for Television and Motion Pictures* (New York: Hastings House, 1972) are useful older discussions, with emphasis on classical Hollywood practices. A useful reference book is Richard K. Ferncase's *Film and Video Lighting Terms and Concepts* (Newton, MA: Focal Press, 1995).

Depth

Art historians have long studied how a two-dimensional image can be made to suggest a deep space. A comprehensive introductory survey is William V. Dunning, *Changing Images of Pictorial Space: A History of Spatial Illusion in Painting* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991). Dunning's history of Western painting emphasizes the manipulation of five techniques we have considered in this chapter: linear perspective, shading, the separation of planes, atmospheric perspective, and color perspective.

Though film directors have of course manipulated the image's depth and flatness since the beginning of cinema, critical understanding of these spatial qualities did

not emerge until the 1940s. It was then that André Bazin called attention to the fact that certain directors staged their shots in unusually deep space. Bazin singled out F. W. Murnau (for *Nosferatu* and *Sunrise*), Orson Welles (for *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*), William Wyler (for *The Little Foxes* and *The Best Years of Our Lives*), and Jean Renoir (for practically all of his 1930s work). By offering us depth and flatness as analytical categories, Bazin increased our understanding of mise-en-scene. (See "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?* vol. 1.) Interestingly, Sergei Eisenstein, who is often contrasted with Bazin, explicitly discussed principles of deep-space staging in the 1930s, as recorded by his faithful pupil, Vladimir Nizhny, in *Lessons with Eisenstein* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1962). Eisenstein asked his class to stage a murder scene in a single shot and without camera movement; the result was a startling use of extreme depth and dynamic movement toward the spectator. For a discussion, see David Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), chaps. 4 and 6. For a general historical overview of depth in mise-en-scene, see David Bordwell's *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), chap. 6.

Color Design

Two clear and readable discussions of color aesthetics in general are Luigina De Grandis, *Theory and Use of Color,* trans. John Gilbert (New York: Abrams, 1986), and Paul Zelanski and Mary Pat Fisher, *Colour for Designers and Artists* (London: Herbert Press, 1989).

For general discussion of the aesthetics of film color, see Raymond Durgnat, "Colours and Contrasts," *Films and Filming* 15, 2 (November 1968): 58–62; and William Johnson, "Coming to Terms with Color," *Film Quarterly* 20, 1 (Fall 1966): 2–22. The most detailed analysis of color organization in films is Scott Higgins, *Harnessing the Rainbow: Technicolor Design in the 1930s* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

Frame Composition and the Viewer's Eye

The film shot is like the painter's canvas: It must be filled up, and the spectator must be cued to notice certain things (and not to notice others). For this reason, composition in film owes much to principles developed in the graphic arts. A good basic study of composition is Donald L. Weismann, *The Visual Arts as Human Experience* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), which has many interesting things to say about depth as well. More elaborate discussions are to be found in Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye,* rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), and his *The Power of the Center: A Study of Composition in the Visual Arts,* 2d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

André Bazin suggested that shots staged in depth and shot in deep focus give the viewer's eye greater freedom than do flatter, shallower shots: The viewer's eye can roam across the screen. (See Bazin, *Orson Welles* [New York: Harper & Row, 1978].) Noël Burch takes issue: "All the elements in any given film image are perceived as equal in importance" (Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981], p. 34). Psychological research on pictorial perception suggests, however, that viewers do indeed scan images according to specific cues. In cinema, static visual cues for "when to look where" are reinforced or undermined by movement of figures or of camera, by sound track and editing, and by the overall form of the film. The psychological research is outlined in Robert L. Solso, *Cognition and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 129–156. In *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), David Bordwell studies how the filmmaker uses staging and frame composition to guide the viewer's scanning of the shot.

Websites

www.thescenographer.com/ Website for *The Scenographer* magazine, which deals with production design and costume design; has some online articles.

www.makeupmag.com/ Website for *Make-Up Artist Magazine,* professional journal for film and television workers; has some online articles.

www.16-9.dk/2003-06/side11_minnelli.htm/ In a well-illustrated article, "Medium Shot Gestures: Vincente Minnelli and *Some Came Running,*" Joe McElhaney provides a very good example of close analysis of long-take staging. The page is hosted by the Danish online magazine *16:9.*

Recommended DVD Supplements

DVDs often include galleries of designs for sets, costumes, and occasionally make-up. Documentaries on the subject include *Pulp Fiction*'s "Production Design Featurette." The unusually large, labyrinthine, enclosed spaceship interior in *Alien,* as well as the film's other sets, are discussed in the "Fear of the Unknown" and "The Darkest Reaches" segments. (The former also deals with costume design.) *Speed*'s "On Location" supplement deals with the 12 different buses that appeared at various stages of the film's action, as well as how the freeway locations were used.

Lighting is an area of mise-en-scene that receives relatively little coverage. An exception is "Painting with

Light," a documentary on cinematographer Jack Cardiff's work on the extraordinary color film *Black Narcissus.* A brief but informative look at lighting comes in the "Shooting on Location: Annie's Office" supplement for *Collateral.* In the "Here to Show Everybody the Light" section of the "Working like a Dog" supplement for *A Hard Day's Night,* director of photography Gilbert Taylor talks about how high-key lighting on the Beatles achieved the characteristic look of the images and about such challenges as rigging lighting equipment in a real train. *Toy Story*'s "Shaders and Lighting" section reveals how computer animation can simulate rim and key lighting.

Auditions are commonly included in DVD supplements, such as those for "The Making of *American Graffiti*" and especially *The Godfather*—where 72 minutes cover the casting, including many screen tests! Some discs go more deeply into aspects of acting. *Collateral*'s extras include a short segment, "Tom Cruise & Jamie Fox Rehearse." "The Stunts," included with *Speed,* shows how the drivers' maneuvers with the vehicles involved in the accidents and near-misses were choreographed using models, as well as covering how decisions are made about whether to let stars do their own stunts. "Becoming an Oompa-Loompa" details the training Deep Roy underwent to play all the Oompa-Loompas in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.* A detailed exploration of the distinctive acting in the films of Robert Bresson is offered by Babette Mangolte's "The Models of *Pickpocket,*" including lengthy interviews with the three main performers recalling the director's methods.

The *Dancer in the Dark* supplement "Choreography: Creating Vincent Paterson's Dance Sequences" takes an unusually close look at this particular type of staging. (This section can be best appreciated if you have watched the whole film or at least the musical numbers "Cvalda" [Track 9] and "I Have Seen It All" [Track 13].)

The Shot: Cinematography

In controlling mise-en-scene the filmmaker stages an event to be filmed. But a comprehensive account of cinema as a medium cannot stop with simply what is put in front of the camera. The *shot* does not exist until patterns are inscribed on a strip of film. The filmmaker also controls the *cinematographic qualities* of the shot—not only *what* is filmed, but also *how* it is filmed. Cinematographic qualities involve three factors: (1) the photographic aspects of the shot, (2) the framing of the shot, and (3) the duration of the shot. This chapter surveys these three areas of artistic control.

The Photographic Image

Cinematography (literally, writing in movement) depends to a large extent on *photography* (writing in light). Sometimes the filmmaker eliminates the camera and simply works on the film itself; but even when drawing, painting, or scratching directly on film, punching holes in it, or growing mold on it, the filmmaker is creating patterns of light on celluloid. Most often, the filmmaker uses a camera to regulate how light from some object will be photochemically registered on the sensitized film. In any event, the filmmaker can select the range of tonalities, manipulate the speed of motion, and transform perspective.

The Range of Tonalities

An image may seem all grays or stark black and white. It may display a range of colors. Textures may stand out clearly or recede into a haze. The filmmaker may control all these visual qualities by manipulating the film stock, exposure, and developing procedures.

Types of **film stocks** are differentiated by the chemical qualities of the emulsion. The choice of film stock has many artistic implications. For one thing, the image will have more or less *contrast* depending partly on the stock used. Contrast refers to the degree of difference between the darkest and lightest areas of the frame. A high-contrast image displays bright white highlights, stark black areas,

and a narrow range of grays in between. A low-contrast image possesses a wide range of grays with no true white or black areas.

As we have already seen in Chapter 4, human vision is highly sensitive to differences in color, texture, shape, and other pictorial properties. Contrasts within the image enable filmmakers to guide the viewer's eye to important parts of the frame. Filmmakers control the degree of contrast in the image in various ways.

In general, a very fast film stock, one that is very sensitive to reflected light, will produce a contrasty look, while a slower, less light-sensitive one, will be low in contrast. The amount of light used on the set during shooting will also affect the image's degree of contrast. Moreover, the cinematographer may use particular developing procedures that increase or decrease contrast. For example, the strength and temperature of the chemicals and the length of time the film is left in the developing bath affect contrast. By manipulating the film stock, lighting factors, and developing procedures, filmmakers can achieve enormous variety in the look of the film image (**5.1–5.3**). Most black-and-white films employ a balance of grays, blacks, and whites.

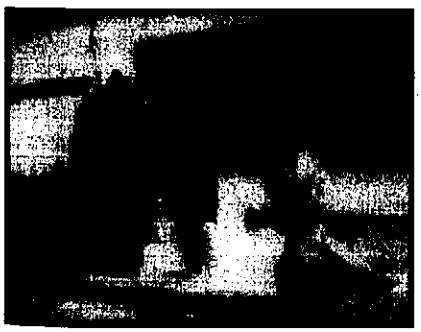
Jean-Luc Godard's *Les Carabiniers* (**5.4**) offers a good example of what post-filming manipulations of film stock can accomplish. The shot's newsreel-like quality is heightened by both the film stock and lab work that increased contrast. "The positive prints," Godard has explained, "were simply made on a special Kodak high contrast stock. . . . Several shots, intrinsically too gray, were duped again sometimes two or three times, always to their highest contrast." The effect suggests old combat footage that has been recopied or shot under bad lighting conditions; the high-contrast look suited a film about the grubbiness of war.

*"Both [cinematographer] Floyd [Crosby] and I wanted [*High Noon*] to look like a documentary, or a newsreel from the period of the 1880s, if film had existed at that time—which, of course, it did not. I believe that we came close to our goal by using flat lighting, a grainy texture in the printing and an unfiltered white sky."*

— Fred Zinnemann, director

5.1 Most black-and-white films employ a balance of grays, blacks, and whites, as in this shot from *Casablanca.*

5.2 In *Breaking the Waves,* color manipulation created bleached-out images.



5.3 The dream sequence early in Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* uses a combination of film stock, overexposure, and laboratory processing to create a bleached-out look.

5.4 This shot from *Les Carabiniers* achieves a newsreel-like quality heightened by both the film stock and lab work that increased contrast.

5.5 The trolley scene in *Meet Me in St. Louis* shows off the vivid colors possible with the Technicolor process.

5.6 The use of blues in *Stalker* makes the action almost seem to be taking place underwater.

5.7 Lye manipulated Gasparcolor paper stock to create pure, saturated silhouettes that split and recombine in *Rainbow Dance.*

Different color film stocks yield varying color contrasts. Technicolor became famous for its sharply distinct, heavily saturated hues, as seen in such films as *Meet Me in St. Louis* (**5.5**). The richness of Technicolor was achieved by means of a specially designed camera and sophisticated printing process. To take another example, Soviet filmmakers used a domestically made stock that tends to lower contrast and give the image a murky greenish-blue cast. Andrei Tarkovsky exploited just these qualities in the monochromatic color design of his shadowy *Stalker* (**5.6**). Len Lye's abstract *Rainbow Dance* uses specific features of the English stock Gasparcolor (**5.7**).

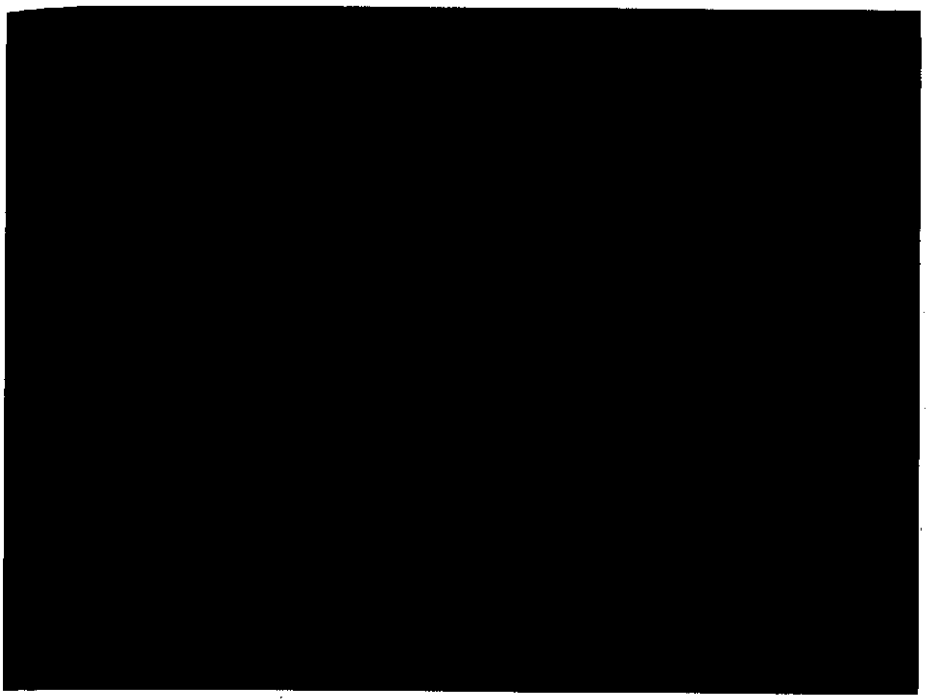
The tonalities of color stock may also be altered by laboratory processes. The person assigned the role of *color timer* or *grader* has a wide choice about the color range of a print. A red patch in the image may be printed as crimson, pink, or almost any shade in between. Often the timer consults with the director to select a key tone that will serve as a reference point for color relations throughout the film. In addition, some prints can be made for purposes that require a different color balance. Today, most prints made for 35mm exhibition are printed somewhat dark, to create rich shadows and darker colors. But prints struck for transfer to video are made on special low-contrast stock in order to compensate for television's tendency to heighten contrast. The resulting image often has a lighter, brighter color range than seen in any theatrical print. Increasingly, cinematographers are using computer grading for selected shots or even an entire film. (See "A Closer Look," pp. 179–181.)

Certain procedures may also add color to footage originally shot in black and white. Before 1930, filmmakers often used tinting and toning. *Tinting* is accomplished by dipping the already developed film into a bath of dye. The dark areas remain black and gray, while the lighter areas pick up the color (**5.8**). *Toning* worked in an opposite fashion. The dye was added during the developing of the positive print. As a result, darker areas are colored, while the lighter portions of the frame remain white or only faintly colored (**5.9**).

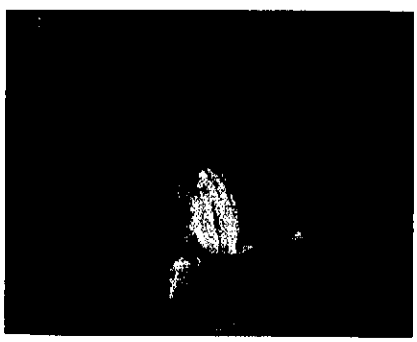
Certain conventions grew up around tinting and toning. Night scenes, as in 5.9 (from *Cenere,* a 1916 Italian film) were often colored blue. Firelight was frequently colored red, while interiors were commonly amber. *The Wrath of the Gods* (1914) uses a pink tint to suggest the glow of an erupting volcano (5.8). Some later filmmakers revived these processes. Vera Chytilova employs a crimson toning in *Daisies* (**5.10**).

A rarer method of adding color is the difficult process of *hand coloring.* Here portions of black-and-white images are painted in colors, frame by frame. The ship's flag in Sergei Eisenstein's *Potemkin* was originally hand colored red against a blue sky. A modern use of hand coloring may be seen in Makavejev's *Innocence Unprotected* (**5.11**).

There are many other ways in which the filmmaker can manipulate the image's tonalities after filming. In *Reflections on Black,* Stan Brakhage scratched off the

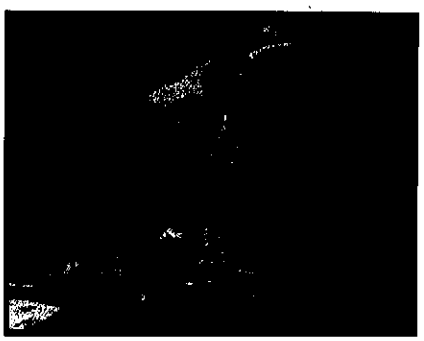


5.8 Tinting creates a pinkish color across the entire frame in the 1914 film *The Wrath of the Gods.*



5.9 In *Cenere,* the deep blue of the dark areas and nearly white patches are characteristic of toning.

5.10 Toning in *Daisies.*

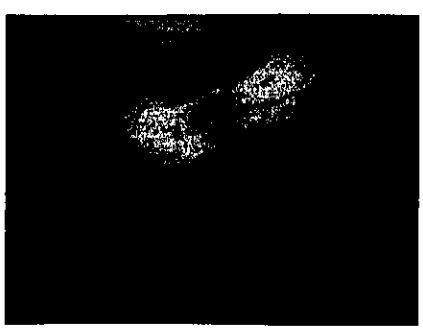


5.11 In *Innocence Unprotected,* stylized images are created by painting multiple colors within a shot.

emulsion in certain parts of the shot (**5.12**). Lars von Trier shot *Breaking the Waves* on 35mm film, then transferred the footage to video and used digital manipulation to drain out much of the color. He transferred the result back to film, resulting in desaturated images that tremble and shimmer (5.2).

The range of tonalities in the image is most crucially affected by the *exposure* of the image during filming. The filmmaker usually controls **exposure** by regulating how much light passes through the camera lens, though images shot with correct exposure can also be overexposed or underexposed in developing and printing. We commonly think that a photograph should be well exposed—neither underexposed (too dark, not enough light admitted through the lens) nor overexposed (too bright, too much light admitted through the lens). But even correct exposure usually offers some latitude for choice; it is not an absolute.

The filmmaker can manipulate exposure for specific effects. American *film noir* of the 1940s sometimes underexposed shadowy regions of the image in keeping with low-key lighting techniques. In *Vidas Secas,* Nelson Pereira dos Santos overexposed the windows of the prison cell to sharpen the contrast between the



5.12 By scratching the emulsion, Brakhage emphasizes the eye motif that runs through *Reflections on Black.*

prisoner's confinement and the world of freedom outside (**5.13**). In the Moria sequence, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* used overexposure in several shots. In **5.14**, the white glare was achieved by digital grading that simulated photographic overexposure.

Choices of exposure are particularly critical in working with color. For shots of *Kasba,* Kumar Shahani chose to emphasize tones within shaded areas, and so he exposed them and let sunlit areas bleach out somewhat (**5.15, 5.16**).

Exposure can in turn be affected by **filters**—slices of glass or gelatin put in front of the lens of the camera or printer to reduce certain frequencies of light reaching the film. Filters thus alter the range of tonalities in quite radical ways. Before modern improvements in film stocks and lighting made it practical to shoot most outdoor night scenes at night, filmmakers routinely made such scenes by using blue filters in sunlight—a technique called *day for night* (**5.17**). Hollywood cinematographers since the 1920s have sought to add glamour to close-ups, especially of women, by means of diffusion filters and silks. Filters applied during shooting or during printing can also alter the color image.

Digital cinematography doesn't employ film stock; the image is captured on an electrically charged sensor and recorded to tape or a hard drive. Still, the filmmakers must make choices about color, exposure, and tonal contrast that are comparable to those offered by film. All the other techniques we'll survey in this chapter have their equivalents in digital moviemaking.

Speed of Motion

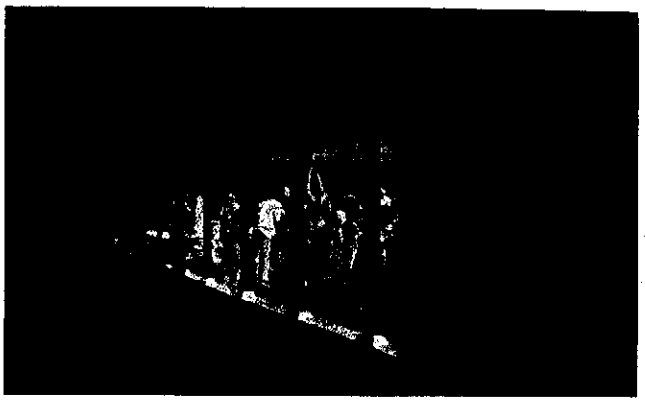
A gymnast's performance seen in slow motion, ordinary action accelerated to comic speed, a tennis serve stopped in a freeze-frame—we are all familiar with the effects of the control of the speed of motion. Of course, the filmmaker who stages the event to be filmed can (within limits) dictate the pace of the action. But that pace can also be controlled by a photographic power unique to cinema: the control of the speed of movement seen on the screen.

The speed of the motion we see on the screen depends on the relation between the rate at which the film was shot and the rate of projection. Both **rates** are calculated in frames per second. The standard rate, established when synchronized-sound cinema came in at the end of the 1920s, was 24 frames per second. Today's 35mm cameras commonly offer the filmmaker a choice of anything between 8 and 64 frames per second (fps), with specialized cameras offering still wider range of choice.

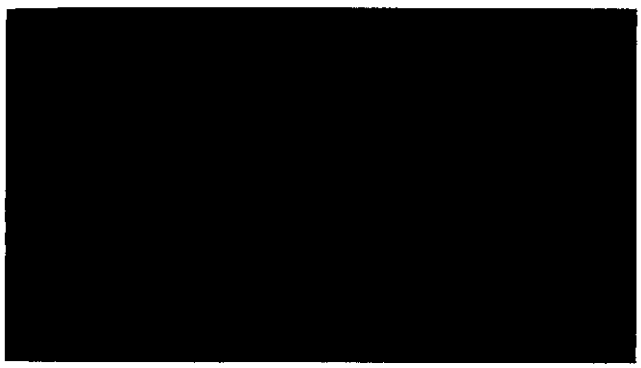
5.13 Deliberate overexposure of windows in *Vidas Secas.*

5.14 In *The Fellowship of the Ring,* the overexposure of the wizard's staff makes the Fellowship a bright island threatened by countless orcs in the surrounding darkness.

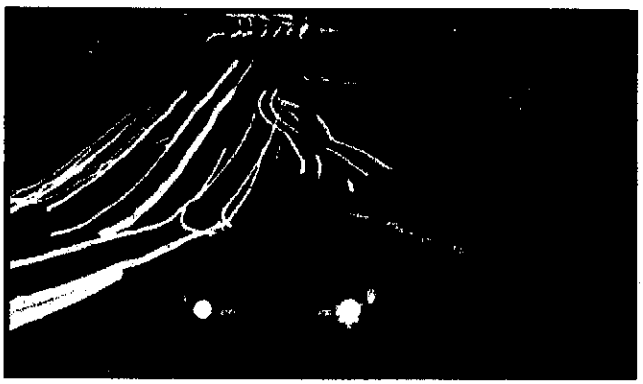
5.15 In *Kasbah,* the vibrant hues of the store's wares stand out, while the countryside behind is overexposed . . .



5.16 . . . while at other moments underexposure for the shaded porches emphasizes the central outdoor area.



5.17 In *The Searchers,* this scene of the protagonists spying on an Indian camp from a bluff was shot in sunlight using day-for-night filters.



5.18 Cars become blurs of light when shot in fast motion for *Koyaanisqatsi.*

If the movement is to look accurate on the screen, the rate of shooting should correspond to the rate of projection. That's why silent films sometimes look jerky today: Films shot at anywhere from 16 to 20 frames per second are speeded up when shown at 24 frames per second. Projected at the correct speed, silent films can look as smooth as movies made today.

As the silent films indicate, if a film is exposed at fewer frames per second than the projection, the screen action will look speeded up. This is the *fast-motion* effect sometimes seen in comedies. But fast motion has long been used for other purposes. In F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu,* the vampire's coach rushes skittishly across the landscape, suggesting his supernatural power. In Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi,* a delirious fast motion renders the hectic rhythms of urban life **(5.18)**. More recent films have used fast motion to grab our attention and accelerate the pace, whisking us through a setting to the heart of the action.

The more frames per second shot, the slower the screen action will appear. The resulting *slow-motion* effect is used notably in Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* to render sports events in detail, a function that continues to be important today. The technique can also be used for expressive purposes. In Rouben Mamoulian's *Love Me Tonight,* the members of a hunt decide to ride quietly home to avoid waking the sleeping deer; their ride is filmed in slow motion to create a comic depiction of noiseless movement. Today slow-motion footage often functions to suggest that the action takes place in a dream or fantasy, to express a lyrical quality, or to convey enormous power, as in a martial-arts film. Slow motion is also

increasingly used for emphasis, becoming a way of dwelling on a moment of spectacle or high drama.

To enhance expressive effects, filmmakers can change the speed of motion in the course of a shot. Often the change of speed helps create special effects. In *Die Hard* a fireball bursts up an elevator shaft toward the camera. During the filming, the fire at the bottom of the shaft was filmed at 100 fps, slowing down its progress, and then shot at faster speeds as it erupted upward, giving the impression of an explosive acceleration. For *Bram Stoker's Dracula,* director Francis Ford Coppola wanted his vampire to glide toward his prey with supernatural suddenness. Cinematographer Michael Ballhaus used a computer program to control the shutter and the speed of filming, allowing smooth and instantaneous changes from 24 fps to 8 fps and back again.

Digital postproduction allows filmmakers to create the effect of variable shooting speeds through *ramping,* shifting speed of movement very smoothly and rapidly. In an early scene of Michael Mann's *The Insider,* researcher Jeffrey Wigand leaves the tobacco company that has just fired him. As he crosses the lobby toward a revolving door, his brisk walk suddenly slows to a dreamlike drifting. The point of this very noticeable stylistic choice becomes apparent only in the film's last shot. Lowell Bergman, the TV producer who has helped Wigand reveal that addictive substances are added to cigarettes, has been dismissed from CBS. He strides across the lobby, and as he passes through the revolving door, his movement glides into extreme slow motion. The repetition of the technique points out the parallels between two men who have lost their livelihoods as a result of telling the truth—two insiders who have become outsiders.

Extreme forms of fast and slow motion alter the speed of the depicted material even more radically. *Time-lapse* cinematography permits us to see the sun set in seconds or a flower sprout, bud, and bloom in a minute. For this, a very low shooting speed is required—perhaps one frame per minute, hour, or even day. For *high-speed* cinematography, which may seek to record a bullet shattering glass, the camera may expose hundreds, even thousands, of frames per second. Most cameras can be used for time-lapse shooting, but high-speed cinematography requires specially designed cameras.

After filming, the filmmaker can still control the speed of movement on the screen through various laboratory procedures. Until the early 1990s, the most common means used was the optical printer. This device rephotographs a film, copying all or part of each original frame onto another reel of film. The filmmaker can use the optical printer to skip frames (accelerating the action when projected), reprint a frame at desired intervals (slowing the action by *stretch printing*), stop the action (repeating a frame over and over, to freeze the projected image for seconds or minutes), or reverse the action. Some silent films are stretch-printed with every other frame repeated, so that they may run more smoothly at sound speed. We are familiar with freeze-framing, slow-motion, and reverse-motion printing effects from the *instant replays* of sports coverage and investigative documentaries. Many experimental films have made striking use of the optical printer's possibilities, such as Ken Jacobs's *Tom Tom the Piper's Son,* which explores the images of an early silent film by enlarging portions of its shots. The optical printer has largely been replaced by digital manipulations of the speed of movement.

5.19 In *Don't Look Now,* as the camera swivels to follow the walking character, the wide-angle lens makes a street lamp he passes appear to lean rightward . . .

5.20 . . . and then leftward.

Perspective

You are standing on railroad tracks, looking toward the horizon. The tracks not only recede but also seem to meet at the horizon. You glance at the trees and buildings along the tracks. They diminish by simple, systematic rule: the closer objects look larger, the farther objects look smaller—even if they are actually of uniform size. The optical system of your eye, registering light rays reflected from the scene, supplies a host of information about scale, depth, and spatial relations among parts of the scene. Such relations are called *perspective* relations.

The **lens** of a photographic camera does roughly what your eye does. It gathers light from the scene and transmits that light onto the flat surface of the film to form an image that represents size, depth, and other dimensions of the scene. One difference between the eye and the camera, though, is that photographic lenses may be changed, and each type of lens will render perspective in different ways. If two different lenses photograph the same scene, the perspective relations in the resulting images could be drastically different. A wide-angle lens could exaggerate the depth you see down the track or could make the foreground trees and buildings seem to bulge; a telephoto lens could drastically reduce the depth, making the trees seem very close together and nearly the same size.

5.21 Wide-angle distortion in Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Cranes Are Flying.*

The Lens: Focal Length Control of perspective in the image is very important to the filmmaker. The chief variable in the process is the **focal length** of the lens. In technical terms, the focal length is the distance from the center of the lens to the point where light rays converge to a point of focus on the film. The focal length alters the perceived magnification, depth, and scale of things in the image. We usually distinguish three sorts of lenses on the basis of their effects on perspective:

1. *The short-focal-length* **(wide-angle)** *lens.*

In 35mm-gauge cinematography, a lens of less than 35mm in focal length is considered a wide-angle lens. Such lenses tend to distort straight lines lying near the edges of the frame, bulging them outward. Note the distortion in two frames from a shot in Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (**5.19, 5.20**). When a wide-angle lens is used for a medium shot or close-up, the distortion of shape may become very evident (**5.21**).

The lens of short focal length has the property of exaggerating depth (**5.22**). Because distances between foreground and background seem greater, the wide-angle lens also makes figures moving to or from the camera seem to cover ground more rapidly.

5.22 In this scene from *The Little Foxes,* the lens makes the characters seem farther from one another than we would expect in so relatively tight a grouping.

2. *The middle-focal-length* **(normal)** *lens.*

A lens of medium focal length is 35 to 50mm. This normal lens seeks to avoid noticeable perspective distortion. With a normal lens, horizontal and vertical lines are rendered as straight and perpendicular. (Compare the bulging effect of the wide-angle lens.) Parallel lines should recede to distant vanishing points, as in our railroad tracks example. Foreground and background should seem neither stretched apart (as with the wide-angle lens) nor squashed together (as with the telephoto lens). A normal lens was used for **5.23**; contrast the sense of distance among the figures achieved in **5.22**.

5.23 A shot made with a normal lens in *His Girl Friday.*

3. *The long-focal-length* **(telephoto)** *lens.*

Whereas wide-angle lenses distort space laterally, longer lenses flatten the space along the camera axis. Cues for depth and volume are reduced. The planes seem squashed together, much as when you look through a telescope or binoculars. In **5.24**, from Chen Kaige's *Life on a String,* the long lens pushes the crowd members almost to the same plane. It also makes the rapids behind the men virtually a two-dimensional backdrop.

Today, the focal length of long lenses typically ranges from around 75 to 250mm or more. They are commonly used in the filming or televising of sports events, since they allow the cinematographer to magnify action at a distance. (For this reason, long lenses are also called telephoto lenses.) In a base-ball game there will invariably be shots taken from almost directly behind the umpire. You have probably noticed that such shots make catcher, batter, and pitcher look unnaturally close to one another. What a very long lens can do to space is dramatically illustrated throughout Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* (**5.25**).

A long-focal-length lens also affects subject movement. Because it flattens depth, a figure moving toward the camera takes more time to cover what seems to

> *"I'm standing around waiting to see where the 50mm is going to be, or what size lens they're putting on, and in that unwritten book in my brain, I said, 'Don't ever let them shoot you full face, on a wide-angle lens, you'll end up looking like Dumbo.'"*
>
> — Tony Curtis, actor

"In New York, New York, *we shot only with a 32mm lens, the whole movie. We tried to equate the old style of framing, the old style meaning 1946–53."*

— Martin Scorsese, director

be a small distance. The *running-in-place* shots in *The Graduate* and other films of the 1960s and 1970s were produced by lenses of very long focal length. In *Tootsie,* the introduction of Michael Dorsey disguised as Dorothy Michaels occurs in a lengthy telephoto shot in order for us to recognize his altered appearance and to notice that none of the people around him finds "her" unusual **(5.26–5.28)**.

Lens length can distinctly affect the spectator's experience. For example, expressive qualities can be suggested by lenses that distort objects or characters. We tend to see the man in **5.29** as looming, even aggressive. Moreover, choice of the lens can make a character or object blend into the setting (5.26) or stand out in sharp relief (5.29). Filmmakers may exploit the flattening effects of the long-focal-length lens to create solid masses of space **(5.30)**, as in an abstract painting.

A director can use lens length to surprise us, as Kurosawa does in *Red Beard.* When the mad patient comes into the intern's room, a long-focal-length lens filming from behind him initially makes her seem to be quite close to him **(5.31)**. But a cut to a more perpendicular angle shows that the patient and the intern are actually several feet apart and that he is not yet in danger **(5.32)**.

"I tend to rely on only two kinds of lenses to compose my frames: very wide angle and extreme telephoto. I use the wide angle because when I want to see something, I want to see it completely, with the most detail possible. As for the telephoto, I use it for close-ups because I find it creates a real "encounter" with the actor. If you shoot someone's face with a 200-millimeter lens, the audience will feel like the actor is really standing in front of them. It gives presence to the shot. So I like extremes. Anything in between is of no interest to me."

— John Woo, director

There is one sort of lens that offers the director a chance to manipulate focal length and to transform perspective relations during a single shot. A **zoom lens** is optically designed to permit the continuous varying of focal length. Originally created for aerial and reconnaissance photography, zoom lenses gradually became a standard tool for newsreel filming. It was not, however, the general practice to zoom during shooting. The camera operator varied the focal length as desired and then started filming. In the late 1950s, however, the increased portability of cameras led to a trend toward zooming while filming.

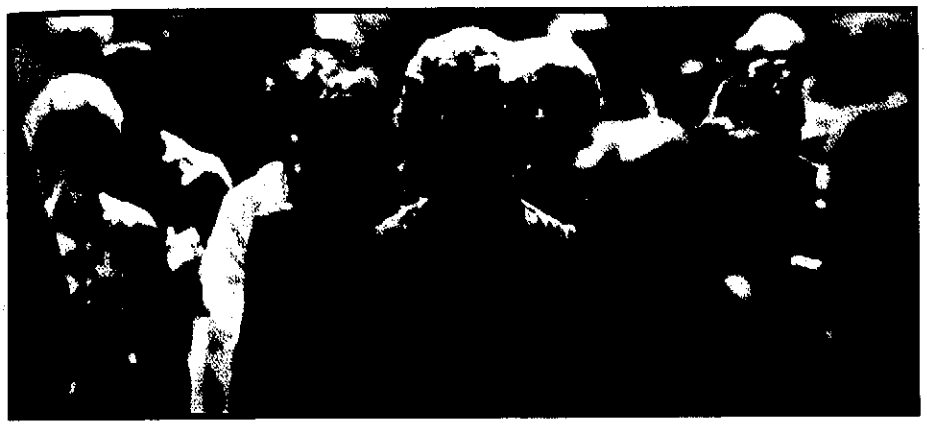
Since then, the zoom has sometimes been used to substitute for moving the camera forward or backward. Although the zoom shot presents a mobile framing, the camera remains fixed. During a zoom, the camera remains stationary, and the lens simply increases or decreases its focal length. Onscreen, the zoom shot magnifies or demagnifies the objects filmed, excluding or including surrounding space, as in **5.33** and **5.34**, from Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation.* The zoom can produce interesting and peculiar transformations of scale and depth, as we shall see when we examine Michael Snow's *Wavelength.*

The impact that focal length can have on the image's perspective qualities is dramatically illustrated in Ernie Gehr's abstract experimental film *Serene Velocity.* The scene is an empty corridor. Gehr shot the film with a zoom lens, but he did not zoom while filming the shot. Instead, the zoom permitted him to change the lens's focal length between takes. As Gehr explains,

5.24 The long lens in Chen Kaige's *Life on a String.*

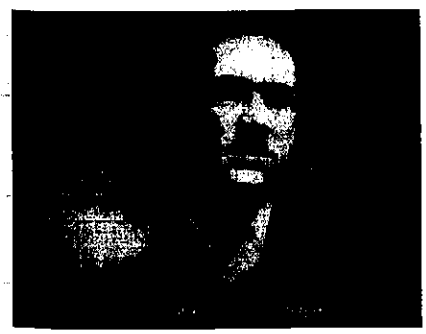
5.25 In *Koyaanisqatsi,* an airport is filmed from a great distance, and the long lens makes it appear that a plane is landing on a crowded highway.

5.26 In *Tootsie,* Dorothy becomes visible among the crowd at a considerable distance from the camera . . .



5.27 . . . and after taking 20 steps seems only slightly closer until . . .

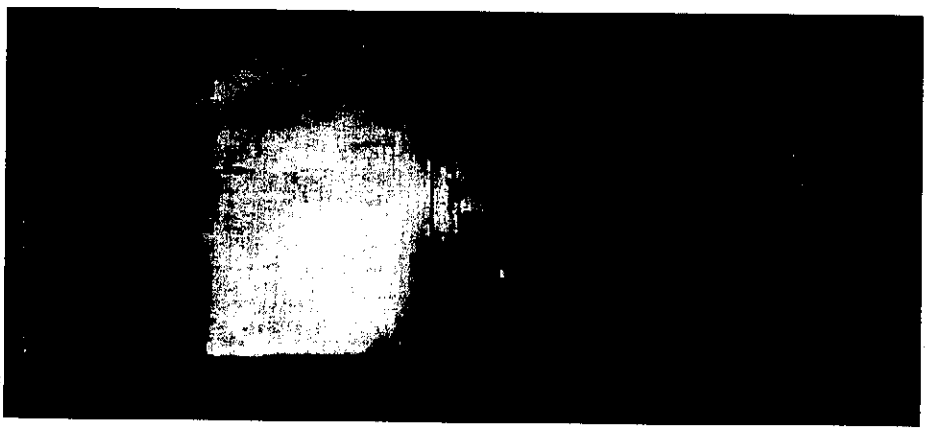
5.28 . . . "she" finally grows somewhat larger, after a total of about 36 steps.



5.29 In Ilya Trauberg's *China Express,* a wide-angle lens creates foreground distortion.

5.30 In *Eternity and a Day,* a long lens makes the beach and sea appear as two vertical blocks.

5.31 In Kurosawa's *Red Beard,* the mad patient in the background seems threateningly to approach the intern . . .



5.32 . . . until a cut reveals that she is across the room from him.

5.33 In the opening of *The Conversation,* a long, slow zoom-in arouses considerable uncertainty about its target . . .

5.34 . . . until it finally centers on a mime and our protagonist, surveillance technician Harry Caul.

> [I] divided the mm range of the zoom lens in half and starting from the middle I recorded changes in mm positions. . . . The camera was not moved at all. The zoom lens was not moved during recording either. Each frame was recorded individually as a still. Four frames to each position. To give an example: I shot the first four frames at 50mm. The next four frames I shot at 55mm. And then, for a certain duration, approximately 60 feet, I went back and forth, four frames at 50mm, four frames at 55mm; four frames at 50mm, four frames at 55mm; etc. . . . for about 60 feet. Then I went to 45–60 [mm] and did the same for about 60 feet. Then to 40–65, and so on.

The resulting film presents an image whose perspective relations pulsate rhythmically—first with little difference in size and scale, but gradually with greater tension between a telephoto image and a wide-angle image (**5.35**). In a sense *Serene Velocity* takes as its subject the effect of focal length on perspective.

The Lens: Depth of Field and Focus Focal length not only affects how shape and scale are magnified or distorted. It also affects the lens's **depth of field**—the range of distances before the lens within which objects can be photographed in sharp **focus**. A lens with a depth of field of 10 feet to infinity will render any object in that range clearly, but the sharpness of the image will decrease when the object moves closer to the lens (say, to 4 feet). All other things being equal, a short-focal-length (wide-angle) lens has a relatively greater depth of field than does a long-focal-length (telephoto) lens.

Depth of field should not be confused with the concept of deep space, discussed in Chapter 4. *Deep space* is a term for the way the filmmaker has staged the action

on several different planes, *regardless of whether all of these planes are in focus.* In the case of *Our Hospitality,* those planes usually are in sharp focus, but in other films, not every plane of deep space is in focus. In this shot from *Simple Men* **(5.36)**, we can see three planes of depth, but deep focus isn't used. The robber and the security guard she holds at pistol point in the middle ground are in focus. But the yellow railing forming a distinct foreground plane is out of focus. In the distant background, visible between the rails, stands the female robber's partner. He's out of focus, too. The example shows that deep space is a property of mise-en-scene, the techniques that affect what is placed in front of the camera. Depth of field depends on the camera itself, with the lens determining what layers of the mise-en-scene are in focus.

As the *Simple Men* example suggests, selective focus is often used to call attention to the main action and to deemphasize less significant parts of the surroundings. Often this involves centering the main character in the foreground and throwing the background out of focus **(5.37)**. Deep space is a property of mise-en-scene, depending on how the image is composed. Depth of field is a property of the photographic lens, affecting what planes of the image are in focus.

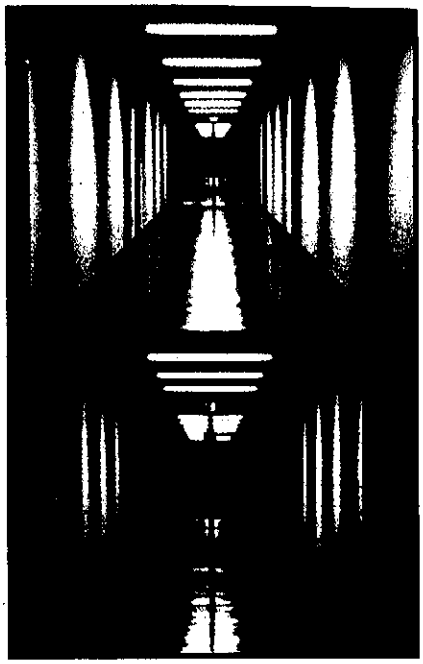
If depth of field controls perspective relations by determining which planes will be in focus, what choices are open to the filmmaker? He or she may opt for what is usually called *selective focus*—choosing to focus on only one plane and letting the other planes blur. This is what director Hal Hurtley does in the *Simple Men* example. Selective focus typically draws the viewer's attention to the main character or object **(5.37)**. The technique can be used for a more abstract compositional effect as well **(5.38)**.

In Hollywood during the 1940s, partly due to the influence of *Citizen Kane,* filmmakers began using faster film, shorter-focal-length lenses, and more intense lighting to yield a greater depth of field. The contract-signing scene from *Citizen Kane* **(5.39)** offers a famous example. This practice came to be called **deep focus**.

Deep-focus cinematography became a major stylistic option in the 1940s and 1950s. A typical usage is illustrated in **5.40**. The technique was even imitated in animated cartoons (4.132, from Chuck Jones's *One Froggy Evening*). During the 1970s and 1980s, deep-focus cinematography was revived in Steven Spielberg's work, notably *Jaws* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind,* and in the films of Brian De Palma **(5.41)**. Today, extreme deep-focus effects can also be achieved digitally **(5.42)**.

The filmmaker may also have the option of adjusting perspective while filming by **racking focus**, or *pulling focus.* A shot may begin with an object in the foreground sharply visible and the rear plane fuzzy, then rack focus so that the background elements come into crisp focus and the foreground becomes blurred. Alternatively, the focus can rack from background to foreground, as in **5.43** and **5.44**, from Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris.*

Special Effects The image's perspective relations may also be created by means of **special effects.** We have already seen (p. 117) that the filmmaker can create setting by use of models and computer-generated images. Alternatively,



5.35 In *Serene Velocity,* telephoto shots of a hallway are juxtaposed to wide-angle shots taken from the same spot.

> *"If I made big-budget films, I would do what the filmmakers of twenty years ago did: use 35, 40, and 50mm [lenses] with lots of light so I could have that depth of field, because it plays upon the effect of surprise. It can give you a whole series of little tricks, little hiding places, little hooks in the image where you can hang surprises, places where they can suddenly appear, just like that, within the frame itself. You can create the off-frame within the frame."*
>
> — Benoit Jacquot, director

5.36 In the first shot of *Simple Men,* the foreground railing and the man in the distance are out of focus, emphasizing the drama in focus in the middle ground.

5.37 Agnès Varda's *Vagabonde (Sans toi ni loi).*

5.38 Leos Carax's *Boy Meets Girl.*

5.39 In *Citizen Kane,* from one plane near the lens (Bernstein's head) through several planes in the middle ground to the wall far in the distance, everything is in sharp focus.

5.40 Anthony Mann's *The Tall Target.*

5.41 In *The Untouchables,* a conversation scene is played in the foreground while setting and distant figures are also kept in focus.

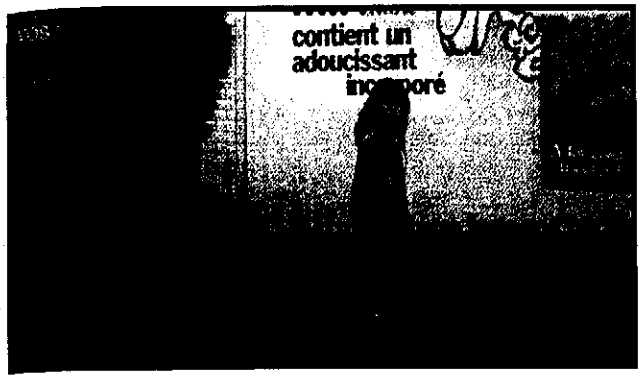
5.42 The small size of the chip in a digital video camera yields extreme depth of field. If this shot, from Agnès Varda's *The Gleaners and I,* had been made on film, either Varda's hand or the truck would have been far more out of focus.

separately photographed planes of action may be combined on the same strip of film to create the illusion that the two planes are adjacent. The simplest way to do this is through **superimposition**. Either by double exposure in the camera or in laboratory printing, one image is laid over another. Superimpositions have been used since the earliest years of the cinema. One common function is to render ghosts, which appear as translucent figures. Superimpositions also frequently provide a way of conveying dreams, visions, or memories. Typically, these mental images are shown against a close view of a face (**5.45**).

More complex techniques for combining strips of film to create a single shot are usually called **process**, or *composite,* **shots**. These techniques can be divided into *projection process work* and *matte process work.*

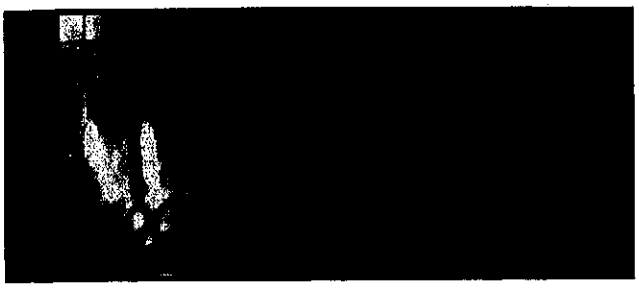
In projection process work, the filmmaker projects footage of a setting onto a screen, then films actors performing in front of the screen. Classical Hollywood filmmaking began this process in the late 1920s, as a way to avoid taking cast and crew on location. The Hollywood technique involved placing the actors against a translucent screen and projecting a film of the setting from behind the screen. The whole ensemble could then be filmed from the front (**5.46**).

Rear projection, as this system was known, seldom creates very convincing depth cues. Foreground and background tend to look starkly separate, partly because of the absence of cast shadows from foreground to background and partly because all background planes tend to seem equally diffuse (**5.47**).



5.43 In this shot from *Last Tango in Paris,* the woman, bench, and wall in the distance are in focus, while the man in the foreground is not . . .

5.44 . . . but after the camera racks focus, the man in the foreground becomes sharp and the background fuzzy.

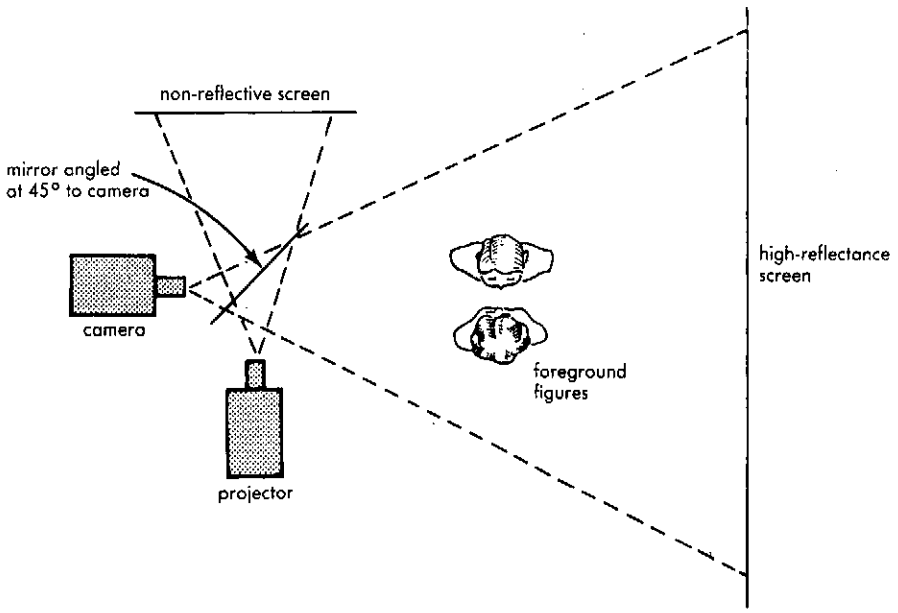


5.45 In the opening of Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill, Vol. 1,* the Bride sees the first victim of her revenge, and her memory of a violent struggle is superimposed over a tight framing of her eyes.

5.46 *Boom Town.*

5.47 In Hitchcock's *Vertigo,* the seascape in the rear plane was shot separately and used as a back-projected setting for an embrace filmed under studio lighting.

Front projection, which came into use in the late 1960s, projects the setting onto a two-way mirror, angled to throw the image onto a high-reflectance screen. The camera photographs the actors against the screen by shooting through the mirror (**5.48**). The results of front projection can be clearly seen in the "Dawn of Man" sequence of *2001: A Space Odyssey,* the first film to use front projection extensively. (At one moment, a saber-toothed tiger's eyes glow, reflecting the projector's light.) Because of the sharp focus of the projected footage, front projection blends foreground and background planes fairly smoothly. The nonrealistic possibilities of front projection have been recently explored by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg. In his film of Wagner's opera *Parsifal* front projection conjures up colossal, phantasmagoric landscapes (**5.49**). Front and rear projection are rapidly being replaced by digital techniques. Here action is filmed in front of a large blue or green screen rather than a film image, with the background later added by digital manipulation.

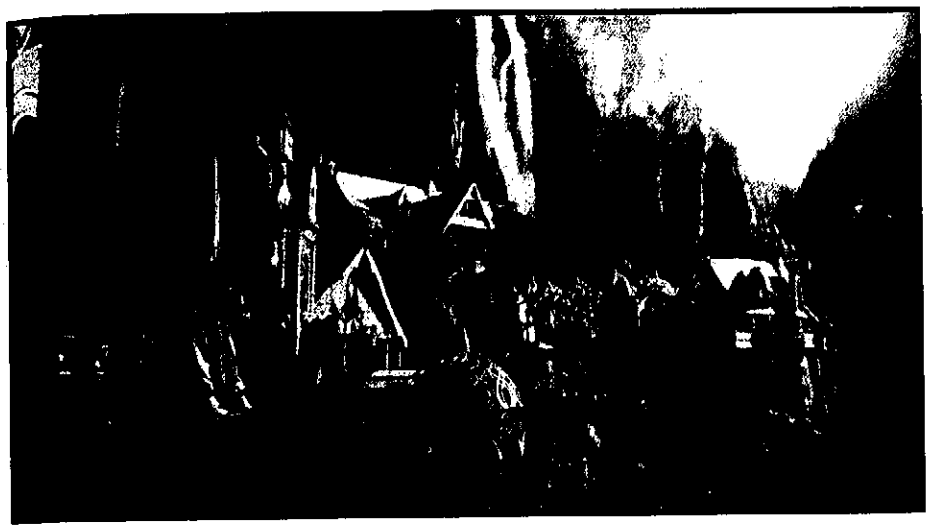


5.48 A front-projection system.

5.49 In Syberberg's film of Wagner's *Parsifal,* front projection conjures up colossal, phantasmagoric landscapes.

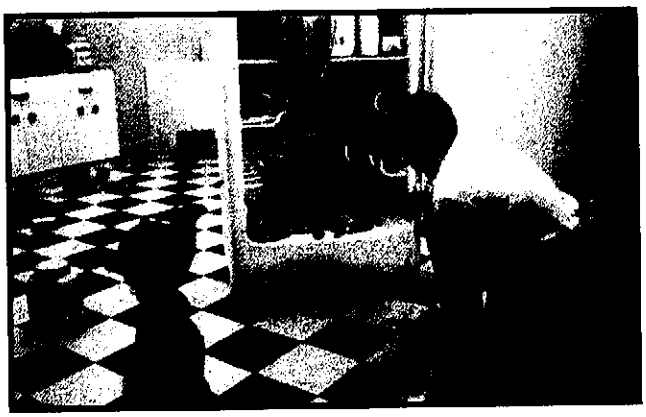
Composite filming can also be accomplished by **matte work**. A *matte* is a portion of the setting photographed on a strip of film, usually with a part of the frame empty. Through laboratory printing, the matte is joined with another strip of film containing the actors. One sort of matte involves a painting of the desired areas of setting, which is then filmed. The footage is combined with footage of action, segregated in the blank portions of the painted scenery. In this way, a matte can create an entire imaginary setting for the film. Stationary mattes of this sort have made glass shots virtually obsolete and were so widely used in commercial cinema that until the late 1990s the matte painter was a mainstay of production. In recent years, matte paintings have been made using computer programs, but they are used in the same way to create scenery (**5.50**).

With a matte painting, however, the actor cannot move into the painted portions of the frame without seeming to disappear. To solve this problem, the filmmaker can use a *traveling matte.* Here the actor is photographed against a blank, usually blue, background. In laboratory printing, the moving outline of the actor is cut out of footage of the desired background. After further lab work, the shot of the actor is jigsawed into the moving gap in the background footage. It is traveling mattes that present shots of Superman's flight or of spaceships hurtling through space (**5.51**). In 4.83, the robot is combined with live action in the background by means



5.50 In this shot from *The Fellowship of the Ring,* the distant part of the building, the cliffs, and the sky are all on a matte painting created by computer.

5.51 In *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope,* the take-off of the *Millennium Falcon* was filmed as a model against a blue screen and matted into a shot of a building with imperial stormtroopers firing upward.



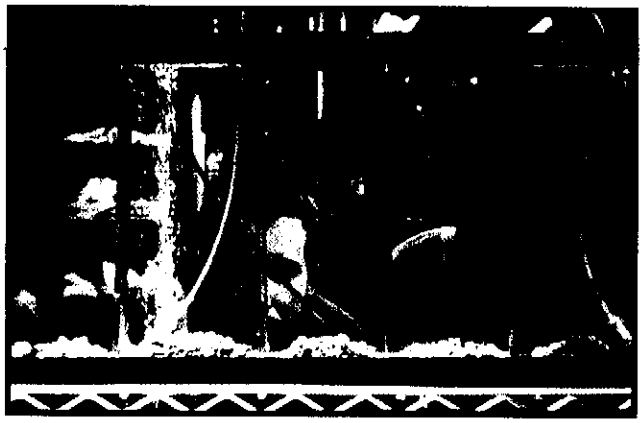
5.52 In *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* a human director inhabits the same world as the cartoon characters starring in his film.

of a traveling matte. The animated figures in our shot from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* **(5.52)** were matted into live-action footage shot separately.

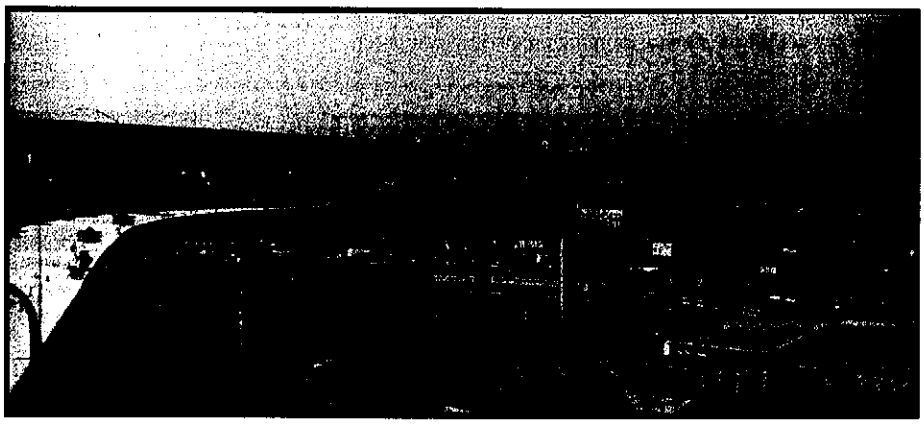
Before the perfecting of computer-generated imagery, traveling mattes were commonly used in all genres of mainstream cinema. Usually, they function to create a realistic-looking locale or situation. But they can also generate an abstract, deliberately unrealistic, image **(5.53)**.

For many films, different types of special effects will be combined. The above illustration from *The Fellowship of the Ring* (5.50) includes a partial full-size set with an actor at the left, a miniature set in the middle ground, a matte painting of the background elements, and computer-animated waterfalls and falling leaves. A single shot of a science fiction film might animate miniatures or models through stop action, convey their movements by a traveling matte, and add animated ray bursts in superimposition while a matte painting supplies a background. For the train crash in *The Fugitive,* front and rear projection were used simultaneously within certain shots.

You may have noticed that superimpositions, projection process work, and matte work all straddle two general bodies of film techniques. These special effects all require arrangement of the material before the camera, so to some extent they are aspects of mise-en-scene. But they also require control of photographic choices (such as refilming and making laboratory adjustments) and affect perspective



5.53 In *Rumble Fish,* a black-and-white film, Francis Ford Coppola uses traveling mattes to color the fish in an aquarium.



5.54 Computer-generated imagery created a gap in the freeway for the bus to leap in *Speed.*

relations, so they involve cinematography as well. We have considered them here because, unlike effects employing models and miniatures, these effects are created through specifically photographic tricks. The general term for them, *optical effects,* stresses their photographic nature.

With the rise of computer-generated effects, the fusion of mise-en-scene and cinematography became even more seamless. Digital compositing allows the filmmaker to shoot some action with performers and then add backgrounds, shadows, or movement that would previously have required photographed mattes, multiple exposures, or optical printing. In *Speed,* the audience sees a city bus leap a broken freeway. The stunt was performed on a ramp designed for the jump, and the highway background was drawn digitally as a matte painting (**5.54**). With the proliferation of specialized programs, computer-generated imagery (CGI) increasingly provides convincing effects that have all but replaced traditional optical printing. (See "A Closer Look.")

Like other film techniques, photographic manipulations of the shot are not ends in themselves. Rather, they function within the overall context of the film. Specific treatments of tonalities, speed of motion, or perspective should be judged less on criteria of realism than on criteria of function. For instance, most Hollywood filmmakers try to make their rear-projection shots unnoticeable. But in Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach,* the perspective relations are yanked out of kilter by an inconsistent rear projection (**5.55**). Since the film's other shots have been filmed on location in correct perspective, this blatantly artificial rear projection calls our attention to the visual style of the entire film.

5.55 The foreground plane of this shot from *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* shows Bach, shot straight on, playing a harpsichord—yet the back-projected building behind him is shot from a low angle.

FROM MONSTERS TO THE MUNDANE:
Computer-Generated Imagery in *The Lord of the Rings*

The films adapted from J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings (The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers,* and *The Return of the King*) show how CGI can be used for impressive special effects: huge battle scenes, plausible monsters, and magical events. Less obviously, the films also indicate how, more and more, CGI shapes many aspects of production, from the spectacular to the mundane.

The director, Peter Jackson, started his career in horror and fantasy films in New Zealand, where he and his partners Jamie Selkirk and Richard Taylor formed a CGI firm, Weta Digital, in 1993. Most of the digital work for *Rings* was done at the Weta facility, although the film involved so much CGI that a few sequences were commissioned from other effects firms.

CGI was used at every stage of production. In preproduction, a sort of animated storyboard (a *previz,* for "previsualization") was made, consisting of *animatics,* or rough computer-generated versions of the scenes. Each of the three previzes was roughly as long as each finished film and helped to coordinate the work of the huge staff involved in both the digital and physical work of production.

During production of the three films, CGI helped create portions of the mise-en-scene. Many shots digitally stitched together disparate elements, blending full-size settings, miniature sets, and matte paintings (5.50). A total of 68 miniature sets were built, and computer manipulation was required in each case to make them appear real or to allow camera movements through them. Computer paint programs could generate matte paintings (often based on location still photographs) for the sky, clouds, distant cliffs, and forests that appeared behind the miniatures.

Rings also drew on the rapidly developing capacity of CGI to create characters. The war scenes were staged with a small number of actual actors in costumes, while vast crowds of CGI soldiers appeared in motion alongside them. Like many companies working on digitally sophisticated films, the Weta team had to develop its own proprietary software programs. A crucial program was Massive (for "Multiple Agent Simulation System in Virtual Environment"). Using motion capture on a few *agents* (costumed actors), the team could build a number of different military maneuvers, assigning all of them to the thousands of crude digitally generated figures. By giving each figure a rudimentary artificial intelligence—such as the ability to see an approaching soldier and identify it as friend or foe—Massive could generate a scene with figures moving in unpredictable patterns. (Many options were given to the digital soldiers, and the considerable variety resulted in more realistic crowds than had the earlier method of simply repeating the movements of a small number of agents.) Another new program, Grunt, rendered these figures into photorealistic soldiers, again by creating a variety of options as to weight, height,

5.56 Vast crowds of soldiers with individualized movements were generated by the Massive program for *The Two Towers*.

and so on and letting these combine randomly for each figure **(5.56)**.

The monsters encountered by the characters during their quest were more elaborately designed and executed than the troops. A detailed three-dimensional model of each creature was constructed and captured with a new scanning wand that could read into recesses and folds to create a complete image from all angles. Obtaining realistic movement from these figures demanded further computer manipulation, however. A new system, Character Mapper, captured motion from a human actor, then adjusted the mass and musculature to imaginary skeletons. This was used notably in the cave-troll sequence to give an impression of the large, squat creature swinging its limbs and flexing its muscles in a believable fashion.

Most of the speaking characters (with the important exception of the skeletal Gollum) were played by actors, but even here CGI was used. The main characters had digital look-alikes who served as stunt doubles, performing actions that were dangerous or impossible. In the cave-troll fight, the actors playing Legolas, Merry, and Pippin were all replaced by their digital doubles when they climbed or jumped on the troll's shoulders. A requirement specific to this story was the juxtaposition of full-size actors playing three-foot-tall hobbits with other characters considerably taller than themselves. The size difference was often created during filming by using small doubles or by placing the hobbits farther from the camera in false-perspective sets. Some scenes combining tall and short characters required camera movement, which, to avoid destroying the false perspective, was accomplished through *motion control*. Motion control uses a camera guided by computer calculations, and here it moved the foreground and background figures at different rates, proportionate to their size and distance from the lens.

In many cases, CGI created the kinds of special effects formerly generated on an optical printer. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, such effects include Gandalf's fireworks, the flood at the Fords of Bruinen, the avalanche that hits the Fellowship on the mountain pass, and the flaming Eye of Sauron. The Elf Legolas's superhuman speed in archery was achieved by adding digital arrows to the actor's pantomime of firing.

Cinematography also depended on CGI. For the cave-troll scene, Jackson donned a virtual-reality helmet and planned camera positions by moving around a virtual set and facing a virtual troll. The camera positions were motion-captured and reproduced in the actual filming of the sequence—which

has a rough, hand-held style, quite different from the rest of the series.

CGI was required in postproduction as well. Filmmakers erased telephone poles in location shots and helicopter blades dipping into the edges of shots of the Fellowship's voyage through mountains. Specialized programs created details such as the ripples caused by drops of dew falling into the water in the Mirror of Galadriel and the distant waterfalls seen behind [illegible].

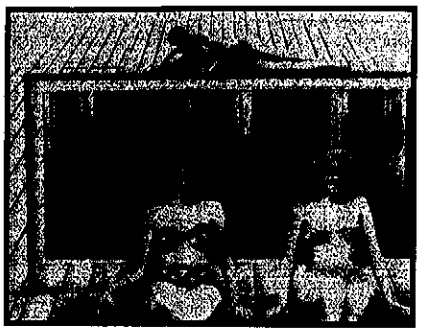
Perhaps most impo[illegible] grading after filming. [illegible] percent of the shots in [illegible] 90 percent in *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*. Gr[illegible] the color of shots, [illegible] location a distinctive [illegible] autumnal shades used [illegible] the faces of the chara[illegible] look pallid in the [illegible] while the early sce[illegible] were given a yell[illegible] enhanced the sunshine [illegible] the grading also [illegible] designed program, [illegible] allowed artists to ad[illegible] ties of individual [illegible] shot. Thus in the Lor[illegible] Galadriel shows Fro[illegible] glows bright white, [illegible] the deep blue tones [illegible] and setting. This was [illegible] by aiming bright light[illegible] brightened nearby pa[illegible]

also by digitally brightening figure in postproduction (5.57). Thanks to digital grading, CGI techniques can go beyond the creation of imaginary creatures and large crowds to shape the visual style of an entire film.

Commenting on the special effects for the Hobbit party scene in *Fellowship*, Effects Supervisor Jim Rygiel and Animation Design Supervisor Randall William Cook emphasize the range of CGI. The party was shot on a studio, but the treetops and sky added by computer. "So we ended [illegible] that whole sky and some trees and obviously adding the dragon and the smoke elements. The showy stuff is obviously fun. There's a lot of stuff that's subtle, just the background behind Frodo and Elijah [Wood], which is very much of a challenge."

The ambitious applications of CGI require enormous technical facilities. For *Fellowship*, Weta had 700 computers devoted solely to rendering [illegible] frames a day. By the end of *Return* there were 4200. The amount of digital information saved for the entire trilogy is around 500 terabytes. As computer memory and speed continue to grow, the applications of CGI to all aspects of filmmaking—and not just to effects-heavy films like *The Lord of the Rings*—will expand as well.

5.57 In *The Fellowship* [illegible] grading makes one figure bright white while the rest of the [illegible]



5.58 In *Daisies,* perspective cues create a comic optical illusion.

5.59 The Lumière camera provided flexibility in framing.

Similarly, **5.58** looks unrealistic unless we posit the man as being about two feet long. But director Vera Chytilova has used setting, character position, and deep focus to make a comic point about the two women's treatment of men. Such trick perspective was designed to be unnoticeable in *The Lord of the Rings,* where an adult actor playing a three-foot-tall hobbit might be placed considerably farther from the camera than an actor playing a taller character, yet the two appeared to be talking face to face. (See "A Closer Look," p. 179) The filmmaker chooses not only how to register light and movement photographically but also how those photographic qualities will function within the overall formal system of the film.

Framing

In any image, the frame is not simply a neutral border; it imposes a *certain vantage point* onto the material within the image. In cinema, the frame is important because it actively *defines* the image for us.

If we needed proof of the power of **framing**, we need only turn to the first major filmmaker in history, Louis Lumière. An inventor and businessman, Lumière and his brother Auguste devised one of the first practical cinema cameras **(5.59)**. The Lumière camera, the most flexible of its day, also doubled as a projector. Whereas the bulky American camera invented by W.K.L. Dickson was about the size of an office desk **(5.60)**, the Lumière camera weighed only 12 pounds and was small and portable. As a result of its lightness, the Lumière camera could be taken outside and could be set up quickly. Louis Lumière's earliest films presented simple events—workers leaving his father's factory, a game of cards, a family meal. But even at so early a stage of film history, Lumière was able to use framing to transform everyday reality into cinematic events.

Consider one of the most famous Lumière films, *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1897). Had Lumière followed theatrical practice, he might have framed the shot by setting the camera perpendicular to the platform, letting the train enter the frame from the right side, broadside to the spectator. Instead, Lumière positioned the camera at an oblique angle. The result is a dynamic composition, with the train arriving from the distance on a diagonal **(5.61)**. If the scene had been shot perpendicularly, we would have seen only a string of passengers' backs climbing aboard. Here, however, Lumière's oblique angle brings out many aspects of the passengers' bodies and several planes of action. We see some figures in the foreground, and some in the distance. Simple as it is, this single-shot film, less than a minute long, aptly illustrates how choosing a position for the camera makes a drastic difference in the framing of the image and how we perceive the filmed event.

Consider another Lumière short, *Baby's Meal* (1895). Lumière selected a camera position that would emphasize certain aspects of the event. A long shot would have situated the family in its garden, but Lumière framed the figures at a medium distance, which downplays the setting but emphasizes the family's gestures and facial expressions **(5.62)**. The frame's control of the scale of the event has also controlled our understanding of the event itself.

5.60 The bulky camera of W.K.L. Dickson.

5.61 Louis Lumière's diagonal framing in *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat.*

5.62 *Baby's Meal.*

Framing can powerfully affect the image by means of (1) the size and shape of the frame; (2) the way the frame defines onscreen and offscreen space; (3) the way framing imposes the distance, angle, and height of a vantage point onto the image; and (4) the way framing can move in relation to the mise-en-scene.

Frame Dimensions and Shape

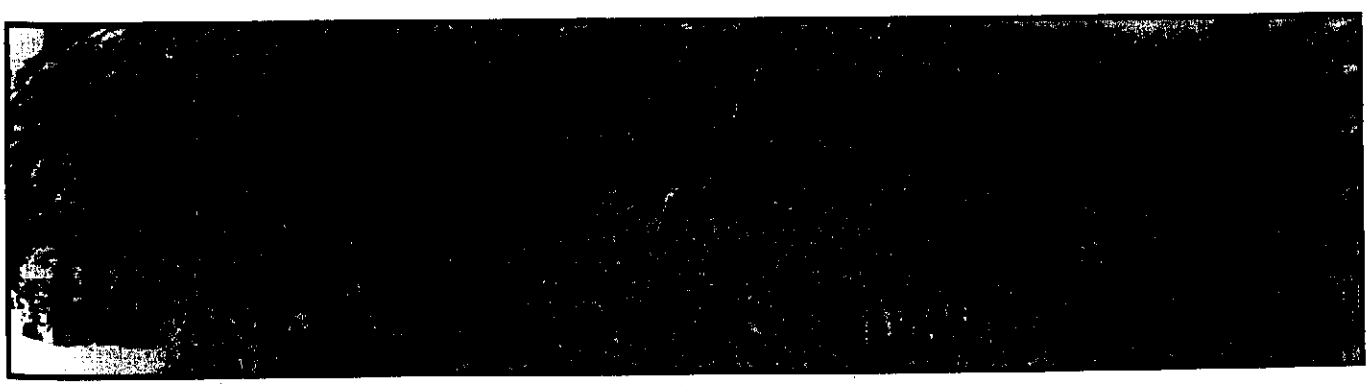
We are so accustomed to the frame as a rectangle that we should remember that it need not be one. In painting and photography, of course, images have frames of various sizes and shapes: narrow rectangles, ovals, vertical panels, even triangles and parallelograms. In cinema, the choice has been more limited. The primary choices involve the width of the rectangular image.

The ratio of frame width to frame height is called the **aspect ratio**. The rough dimensions of the ratio were set quite early in the history of cinema by Thomas Edison, Dickson, Lumière, and other inventors. The proportions of the rectangular frame were approximately four to three, yielding an aspect ratio of 1.33:1. Nonetheless, in the silent period, some filmmakers felt that this standard was too limiting. Abel Gance shot and projected sequences of *Napoleon* (1927) in a format he called *triptychs*. This was a wide-screen effect composed of three normal frames placed side by side. Gance used the effect sometimes to show a single huge expanse and sometimes to put three distinct images side by side **(5.63)**. In contrast, the Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein argued for a square frame, which would make compositions along horizontal, vertical, and diagonal directions equally feasible.

The coming of sound in the late 1920s altered the frame somewhat. Adding the sound track to the filmstrip required adjusting either the shape or the size of the image. At first, some films were printed in an almost a square format, usually about 1.17:1 **(5.64)**. But in the early 1930s, the Hollywood Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences established the so-called **Academy ratio** of 1.33:1 **(5.65)**. The Academy ratio was standardized throughout the world until the mid-1950s. For decades, standard television screens have also been in the 1.33:1 ratio, but wide-screen TVs are gradually gaining popularity.

Since the mid-1950s, a variety of *wide-screen* ratios has dominated 35mm filmmaking. The most common format in North America today is 1.85:1 **(5.66)**. The 1.66:1 ratio **(5.67)** is more frequently used in Europe than in North America. A less common ratio, also widely used in European films, is 1.75:1 **(5.68)**. A 2.35:1 ratio **(5.69)** was standardized by the CinemaScope anamorphic process during the 1950s. The 2.2:1 ratio was chiefly used for 70mm presentation **(5.70)**, though as film stocks have improved, 70mm filming and projecting have largely disappeared.

The simplest way to create a wide-screen image is by **masking** it at some stage in production or exhibition **(5.71)**. This masking is usually called a *hard matte*. Alternatively, many contemporary films are shot full-frame (that is, between 1.33:1 and 1.17:1) in the expectation that they will be masked when the film is shown.



5.63 A panoramic view from *Napoleon* joined images shot with three cameras.

1.17:1

5.64 2
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2.35:1
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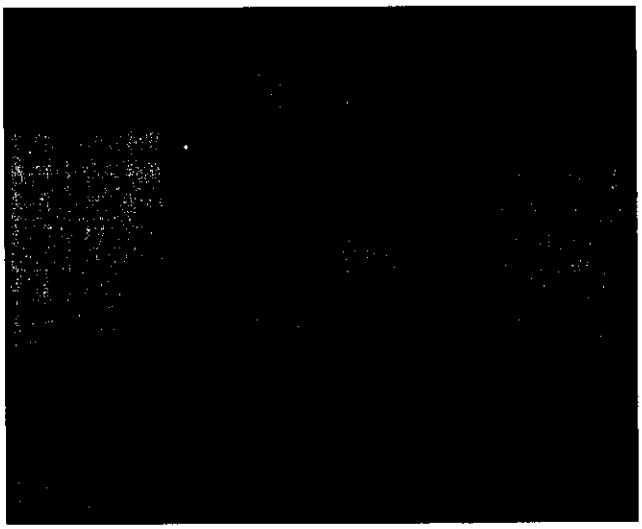
5.71 This frame from Agnès Varda's *Vagabond* was masked during filming or printing.



5.72 Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull*. Note the microphone visible at the top edge.

5.73 A frame from Nicholas Ray's CinemaScope film *Bigger Than Life* squeezed . . .

5.74 . . . and as projected.

Sometimes this results in lights or sound equipment being visible in the full-frame image. In **5.72** you can clearly see the microphone bobbing down into the shot. This would not be seen in the theater, where the top and bottom of the frame would be masked by the aperture plate in the projector. The colored lines in our illustration show a projection framing at 1.85:1.

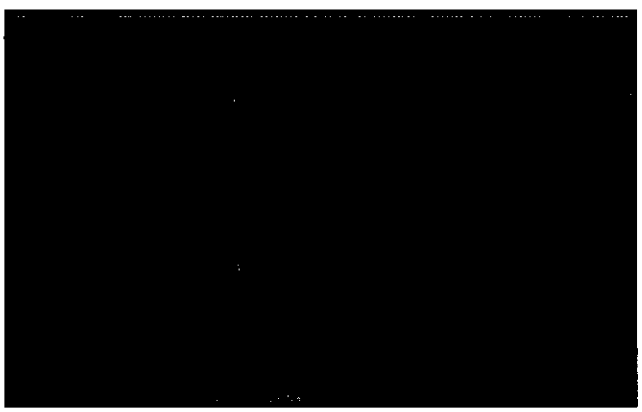
Another way to create a wide-screen image is by using an **anamorphic** process. Here a special lens squeezes the image horizontally, either during filming or in printing. A comparable lens is necessary to unsqueeze the image during projection. The image on the 35mm filmstrip is shown in **5.73**, while the image as projected on the screen is shown in **5.74**. The anamorphic aspect ratio, established by CinemaScope was 2.35:1, until the 1970s; for technical reasons, it was adjusted to 2.40:1. This is the aspect ratio of Panavision, today's most frequently used anamorphic system.

Wide-screen cinema, either masked or anamorphic, has significant visual effects. The screen becomes a band or strip, emphasizing horizontal compositions. The format was initially associated with genres of spectacle—Westerns, travelogues, musicals, historical epics—in which sweeping settings were important. But directors quickly learned that wide-screen has value for more intimate subjects, too.

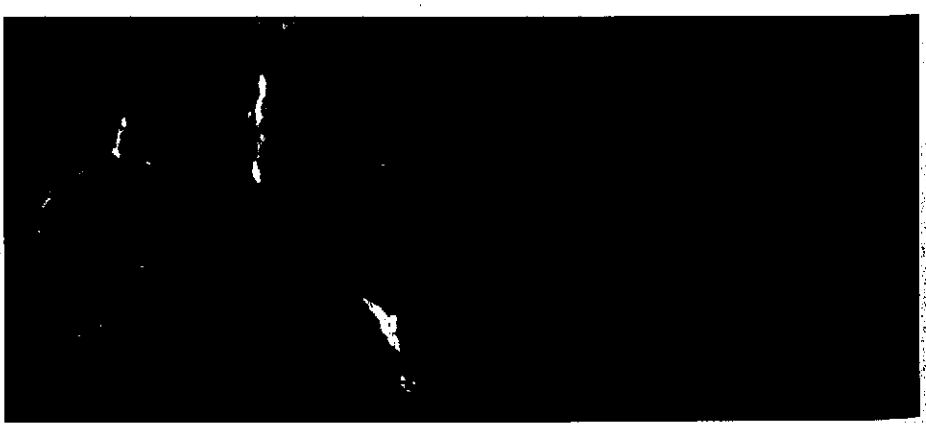
The frame from Kurosawa's *Sanjuro* **(5.75)** shows how an anamorphic process (Tohoscope, the Japanese equivalent of CinemaScope) can be used to create significant foreground and background areas in a confined setting.

In some wide-screen compositions, the mise-en-scene draws the audience's attention to only one area of the image. A common solution is to put the important information slightly off center **(5.76)**, or even sharply off center **(5.77)**. Or the director may use the wide-screen format to multiply points of interest. Many scenes in Im Kwon-Taek's *Chunhyang* fill the frame with bustle and movement **(5.78)**.

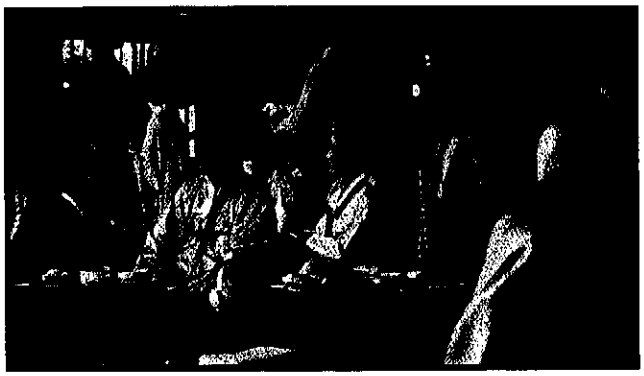
5.75 Akira Kurosawa's *Sanjuro.*



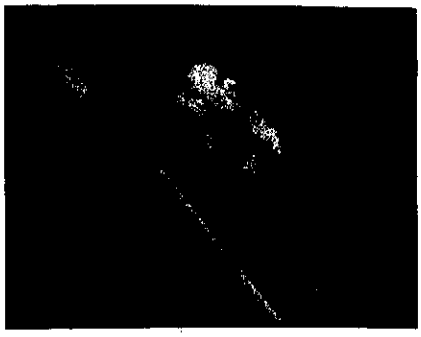
5.76 Souleymare Cissé's *Yeelen.*



5.77 John McTiernan's *Die Hard.*



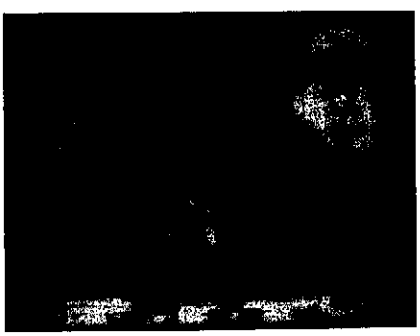
5.78 In this busy scene from *Chunhyang,* our eye shuttles around the widescreen frame according to who is speaking, who is facing us, and who responds to the speaker.



5.79 Gance's *La Roue.*

5.80 Griffith's *Intolerance.*

5.81 Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons.*



5.82 Philips Smalley's 1913 *Suspense* uses a three-way split screen.

The rectangular frame, while by far the most common, has not prevented filmmakers from experimenting with other image shapes within the rectangular frame. This has usually been done by attaching **masks** over either the camera's or the printer's lens to block the passage of light. Masks were quite common in the silent cinema. A moving circular mask that opens to reveal or closes to conceal a scene is called an **iris**. In *La Roue,* Gance employed a variety of circular and oval masks (**5.79**). In **5.80**, a shot from Griffith's *Intolerance,* most of the frame is boldly blocked out to leave only a thin vertical slice, emphasizing the soldier's fall from the rampart. A number of directors in the sound cinema have revived the use of irises and masks. In *The Magnificent Ambersons* (**5.81**), Orson Welles used an iris to close a scene; the old-fashioned device adds a nostalgic note to the sequence.

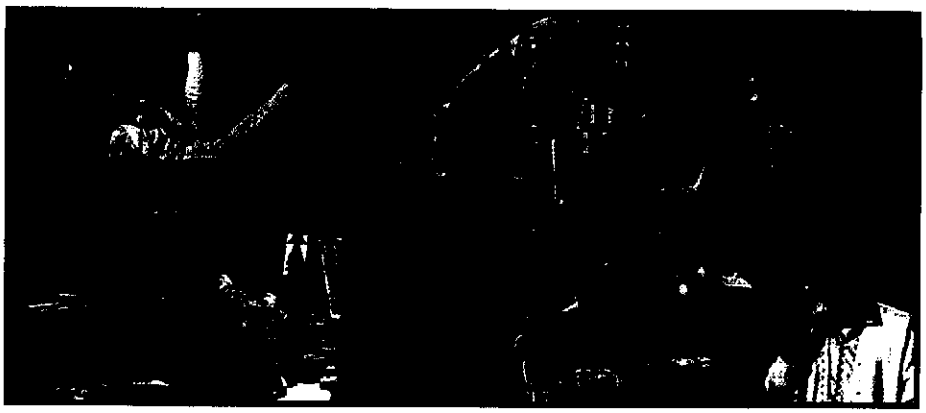
We also should mention experiments with *multiple-frame* imagery, often called *split-screen* imagery. In this process, two or more images, each with its own frame dimensions and shape, appear within the larger frame. From the early cinema onward, this device has been used to present scenes of telephone conversations (**5.82**). Split-screen phone scenes were revived for phone conversations in *Bye Bye Birdie* (**5.83**) and other 1960s wide-screen comedies. Multiple-frame imagery is also useful for building suspense, as Brian De Palma has shown in such films as *Sisters.* We gain a godlike omniscience as we watch two or more actions at exactly the same moment. Peter Greenaway used split screen more experimentally in *Prospero's Books,* juxtaposing images suggested by Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (**5.84**).

As usual, the filmmaker's choice of screen format can be an important factor in shaping the viewer's experience. Frame size and shape can guide the spectator's attention. It can be concentrated through compositional patterns or masking, or it can be dispersed by use of various points of interest or sound cues. The same possibilities exist with multiple-frame imagery, which must be carefully coordinated either to focus the viewer's notice or to send it ricocheting from one image to another.

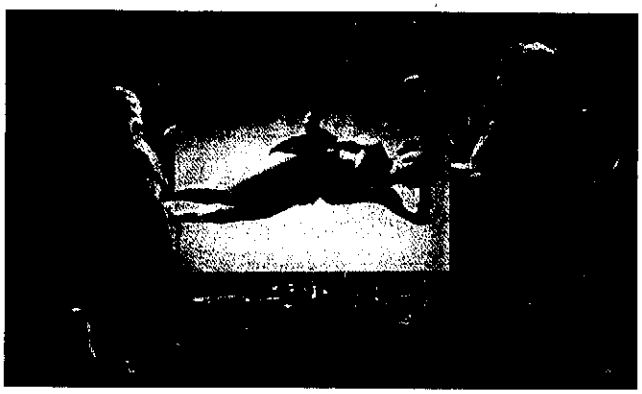
Onscreen and Offscreen Space

Whatever its shape, the frame makes the image finite. The film image is bounded, limited. From an implicitly continuous world, the frame selects a slice to show us, leaving the rest of the space *offscreen.* If the camera leaves an object or person and moves elsewhere, we assume that the object or person is still there, outside the frame. Even in an abstract film, we cannot resist the sense that the shapes and patterns that burst into the frame come from somewhere.

Film aesthetician Noël Burch has pointed out six zones of offscreen space: the space beyond each of the four edges of the frame, the space behind the set, and the space behind the camera. It is worth considering how many ways a filmmaker can imply the presence of things in these zones of offscreen space. A character can aim looks or gestures at something offscreen. As we'll see in Chapter 7, sound can offer potent clues about offscreen space. And, of course, something from offscreen can protrude partly into the frame. Virtually any film could be cited for examples



5.83 Teenagers discuss the latest gossip in *Bye Bye Birdie*'s split-screen conversation.



5.84 The actor playing Ariel in *Prospero's Books* hovers over the scene in a separate space.

5.85 In *Jezebel,* the heroine, Julie, greets some friends in medium shot . . .

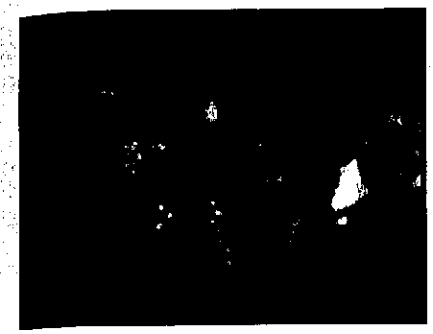
5.86 . . . when suddenly a huge fist holding a glass appears in the left foreground.

of all these possibilities, but attractive instances are offered by films that use offscreen space for surprise effects.

In a party scene in William Wyler's *Jezebel,* the heroine, Julie, is the main focus of attention until a man's hand comes abruptly into the frame (**5.85–5.88**). The intrusion of the hand abruptly signals us to the man's presence; Julie's glance, the camera movement, and the sound track confirm our new awareness of the total space. The director has used the selective powers of the frame to exclude something of great importance and then introduce it with startling effect.

More systematically, D. W. Griffith's *Musketeers of Pig Alley* makes use of sudden intrusions into the frame as a motif developing across the whole film. When a gangster is trying to slip a drug into the heroine's drink, we are not aware that the Snapper Kid has entered the room until a plume of his cigarette smoke wafts into the frame (**5.89**). At the film's end, when the Snapper Kid receives a payoff, a mysterious hand thrusts into the frame to offer him money (**5.90**). Griffith has exploited the surprise latent in our sudden awareness that figures are offscreen.

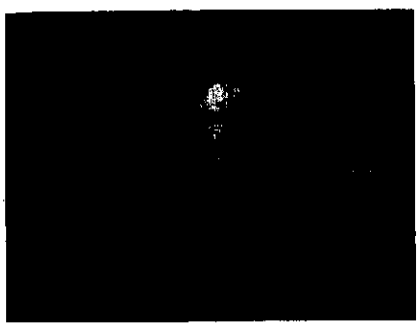
The use of the fifth zone of offscreen space, that behind the rear plane, is of course common; characters go out a door and are now concealed by a wall or a staircase. Somewhat rarer is the use of the sixth zone—offscreen space behind and near the camera. One lengthy example occurs in Abbas Kiarostami's *Under the Olive Trees.* The crew is shooting a film scene, and we watch through the lens of the camera. As the tensions between two young actors spoil take after take, the action is repeated many times (**5.91**). Eventually, shots begin to show the director and his crew behind the camera (**5.92**). After several repetitions, the director walks in from that offscreen space behind the camera and tries to resolve the problem (**5.93**). Because of our awareness of the space behind the camera, throughout the many



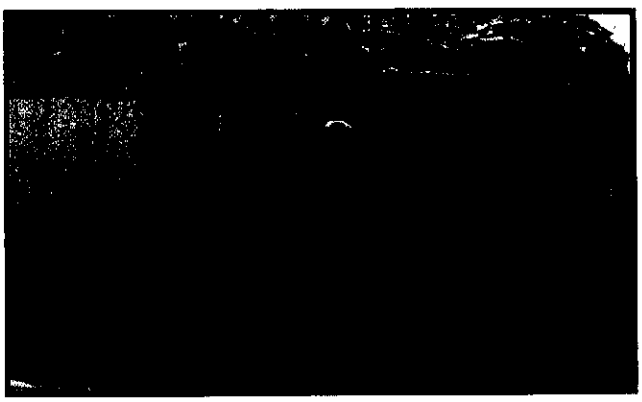
5.87 Julie looks off at its owner and comes forward . . .

5.88 . . . and the camera retreats slightly to frame her with the man who had toasted her.

5.89 *The Musketeers of Pig Alley.*



5.90 *The Musketeers of Pig Alley.*



5.91 The actors return to their positions for one of many retakes of a shot for the film-within-a-film in *Under the Olive Trees.*

5.92 Finally, a reverse shot reveals the crew behind the camera, trying to figure out what is causing the problem.

5.93 Eventually, the director walks into camera range and tries to talk the actors into playing their roles as he wants them to.

5.94 A straight-on angle in *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach.*

5.95 A high-angle framing from *Se7en.*

5.96 A low-angle framing from *Babe.*

retakes, we remain aware of the crew's growing frustration. In such ways, a filmmaker can turn the necessary limitations of the frame edge to advantage.

Angle, Level, Height, and Distance of Framing

The frame implies not only space outside itself but also a position from which the material in the image is viewed. Most often, such a position is that of the camera filming the event. Even in an animated film, the shots may be framed as high or low angles, or long shots or close-ups, all of which simply result from the perspective of drawings selected to be photographed.

Angle The frame positions us at some angle looking onto the shot's mise-en-scene. The number of such angles is infinite, since the camera might be placed anywhere. In practice, we typically distinguish three general categories: (1) the straight-on angle, (2) the high angle, and (3) the low angle. The straight-on angle is the most common (**5.94**). The high-angle positions us looking down at the material within the frame (**5.95**). The low-angle framing positions us as looking up at the framed materials (**5.96**).

Level The frame can be more or less level—that is, parallel to the horizon. If the framing is tipped to one side or the other, it's said to be **canted**. Canted framing is relatively rare, although a few films make heavy use of it, such as Orson Welles's *Mr. Arkadin,* Carol Reed's *The Third Man,* and Wong Kar-wai's *Fallen Angels* (**5.97**). In Christopher Maclaine's *The End,* a canted framing makes a steep street in the foreground appear level and renders the houses in the background grotesquely out of kilter (**5.98**).

Height The framing usually gives us a sense of being stationed at a certain height in relation to the settings and figures. Camera angle is, of course, partly related to height: To frame from a high angle entails being at a vantage point higher than the material in the image.

But camera height is not simply a matter of camera angle. For instance, the Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu often positions his camera close to the ground to film characters or objects on the floor (4.140, 6.129, and 6.130). Note that this is not a matter of camera angle, for the angle is straight on; we still see the ground or floor. Filming from such a low height with a straight-on angle is an important quality of Ozu's distinctive visual style.

Distance The framing of the image stations us not only at a certain angle and height and on a level plane or at a cant but also at a certain distance. Framing supplies a sense of being far away or close to the mise-en-scene of the shot. This aspect

5.97 A canted framing in *Fallen Angels.*

5.98 A startling canted framing in *The End.*

5.99 *The Third Man:* extreme long shot.

5.100 Long shot.

5.101 Medium long shot.

5.102 Medium shot.

5.103 Medium close-up.

5.104 Close-up.

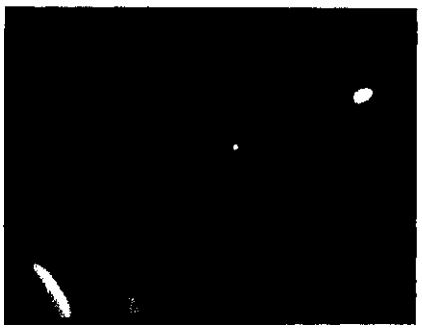
of framing is usually called *camera distance.* In presenting the terms used for various distances, we'll use the standard measure: the human body. Our examples are all from *The Third Man.*

In the **extreme long shot**, the human figure is barely visible **(5.99)**. This is the framing for landscapes, bird's-eye views of cities, and other vistas. In the **long shot**, figures are more prominent, but the background still dominates **(5.100)**. Shots in which the human figure is framed from about the knees up are called **medium long shots (5.101)**. These are common, since they permit a nice balance of figure and surroundings.

The **medium shot** frames the human body from the waist up **(5.102)**. Gesture and expression now become more visible. The **medium close-up** frames the body from the chest up **(5.103)**. The **close-up** is traditionally the shot showing just the head, hands, feet, or a small object. It emphasizes facial expression, the details of a gesture, or a significant object **(5.104)**. The **extreme close-up** singles out a portion of the face (often eyes or lips) or isolates and magnifies an object **(5.105)**.

Note that the size of the photographed material within the frame is as important as any real camera distance. From the same camera distance, you could film a long shot of a person or a close-up of King Kong's elbow. We would not call the shot in **5.106** (from *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc)* a close-up just because only Jeanne's head appears in the frame; the framing is that of a long shot because in scale her head is relatively small. (If the framing were simply adjusted downward, her whole body would be visible.) In judging camera distance, the relative proportion of the material framed determines how we identify the shot.

Categories of framing are obviously matters of degree. There is no universal measure of camera angle or distance. No precise cut-off point distinguishes between a long shot and an extreme long shot, or a slightly low angle and a straight-on angle. Moreover, filmmakers are not bound by terminology. They don't worry if a shot does not fit into traditional categories. (Nevertheless abbreviations like MS for medium shot and CU for close-up are regularly used in screenplays, so



5.105 Extreme close-up.

5.106 *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc.*

5.107 In *Citizen Kane,* the low angle functions to isolate Kane and his friend against an empty background, his deserted campaign headquarters.

> *"I don't* like *close-ups unless you can get a kick out of them, unless you* need *them. If you can get away with attitudes and positions that show the feeling of the scene, I think you're better off using the close-up only for absolute punctuation—that's the reason you do it. And you save it—not like TV where they do* everything *in close-up."*
>
> — Howard Hawks, director, *His Girl Friday*

5.108 *North by Northwest.*

filmmakers do find these terms useful in their work.) In most cases, the concepts are clear enough for us to use them in talking about films.

Functions of Framing Sometimes we're tempted to assign absolute meanings to angles, distances, and other qualities of framing. It is easy to claim that framing from a low angle automatically presents a character as powerful and that framing from a high angle presents him or her as dwarfed and defeated. Verbal analogies are especially seductive: A canted frame seems to mean that "the world is out of kilter."

The analysis of film as art would be a lot easier if technical qualities automatically possessed such hard-and-fast meanings, but individual films would thereby lose much of their uniqueness and richness. The fact is that framings have no absolute or general meanings. In *some* films, angles and distance carry such meanings as mentioned above, but in other films—probably most films—they do not. To rely on formulas is to forget that meaning and effect always stem from the film, from its operation as a system. The context of the film determines the function of the framings, just as it determines the function of mise-en-scene, photographic qualities, and other techniques. Consider three examples.

At many points in *Citizen Kane,* low-angle shots of Kane do convey his looming power, but the lowest angles occur at the point of Kane's most humiliating defeat—his miscarried gubernatorial campaign **(5.107)**. Note that angles of framing affect not only our view of the main figures but also the background against which those figures may appear.

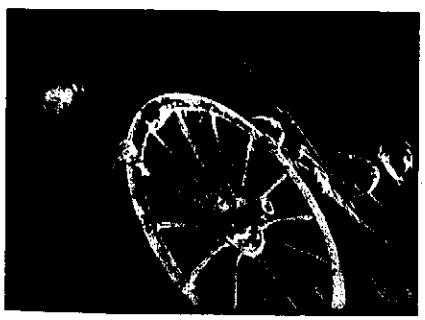
If the cliché about high-angle framings were correct, **5.108,** a shot from *North by Northwest,* would express the powerlessness of Van Damm and Leonard. In fact, Van Damm has just decided to eliminate his mistress by pushing her out of a plane, and he says, "I think that this is a matter best disposed of from a great height." The angle and distance of Hitchcock's shot wittily prophesy how the murder is to be carried out.

Similarly, the world is hardly out of kilter in the shot from Eisenstein's *October* shown in **5.109**. The canted frame dynamizes the effort of pushing the cannon.

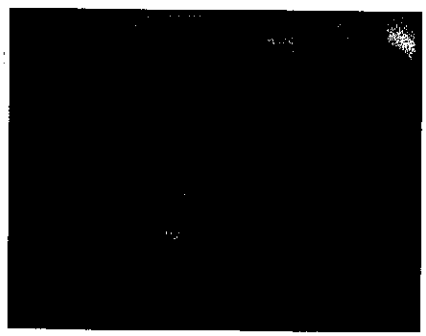
These three examples should demonstrate that we cannot reduce the richness of cinema to a few recipes. We must, as usual, look for the *functions* the technique performs in the particular *context* of the total film.

Camera distance, height, level, and angle often take on clear-cut narrative functions. Camera distance can establish or reestablish settings and character positions, as we shall see in the next chapter when we examine the editing of the first sequence of *The Maltese Falcon.* A framing can isolate a narratively important detail **(5.110, 5.111)**.

Framing also can cue us to take a shot as subjective. In Chapter 3, we saw that a film's narration may present story information with some degree of psychological depth (p. 90), and one option is a perceptual subjectivity that renders what a character sees or hears. When a shot's framing prompts us to take it as seen through a

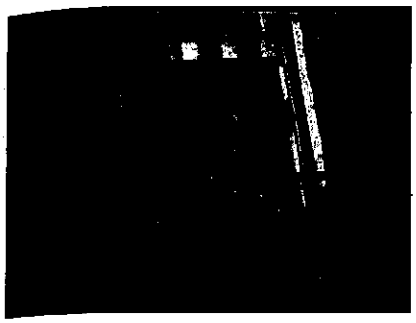


5.109 A dramatic canted framing from *October.*



5.110 The tears of Henriette in *A Day in the Country* are visible in extreme close-up.

5.111 In *Day for Night,* a close framing emphasizes the precision with which the film director positions an actor's hands.



5.112 In *Fury,* the hero in his jail cell is seen through the bars from a slightly low angle . . .

5.113 . . . while the next shot, a high angle through the window toward the street outside, shows us what he sees, from his point of view.

5.114 In *The Maltese Falcon,* Kasper Gutman is frequently photographed from a low angle, emphasizing his obesity.

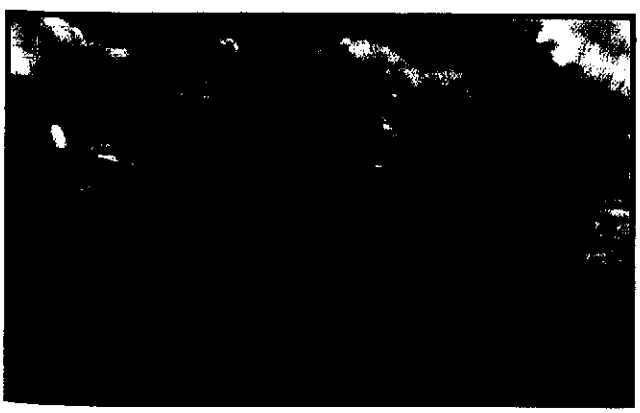
character's eyes, we call it an optically subjective shot, or a point-of-view (POV shot). Fritz Lang's *Fury* provides a clear example **(5.112, 5.113)**.

Framings may serve the narrative in yet other ways. Across an entire film, the repetitions of certain framings may associate themselves with a character or situation. That is, framings may become motifs unifying the film **(5.114)**. Throughout *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* Dreyer returns obsessively to extreme close-up shots of Jeanne (4.129).

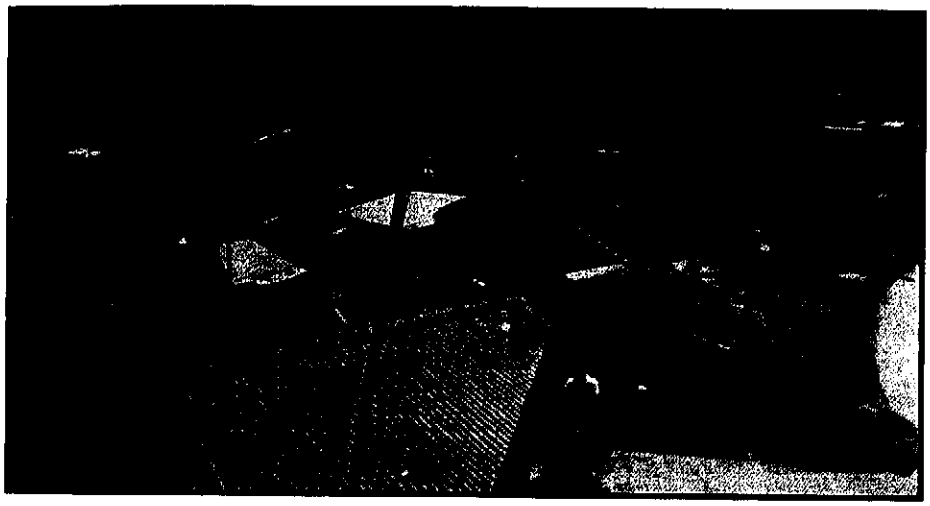
Alternatively, certain framings in a film may stand out by virtue of their rarity. The ominously calm effect of the shot of the birds descending on Bodega Bay in Hitchcock's film *The Birds* arises from the abrupt shift from straight-on medium shots to an extreme long shot from very high above the town (6.34 and 6.35, p. 227). In a film composed primarily of long shots and medium shots, an extreme close-up will obviously have considerable force. Similarly, the early scenes of Ridley Scott's *Alien* present few shots depicting any character's point of view. But when Kane approaches the alien egg, we see close views of it as if through his eyes, and the creature leaps straight out at us. This not only provides a sudden shock; the abrupt switch to framings that restrict us to one character's range of knowledge emphasizes a major turning point in the plot.

Apart from their narrative significance, framings can add a visual interest of their own. Close-ups can bring out textures and details we might otherwise ignore. We can see the surreptitious gestures of a thief in the medium close-up from Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* **(5.115)**; a string of similar close shots makes up a dazzling, balletlike scene in this film. Long shots can permit us to explore vistas. Much of the visual delight of Westerns, of David Lynch's *The Straight Story,* or of Werner Herzog's documentary *Lessons of Darkness* **(5.116)** arises from long shots that make huge spaces manifest. By including a range of information, the long-shot framing encourages us to explore details or discover abstract patterns **(5.117)**.

5.115 Bresson's *Pickpocket.*



5.116 In *Lessons of Darkness,* helicopter shots give the desolate burning oilfields of Kuwait after the 1991 Gulf War an eerie, horrifying grandeur.



5.117 In Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Summer at Grandpa's,* the boy from the city visits his disgraced uncle, and the neighborhood is presented as a welter of rooftops sheltering a spot of bright red.

5.118 René Clair in *Entr'acte* frames a ballerina from straight below, transforming the figure into an expanding and contracting flower.

5.119 *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc.*

Our eye also enjoys the formal play presented by unusual angles on familiar objects (**5.118**). In *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc,* the upside-down framings (**5.119**) are not motivated as a character's point of view; they exist as an exploration of framing in its own right. "By reproducing the object from an unusual and striking angle," writes Rudolf Arnheim, "the artist forces the spectator to take a keener interest, which goes beyond mere noticing or acceptance. The object thus photographed sometimes gains in reality, and the impression it makes is livelier and more arresting."

Framing may be used for comic effect, as Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Jacques Tati have all shown. We have seen that in *Our Hospitality* Keaton stages many gags in depth. Now we can see that well-chosen camera angles and distances are also vital to the gags' success. For example, if the railroad scene shown in 4.161 were shot from the side and in extreme long shot, we would not see so clearly that the two parts of the train are on parallel tracks. Moreover, we could not see the engineer's unconcerned posture, which indicates his failure to realize what has happened. Similarly, the use of framing to create offscreen space is vital to the gag shown in 4.170 and 4.171. Here the gag is laid out in time rather than space. First Willie tugs on the rope; then an unseen effect of that tug becomes visible as the Canfield son hurtles past and disappears. Finally, Willie reacts and is himself dragged down into the abyss below the frameline. Try to imagine these moments and others in *Our Hospitality* framed in a different way, and you will see how our reaction to Keaton's humor depends on the careful combination of mise-en-scene and framing.

Similarly, in Tati's *Play Time,* mise-en-scene and camera position cooperate to create pictorial jokes (**5.120**). The visual pun issues from the precisely chosen camera angle and distance, as well as from the mise-en-scene: the man's stooping posture as well as the door handles make him look like a goat. We cannot classify all the non-narrative functions of framing; we can only suggest that camera angle, level, height, and distance have the constant possibility of sharpening our awareness of purely visual qualities.

The Mobile Frame

All of the features of framing we have examined are present in paintings, photographs, comic strips, and other sorts of pictures. All images furnish instances of aspect ratios, in-frame and out-of-frame relations, angle, level, height, and distance of the frame's vantage point. But there is one resource of framing that is specific to

5.120 In *Play Time,* M. Hulot reacts with a start when he notices that a man locking a door seems suddenly to have sprouted horns (the door handles).

5.121 During a shot in Dreyer's *Ordet,* the camera pans right . . .

5.122 . . . to keep the figures in frame as they cross a room.

cinema (and video). In film, it is possible for the frame to *move* with respect to the framed material.

Mobile framing means that the framing of the object changes. The mobile frame changes the camera angle, level, height, or distance *during* the shot. Further, since the framing orients us to the material in the image, we often see ourselves as moving *along with* the frame. Through such framing, we may approach the object or retreat from it, circle it, or move past it.

Types of Mobile Framing We usually refer to the ability of the frame to be mobile as *camera movement.* A mobile frame is usually achieved by moving the camera physically during production. There are several kinds of camera movement, each a specific effect onscreen.

The **pan** (short for *panorama*) movement rotates the camera on a vertical axis. The camera as a whole does not move to a new position. Onscreen, the pan gives the impression of a frame horizontally scanning space. It is as if the camera "turns its head" right or left **(5.121, 5.122)**.

The **tilt** movement rotates the camera on a horizontal axis. It is as if the camera's head were swiveling up or down. Again, the entire camera does not change position. Onscreen, the tilt movement yields the impression of unrolling a space from top to bottom or bottom to top **(5.123, 5.124)**.

In the **tracking** or **dolly shot**, the camera as a whole does change position, traveling in any direction along the ground—forward, backward, circularly, diagonally, or from side to side **(5.125, 5.126)**. Note how the figures remain in the same basic relationship to the frame as they stroll along a sidewalk, while the front of the house that they hope to buy remains visible behind them.

In the **crane shot**, the camera moves above ground level. Typically, it rises or descends, often thanks to a mechanical arm that lifts and lowers it. The mourning scene in *Ivan the Terrible* begins with a crane downward **(5.127, 5.128)**. A crane shot may move not only up and down, like an elevator, but forward and backward or from side to side **(5.129, 5.130)**. For *The Thin Red Line,* Terence Malick used a crane with a 72-foot arm to let the camera slither over tall grass during battle scenes. Variations of the crane shot are helicopter and airplane shots.

Pans, tilts, tracking shots, and crane shots are the most common framing movements, but virtually any kind of camera movement can be imagined (somersaulting, rolling, and so on). And as we shall see, types of camera movements can be combined.

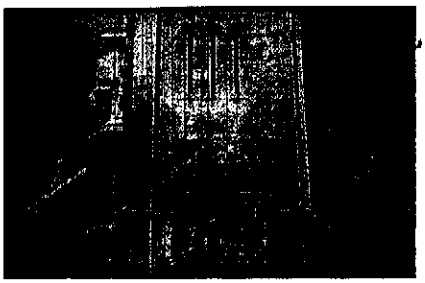
Camera movements have held an appeal for filmmakers and audiences since the beginnings of cinema. Why? Visually, camera movements have several arresting effects. They often increase information about the space of the image. Objects become sharper and more vivid than in stationary framings. New objects or figures are usually revealed. Tracking shots and crane shots supply continually changing perspectives on passing objects as the frame constantly shifts its orientation.

"I realized that if I could just get to the really good scripts, I could approach it the way I approach literature—why the camera moves this way because of this motif—and then it became fascinating."

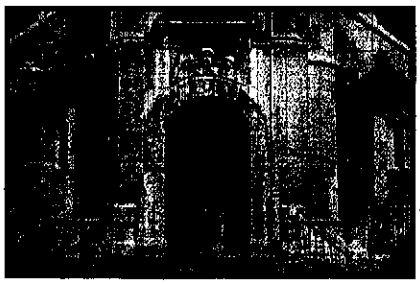
—Jodie Foster, director, *Little Man Tate*

"It's a compulsion of mine to move the camera, and I now know why. It enhances three-dimensionality. It puts you in the space, and if you move the camera the audience becomes aware of the space."

— George Miller, director, *The Road Warrior*



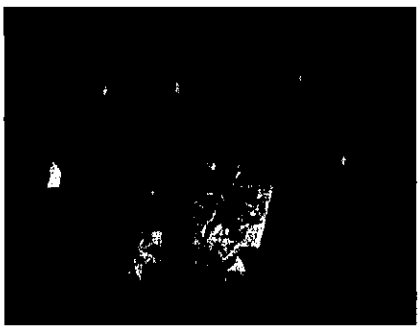
5.123 François Truffaut's *The Bride Wore Black* begins with a tilt down a church spire . . .



5.124 . . . to the church door.

5.125 During this lateral tracking shot in Erich von Stroheim's *Greed,* the camera moves rightward . . .

5.126 . . . along with the two characters.



5.127 In *Ivan the Terrible,* from a high-angle view of the bier, the camera cranes down . . .

5.128 . . . to end with a straight-on framing of Ivan seated at the bier's base.

Objects appear more solid and three-dimensional when the camera arcs (that is, tracks along a curved path) around them. Pan and tilt shots present space as continuous, both horizontally and vertically.

Moreover, it is difficult not to see camera movement as a substitute for *our* movement. The objects do not seem to swell or shrink. We seem to approach or retreat from them. We are not, of course, completely fooled. We never forget that we are watching a film in a theater. But camera movement provides several convincing cues for movement through space. Indeed, so powerful are these cues that filmmakers often make camera movements subjective—motivated narratively to represent the view through the eyes of a moving character. That is, camera movement can be a powerful cue that we are watching a point-of-view shot.

In commercial film production today, many camera movements are made with the camera on a dolly. Before the 1970s, it was standard practice to mount the dolly on rails for lengthy movements (hence the term *tracking*). In recent decades, however, a simple and popular means has been a gimbal-balanced camera mount patented as the Steadicam. This mount attaches the camera to the operator's body by means of a brace. The operator can walk with the camera, guiding the framing by minimal hand movements while viewing the image on a video monitor. Another operator adjusts focus by remote control.

The balancing mechanism allows the Steadicam to produce smooth mobile shots. It enables fluidity in tracking with actors climbing stairs, entering rooms, and riding bicycles or motorcycles (**5.131, 5.132**). Recently, directors have used a Steadicam on the set to supplement the principal camera by providing moving shots that can be cut into longer views. Some directors have taken advantage of the Steadicam to create elaborate moving shots lasting several minutes and traversing a series of spaces, as in the openings of Brian De Palma's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* and Paul Thomas Anderson's *Boogie Nights.* (For a Steadicam in use, see Fig. 5.206.)

Sometimes the filmmaker does not want smooth camera movements, preferring a bumpy, jiggling image. Commonly, this sort of image is achieved through use of the **hand-held** camera. That is, the operator does not anchor the machine on a tripod or dolly, but instead uses his or her body to act as the support without benefit of compensating equipment (**5.133**). This sort of camera movement became common in the late 1950s, with the growth of the *cinéma-vérité* documentary. One of the most famous early handheld traveling shots was in *Primary,* when a cameraman held the camera above his head and followed John F. Kennedy through a milling crowd (**5.134**).

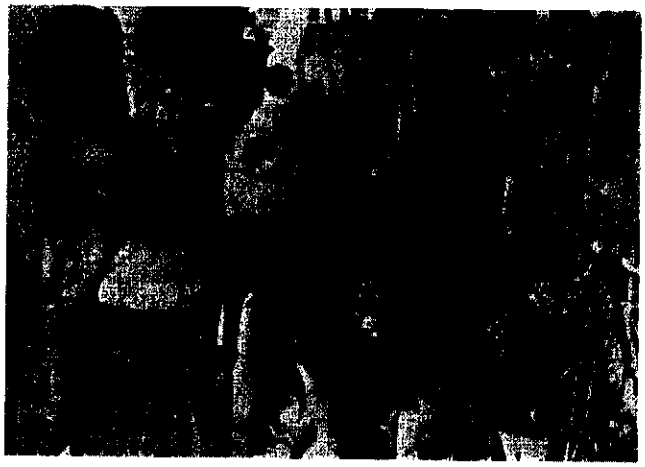
Handheld shots have appeared in many fiction films as well. Because the technique originated in documentary filming, it can lend an air of authenticity to pseudo-documentaries like *The Blair Witch Project.* In other instances, the handheld camera movement functions to create subjective point of view (**5.135**). Sometimes the handheld shot intensifies a sense of abrupt movement, as if the action were glimpsed on the fly. For *julien donkey-boy,* Harmony Korine used lightweight, bouncy, mini-DV cameras to shoot Julian shuffling through his neighborhood (**5.136**).

5.129 At the end of Karel Reisz's *Morgan!* the camera moves diagonally up . . .

5.130 . . . and back to reveal that the hero's apparently innocuous flower garden proclaims his Communist sympathies.

5.131 In Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull,* the Steadicam follows the protagonist out of his dressing room . . .

5.132 . . . and through a crowd up to the boxing ring.



5.133 Don Pennebaker hand-holds the camera while filming his *Keep on Rocking.*

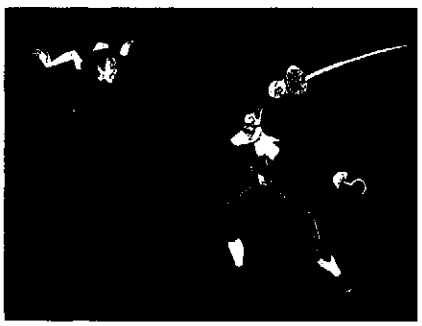
5.134 John Kennedy greeting a Wisconsin crowd in *Primary.*

5.135 In Samuel Fuller's *The Naked Kiss,* a handheld subjective camera heightens the impact of a fight.

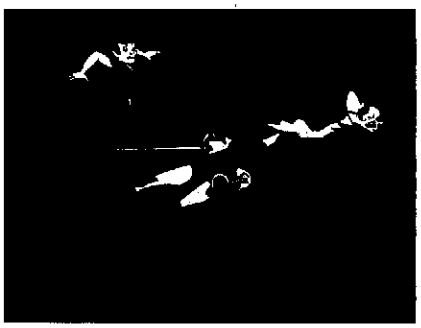
A static camera can simulate frame mobility. In animation, the actual camera stays in one position, but by filming individual cels frame by frame, the animator can create the effect of camera movement (**5.137–5.139**). Alternatively, a mobile frame effect can be achieved by photographing a still picture or a stopped frame of film and gradually enlarging or reducing any portion of that image, as is frequently done in optical printing or with CGI. Iris masking can open up to reveal a vista or close down to isolate a detail. The zoom lens can also be used to provide a mobile framing while the camera stays fixed.

How can we as viewers distinguish between a zoom and a tracking or craning movement? In general, animation, special effects, and the zoom lens reduce or blow up some portion of the image. Although the tracking shot and the crane shot do

5.136 As Julien walks, the handheld camera's jerky pace complements the explosions of color created by printing video up to 35mm.



5.137 A pan shot simulated by animation in *Peter Pan* begins with Peter and Captain Hook near a mast. Peter swings in to kick Hook . . .



5.138 . . . and the framing pans to follow as the two fly rightward . . .

5.139 . . . across the deck.

enlarge or reduce portions of the frame, this is not *all* that they do. In the genuine camera movement, static objects in different planes pass one another at different rates. We see different sides of objects, and backgrounds gain volume and depth.

In Alain Resnais's *La Guerre est finie,* a tracking shot **(5.140, 5.141)** gives the objects considerable volume. The wall has lost none of its bulk or solidity. Moreover, the street sign has not simply been enlarged. We also see it from a distinctly different angle.

In contrast, with a zoom enlargement, the mobile frame does not alter the aspects or positions of the objects filmed. In **5.142** and **5.143**, from Theo Angelopoulos's *Ulysses' Gaze,* a zoom enlarges our view of a large, broken statue of Lenin floating on a barge. Our vantage point on the statue is the same at the end of the shot as at the beginning: The top of the statue is still seen against the bottom of a row of small trees, and its feet are in exactly the same place in relation to the railing on the ship's prow. As the zoom occurs, the barge gradually looks closer to the line of trees than it had at the beginning. In sum, when the camera moves, we sense our own movement through the space. In a zoom, a bit of the space seems magnified or demagnified.

5.140 In *La Guerre est finie,* a street sign tilted slightly up on its right side . . .

5.141 . . . is tilted up distinctly at the left by the end of the track-in.

5.142 A distant view of a statue on a barge in *Ulysses' Gaze* . . .

5.143 . . . is enlarged by a zoom-in.

So far, we have isolated these different sorts of mobile framings in fairly pure states. But filmmakers frequently combine such framings within a single shot: The camera may track and pan at the same time or crane up while zooming. Still, every instance can be identified as a combination of the basic types.

Functions of Frame Mobility Our catalogue of the types of mobile framings is of little use without a consideration of how such framing strategies function systematically within films. How does mobile framing relate to cinematic space and time? How do mobile framings create patterns of their own? In short, how does mobile framing interact with the form of the film?

1. *The mobile frame and space*

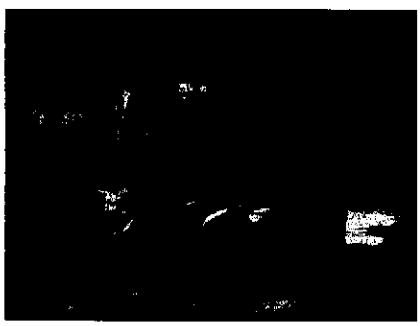
The mobile frame affects onscreen and offscreen space considerably, as we've already seen in our earlier example from *Jezebel* (5.85–5.88). After the hand with the glass intrudes into close-up, the camera tracks back to frame the man standing in the foreground. The mobile frame also continually affects the angle, level, height, or distance of the framing. A crane up may change the angle from a low one to a high one; a track-in may change the distance from long shot to close-up.

We can, in general, ask several questions about how the mobile frame relates to space. Do the frame's movements depend on figure movement? For example, one of the commonest functions of camera movement is **reframing**. If a character moves in relation to another character, often the frame will slightly pan or tilt to adjust to the movement. In *His Girl Friday,* director Howard Hawks strives to balance his compositions through reframing (**5.144–5.146**). Since reframings are motivated by figure movement, they tend to be relatively unnoticeable. When you do start to notice them, you may be surprised at how frequently they appear. Almost any modern film is constantly reframing characters in conversation scenes.

Reframing is only one way that the mobile frame may depend on figure movement. The camera may also displace itself in order to follow figures or moving objects. A camera movement that is more than just a reframing and that follows a figure's movement is called—logically enough—a **following shot** (see 5.201–5.202, 5.208–5.209, and 5.213–5.222). A pan may keep a racing car centered, a tracking shot may follow a character from room to room, or a crane shot may pursue a rising balloon. In such cases frame mobility functions primarily to keep our attention fastened on the subject of the shot, and it subordinates itself to that subject's movement.

The mobile frame can move independently of the figures, too. Often, of course, the camera moves away from the characters to reveal something of significance to the narrative. A camera movement can point out an overlooked clue, a sign that comments on the action, an unnoticed shadow, or a clutching hand. The moving camera can establish a locale the characters will eventually enter. This is what

5.144 In *His Girl Friday,* when Hildy crosses from the left . . .



5.145 . . . to sit on a desk, the camera pans right to reframe her . . .

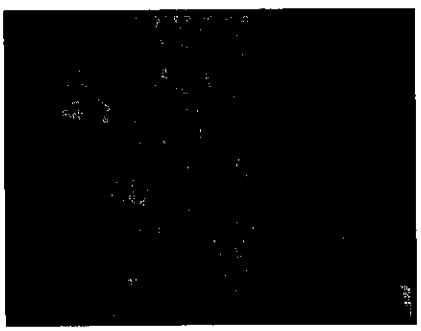
5.146 . . . and when Walter swivels his chair to face her, the camera reframes slightly leftward.

happens at the start of Otto Preminger's *Laura,* when the camera glides through Waldo Lydecker's sitting room, establishing him as a man of wealth and artistic tastes, before revealing the detective MacPherson. Similarly, at the beginning of *Back to the Future,* the camera prowls through Doc's empty house, hinting at his character and the narrative to come. In Jean Renoir's *Crime of M. Lange,* the moving camera characterizes Lange by leaving him and panning around to survey his room (**5.147–5.151**). Lange is shown to be a fantasist, living in the world of Western lore he draws on for his cowboy stories.

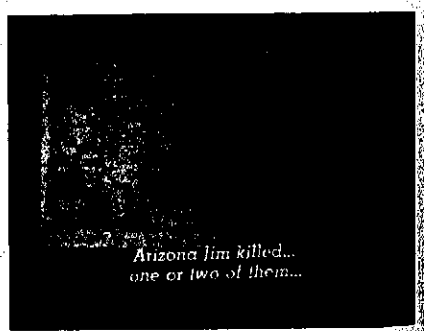
Whether dependent on figure movement or independent of it, the mobile frame can profoundly affect how we perceive the space within the frame and offscreen. Different sorts of camera movements create different conceptions of space. In *Last Year at Marienbad,* Resnais often tracks into corridors and through doorways, turning a fashionable resort hotel into a maze. Alfred Hitchcock has produced some of the most famous single camera movements in film history. One track-and-crane shot moves from a high-angle long shot of a ballroom over the heads of the dancers to an extreme close-up of a drummer's blinking eyes (*Young and Innocent*). In *Vertigo,* an especially tricky combination track-*out* and zoom-*in* plastically distorts the shot's perspective and conveys the protagonist's dizziness. The device reappears in Spielberg's *Jaws,* when Sheriff Brody at the beach suddenly realizes that the shark has attacked a child. Simultaneously tracking and zooming in opposite directions has become common in modern Hollywood filmmaking (what director Sam Raimi calls the "warp-o cam"). In films such as *The Red and the White,* Miklós Janscó specialized in lengthy camera movements that roam among groups of people moving across a plain. His shots use all of the resources of tracking, panning, craning, zooming, and racking focus to sculpt ever-changing spatial relations.

All of these examples illustrate various ways in which frame mobility affects our sense of space. Of any mobile framing, we can ask, How does it function to reveal or conceal offscreen space? Is the frame mobility dependent on figure

5.147 In *The Crime of M. Lange,* although the camera begins on Lange at work . . .



5.148 . . . it soon leaves him to show his cowboy pistols and hat . . .



5.149 . . . keeps going to show a map with Arizona outlined . . .

5.150 . . . pans past more guns . . .

5.151 . . . before returning to the excited author writing his Western tales

movement or independent of it? What particular trajectory does the camera pursue? Such questions will best be answered by considering how spatial effects of the camera movement function with respect to the film's overall form.

2. *The mobile frame and time*

Frame mobility involves time as well as space, and filmmakers have realized that our sense of duration and rhythm is affected by the mobile frame. The importance of duration in camera movement, for example, can be sensed by comparing two Japanese directors, Yasujiro Ozu and Kenji Mizoguchi. Ozu prefers short camera movements in a single direction, as in *Early Summer* and *The Flavor of Green Tea over Rice.* Mizoguchi, alternatively, cultivates the leisurely, drawn-out tracking shot, often combining it with panning. That camera movements simply take less time in Ozu's films than in Mizoguchi's constitutes a major difference between the two directors' styles.

Since a camera movement consumes time on screen, it can create an arc of expectation and fulfillment. In the pan shot across M. Lange's study, Renoir makes us wonder why the camera strays from the main character, then answers the question by indicating Lange's fascination with the American West. Later in this chapter, we shall examine how our expectations are manipulated over time in the opening camera movements of Welles's *Touch of Evil.*

The velocity of frame mobility is important, too. A zoom or a camera movement may be relatively slow or fast. Richard Lester's *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!* started a fad in the 1960s for very fast zoom-ins and -outs. In comparison, one of the most impressive early camera movements, D. W. Griffith's monumental crane shot in Belshazzar's feast in *Intolerance,* gains majesty and suspense through its inexorably slow descent toward the immense Babylonian set (4.12).

In general, a camera movement may create particular effects of its own. If the camera pans quickly from an event, we may be prompted to wonder what has happened. If the camera abruptly tracks back to show us something in the foreground that we had not expected, as in our earlier *Jezebel* example (5.85–5.88), we are taken by surprise. If the camera slowly moves in on a detail, gradually enlarging it but delaying the fulfillment of our expectations, the camera movement has contributed to suspense. In a narrative film, the velocity of mobile framing can be motivated by narrational needs. A quick track-in to a significant object can underline a key piece of story information.

Sometimes the speed of the mobile framing functions rhythmically. In Will Hindle's *Pastorale d'été* a gentle, bouncing beat is created by zooming in and slightly tilting up and down in time to Honegger's music. Often musical films make use of the speed of camera movement to underline qualities of a song or dance. During the "Broadway Rhythm" number in *Singin' in the Rain,* the camera cranes quickly back from Gene Kelly several times, and the speed of the movement is timed to accentuate the lyrics. Frame velocity can also create expressive qualities—a camera movement can be fluid, staccato, hesitant, and so forth. In short, the duration and speed of the mobile frame can significantly control our perception of the shot over time.

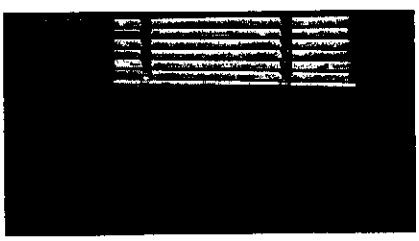
3. *Patterns of mobile framing*

The mobile frame can create its own specific motifs within a film. For example, Hitchcock's *Psycho* begins and ends with a forward movement of the frame. In the film's first three shots, the camera pans right and then zooms in on a building in a cityscape **(5.152)**. Two forward movements finally carry us under a window blind and into the darkness of a cheap hotel room **(5.153–5.155)**. The camera's movement inward, the penetration of an interior, is repeated throughout the film, often motivated as a subjective point of view as when various characters move deeper and deeper into Norman Bates's mansion. The next-to-last shot of the film shows

> *"One thing I hate in films is when the camera starts circling characters. If three people are sitting at a table talking, you'll often see the camera circling them. I can't explain why, but I find it totally fake."*
>
> — Takeshi Kitano, director, *Sonatine*

5.152 The opening shot of *Psycho.*

5.153 The second shot concentrates on one building . . .



5.154 . . . as the camera moves lower and closer to a window . . .

5.155 . . . and reveals the heroine and her boyfriend in a lunchtime tryst.

5.156 *Psycho*'s next-to-last shot begins at a distance from Norman . . .

5.157 . . . and moves in so that we see his expression as we hear his thoughts.

5.158 A can used as a signal is initially seen sitting on a shelf . . .

5.159 . . . then is pulled over. It lands on a pillow and so makes no sound . . .

Norman sitting against a blank white wall, while we hear his interior monologue (**5.156**). The camera again moves forward into a close-up of his face (**5.157**). This shot is the climax of the forward movement initiated at the start of the film; the film has traced a movement into Norman's mind. Another film that relies heavily on a pattern of forward, penetrating movements is *Citizen Kane,* which depicts the same inexorable drive toward the revelation of a character's secret.

Other kinds of movements can repeat and develop across a film. Max Ophuls's *Lola Montès* uses both 360° tracking shots and constant upward and downward crane shots to contrast the circus arena with the world of Lola's past. In Michael Snow's ⟷ (usually called *Back and Forth*), the constant panning to and fro across a classroom, Ping-Pong fashion, determines the basic formal pattern of the film. It comes as a surprise when, near the very end, the movement suddenly becomes a repeated tilting up and down. In these and many other films, the mobile frame sets up marked repetitions and variations.

Functions of Mobile Framing: Grand Illusion and Wavelength By way of summary, we can look at two contrasting films that illustrate possible relations of the mobile frame to narrative form. One uses the mobile frame in order to strengthen and support the narrative, whereas the other subordinates narrative form to an overall frame mobility.

Jean Renoir's *Grand Illusion* is a war film in which we almost never see the war. Heroic charges and doomed battalions, the staple of the genre, are absent. World War I remains obstinately offscreen. Instead, Renoir concentrates on life in a German POW camp to suggest how relations between nations and social classes are affected by war. The prisoners Maréchal and Boeldieu are both French; Rauffenstein is a German officer. Yet the aristocrat Boeldieu has more in common with Rauffenstein than with the mechanic Maréchal. The film's narrative form traces the death of the Boeldieu-Rauffenstein upper class and the precarious survival of Maréchal and his pal Rosenthal—their flight to Elsa's farm, their interlude of peace there, and their final escape back to France and presumably back to the war.

Within this framework, camera movement has several functions, all directly supportive of the narrative. First, and most typical, is its tendency to adhere to figure movement. When a character or vehicle moves, Renoir often pans or tracks to follow. The camera follows Maréchal and Rosenthal walking together after their escape; it tracks back when the prisoners are drawn to the window by the sound of marching Germans below. But it is the movements of the camera *independent* of figure movement that make the film more unusual.

When the camera moves on its own in *Grand Illusion,* we are conscious of it actively interpreting the action, creating suspense or giving us information that the characters do not have. For example, in one scene, a prisoner is digging in an escape tunnel and tugs a string signaling that he needs to be pulled out (**5.158**). Independent camera movement builds suspense by showing that the other characters have missed the signal and do not realize that he is suffocating (**5.159, 5.160**). Camera movement thus helps create a somewhat unrestricted narration.

Sometimes the camera is such an active agent that Renoir used repeated camera movements to create patterns of narrative significance. One such pattern is the movement to link characters with details of their environment. Often a sequence begins with a close-up of some detail, and the camera moves back to anchor this detail in its larger spatial and narrative context (**5.161, 5.162**).

More complicated is the scene of the Christmas celebration at Elsa's that begins with a close-up of the crèche and tracks back to show, in several stages, the interplay of reactions among the characters. Such camera movements are not simply decoration; beginning on a scenic detail before moving to the larger context makes narrative points economically, constantly emphasizing relationships among elements of Renoir's mise-en-scene. So does the rarer track-in to a detail at the *end*

5.160 . . . and the camera pans left to reveal that the characters have not noticed it.

5.161 Renoir begins the scene of Boeldieu and Maréchal discussing escape plans by framing a close-up of a caged squirrel . . .

5.162 . . . before tracking back to reveal the men beside the cage, thus creating a clear narrative parallel.

of a scene, as when after Boeldieu's death, Rauffenstein cuts the geranium, the one flower in the prison **(5.163, 5.164)**.

Characters are tied to their environment by some even more ambitious moving-camera shots. These stress important narrative parallels. For example, tracking shots compare actions in two officers' bars—one French **(5.165–5.167)**, one German **(5.168–5.170)**. Through his camera movements, Renoir indicates a similarity between the two warring sides, blurring their national differences and stressing common desires. The camera movements, repeated in a systematic pattern, create the narrative parallel.

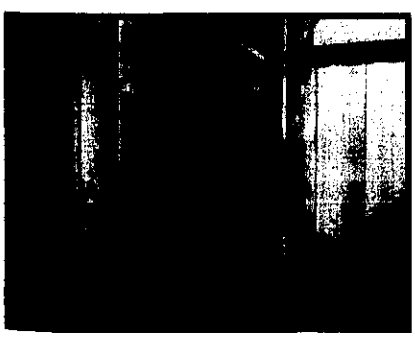
Or consider how two parallel tracking shots compare the war of the aristocrats and the war of the lower-class people. We are introduced to Rauffenstein's new position as commander of a POW camp through a lengthy tracking shot **(5.171–5.178)**. During this movement, Renoir presents, wordlessly, the military mystique of grace on the battlefield that characterizes the aristocrat's war.

Late in the film, however, a parallel shot criticizes this one **(5.179–5.181)**. That Elsa's war has none of Rauffenstein's glory is conveyed chiefly through a parallel created by the repeated camera movement. Moreover, these camera movements work together with mise-en-scene, as the narrative parallel is reinforced by the subtle use of objects as motifs—the crucifixes in 5.171 and 5.181, the photographs in 5.172 and 5.179, and the tables that end both shots. (Note the subtle use of the empty chairs upended on the table to reinforce the absence of Elsa's husband.)

Moving the camera independently of figure movement also links characters with one another. Again and again in the POW camp, the camera moves to join one man to his comrades, spatially indicating their shared condition. When the prisoners ransack the collection of women's clothes, one man decides to dress up

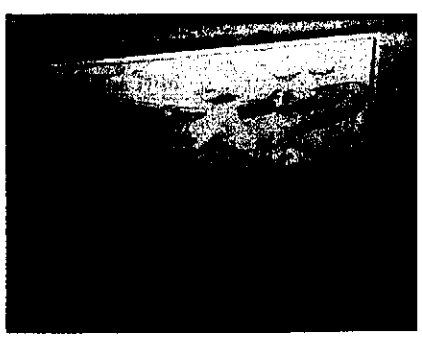
5.163 As Rauffenstein moves to the geranium in the window . . .

5.164 . . . Renoir tracks in to a close shot of the flower as he cuts it.



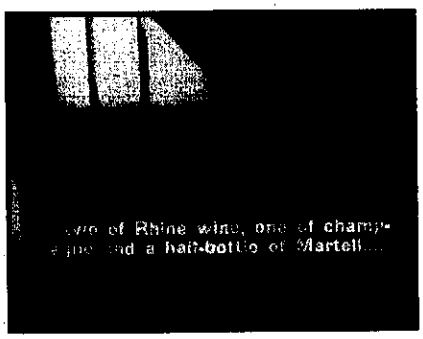
5.165 In the first scene, as Maréchal leaves the French officers' bar . . .

5.166 . . . Renoir pans and tracks left from the door to reveal pinups (just coming into the frame at the right) . . .

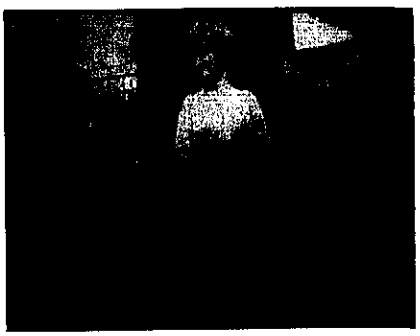


5.167 . . . and a poster.

5.168 One scene later, in the German officers' bar, a similar camera movement, this time toward the right, leaves the characters . . .

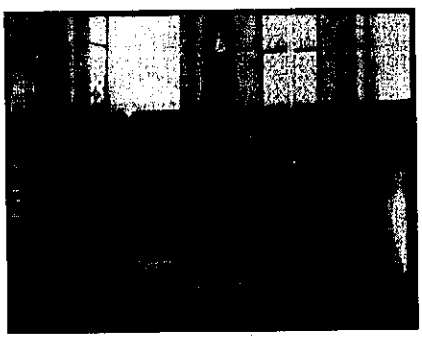


5.169 . . . and explores on its own . . .



5.170 . . . discovering some similar decorations.

5.171 Renoir begins on a crucifix and . . .



5.172 . . . tilts down to a military portrait on an altar, underlining the irony of a chapel commandeered as a bivouac.

5.173 The camera tracks past whips, spurs, and swords . . .

5.174 . . . to a servant preparing Rauffenstein's gloves.

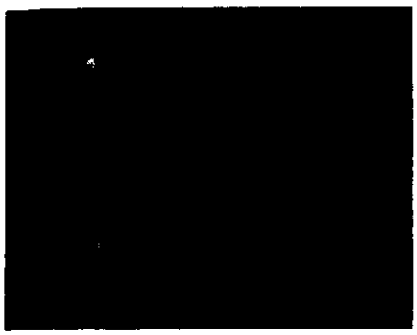
5.175 He then walks away from the camera to close a window before returning . . .

5.176 . . . into the foreground as the camera pans left and tracks back to reveal . . .

5.177 . . . a breakfast table . . .

5.178 . . . at which Rauffenstein is revealed to be sitting.

5.179 This shot also begins on an object, a photograph of Elsa's dead husband . . .



5.180 . . . before tracking left past Elsa, who remarks, "Now the table is too large" . . .

5.181 . . . to reveal the kitchen table, where her daughter Lotte sits alone.

5.182 As the lead "female" singer whips off his wig and requests the "Marseillaise" from the musicians . . .

in them. When he appears, a stillness falls over the men. Renoir tracks silently over the prisoners' faces, each one registering a reticent longing.

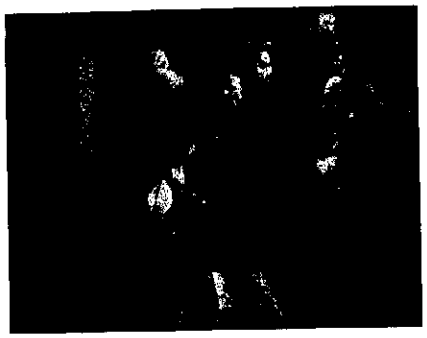
A more elaborate linking movement occurs in the scene of the prison vaudeville show, when the men learn that the French have recaptured a city. Renoir presents the shot as a celebration of spatial unity, with the camera moving among the men as they begin defiantly to sing the "Marseillaise" **(5.182–5.188)**. This complex camera movement circulates freely among the prisoners, suggesting their patriotic courage and unity in disobeying their captors.

In Elsa's cottage as well as in the prison, camera movement links characters. After feeding a cow, Maréchal enters the house, and a pan with him reveals Elsa scrubbing the floor. The culmination of the linking movement comes near the film's end, when Renoir pans from the Germans on one side of the border **(5.189)** to the distant French escapees on the other **(5.190, 5.191)**. Even on this scale, Renoir's camera refuses to honor national divisions.

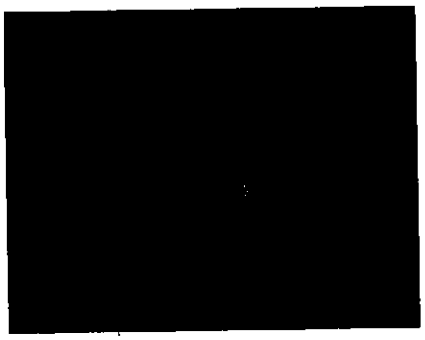
The French film critic André Bazin remarked: "Jean Renoir found a way to reveal the hidden meaning of people and things without destroying the unity that is natural to them." By placing emphasis and making comparisons, the mobile frame in *Grand Illusion* becomes as important as the mise-en-scene. The camera movements carve into space to create connections that enrich the film's narrative form.

In Michael Snow's experimental film *Wavelength,* the relation of narrative to the mobile frame is quite different. Instead of supporting narrative form, frame mobility dominates narrative, even deflecting our attention from narrative. The film begins with a long-shot framing of a loft apartment, facing one wall and window **(5.192)**. In the course of the film, the camera zooms in abruptly a short distance and then holds that framing. It zooms in a bit more and then holds that **(5.193)**. And so

5.183 . . . the camera moves right as the singer turns toward the audience . . .



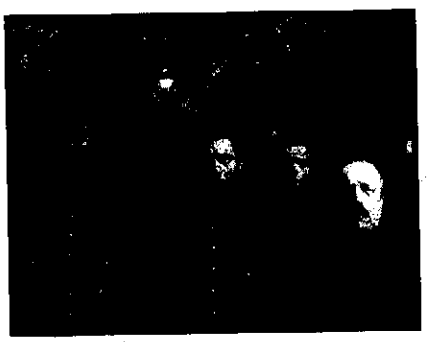
5.184 . . . and farther right as others onstage sing along.



5.185 A tilt down shows two worried German guards . . .

5.186 . . . and a track back to the left reveals a row of French prisoners in the audience on their feet, singing.

5.187 The camera tracks forward past them to the musicians and singer again . . .



5.188 . . . then pans quickly left to face the entire audience.

5.189 As the Germans realize that Maréchal and Rosenthal have crossed over into Switzerland . . .

5.190 . . . Renoir pans to the right across the invisible border . . .

5.191 . . . to the two escapees, tiny dots in the huge landscape.

5.192 Early in *Wavelength,* much of the apartment is visible.

it goes throughout the film's 45-minute length. By the end, a photograph of ocean waves on the distant wall fills the frame in close-up.

Thus *Wavelength* is structured primarily around a single kind of frame mobility—the zoom-in. Its pattern of progression and development is not a narrative one, but one of exploration, through deliberately limited means, of how the zoom transforms the space of the loft. The sudden zooms create frequent abrupt shifts of perspective relations. In excluding parts of the room, the zoom-in also magnifies and flattens what we see; every change of focal length gives us a new set of spatial relations. The zoom places more and more space offscreen. The sound track, for the most part, reinforces the basic formal progression by emitting a single humming tone that rises consistently in pitch as the zoom magnifies the space more and more.

Within *Wavelength*'s basic pattern, though, there are two contrasting systems. The first is a series of filtered tints that plays across the image as abstract fields of color. These tints often work against the depth represented in the shot of the loft.

A second system evokes a sketchy narrative. At various intervals, characters enter the loft and carry on certain activities (talking, listening to the radio, making phone calls). There is even a mysterious death (a body lies on the floor in **5.194**). But these events remain unexplained in cause–effect terms and inconclusive as to closure (although at the film's end we do hear a sound that resembles a police siren). Furthermore, none of these actions swerves the mobile framing from its predetermined course. The jerkily shifting and halting zoom continues, even when it excludes important narrative information. Thus *Wavelength* pulls in bits and pieces of narrative, but these fragments of action remain secondary, operating within the temporal progression of the zoom.

From the standpoint of the viewer's experience, *Wavelength*'s use of frame mobility arouses, delays, and gratifies unusual expectations. What plot there is briefly arouses curiosity (What are the people up to? What has led to the man's death, if he does die?) and surprise (the apparent murder). But in general, a story-centered suspense is replaced by a *stylistic* suspense: what will the zoom eventually frame? From this standpoint, the colored tints and even the plot work with the spasmodic qualities of the zoom to delay the forward progress of the framing. When the zoom finally reveals its target, our stylistic anticipations have come to fulfillment. The film's title stands revealed as a multiple pun, referring not only to the steadily rising pitch of the sound track but also to the distance that the zoom had to cross in order to reveal the photo—a "wave length."

Grand Illusion and *Wavelength* illustrate, in different ways, how frame mobility can guide and shape our perception of a film's space and time. Frame mobility may be motivated by larger formal purposes, as in Renoir's film, or it may itself become the principal formal concern, motivating other systems, as in Snow's film. What is important to realize is that by examining how filmmakers use the mobile frame within specific contexts, we can gain a fuller understanding of how our experience of a film is created.

5.193 Near the end, the sporadic zoom-ins have made details of the far wall visible.

5.194 The zoom-ins in *Wavelength* will soon eliminate the body on the floor from the frame.

Duration of the Image: The Long Take

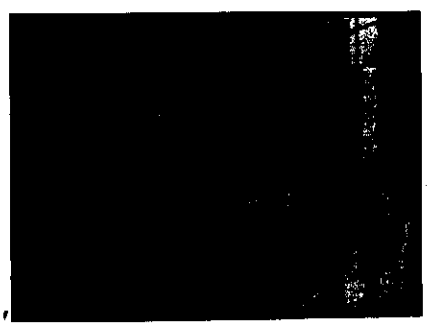
In our consideration of the film image, we have emphasized spatial qualities—how photographic transformations can alter the properties of the image, how framing defines the image for our attention. But cinema is an art of time as well as space, and we have seen already how mise-en-scene and frame mobility operate in temporal as well as spatial dimensions. What we need to consider now is how the duration of the shot affects our understanding of it.

There is a tendency to consider the shot as recording real duration. Suppose a runner takes three seconds to clear a hurdle. If we film the runner, our projected film will also consume three seconds—or so the assumption goes. One film theorist, André Bazin, made it a major tenet of his aesthetic that cinema records real time. But the relation of shot duration to the time taken by the filmed event is not so simple.

First, obviously, the duration of the event on the screen may be manipulated during filming or post-production, as we discussed earlier in this chapter. Slow-motion or fast-motion techniques may present the runner's jump in 20 seconds or 2. Second, narrative films often permit no simple equivalence of real duration with screen duration, even within one shot. As Chapter 3 pointed out (pp. 80), story duration will usually differ considerably from plot duration and screen duration.

Consider a shot from Yasajiro Ozu's *The Only Son.* It is well past midnight, and we have just seen a family awake and talking; this shot shows a dim corner of the family's apartment, with none of the characters onscreen **(5.195)**. But soon the light changes. The sun is rising. By the end of the shot, it is morning **(5.196)**. This

5.195 A scene in *The Only Son* moves from night . . .



5.196 . . . to day in a single shot.

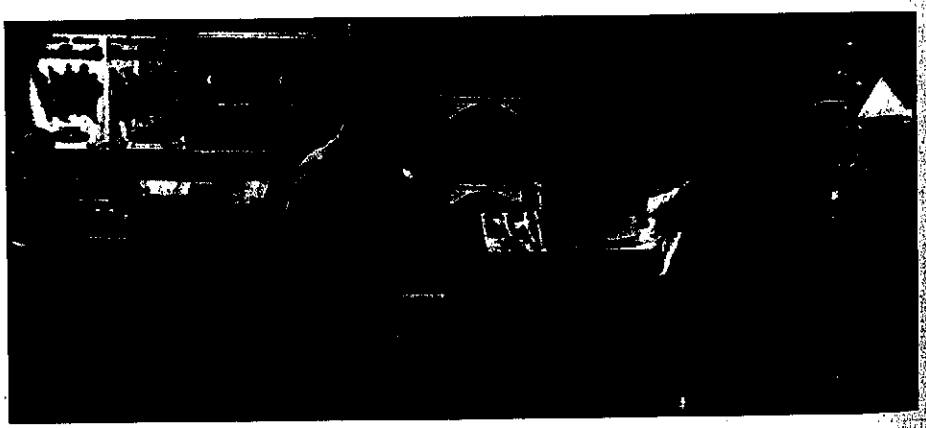
transitional shot consumes about a minute of screen time. It plainly does not record the duration of the story events; that duration would be at least five hours. To put it another way, by manipulating screen duration, the film's plot has condensed a story duration of several hours into a minute or so.

More recent films use tracking movements to compress longer passages of time in a continuous shot **(5.197, 5.198)**. The final shot of *Signs* moves away from an autumn view through a window (itself an echo of the opening shot's track-back from a window) and through a room, to reveal a winter landscape outside another window. Months of story time have passed during the tracking movement.

Functions of the Long Take

Every shot has some measurable screen duration, but in the history of cinema, directors have varied considerably in their choice of short or lengthy shots. In general, early cinema (1895–1905) tended to rely on shots of fairly long duration, since there was often only one shot in each film. With the emergence of continuity editing in the period 1905–1916, shots became shorter. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, an American film would have an average shot length of about 5 seconds. After the coming of sound, the average stretched to about 10 seconds.

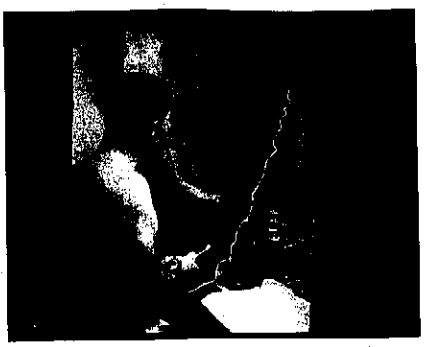
Throughout the history of the cinema, some filmmakers have consistently preferred to use shots of greater duration than the average. In various countries in the mid-1930s, directors began to experiment with very lengthy shots. These filmmakers' usually lengthy shots—**long takes**, as they're called—represented a powerful creative resource.



5.197 In Roger Michell's *Notting Hill,* the protagonist's walk through the Portobello street market moves through autumn . . .

5.198 . . . winter, and spring.

Long take is not the same as *long shot,* which refers to the apparent distance between camera and object. As we saw in examining film production (p. 20), a *take* is one run of the camera that records a single shot. Calling a shot of notable length a long take rather than a long shot prevents ambiguity, since the latter term refers to a distanced framing, not to shot duration. In the films of Jean Renoir, Kenji Mizoguchi, Orson Welles, Carl Dreyer, Miklós Janscó, Hou Hsiao-hsien, and Bèla Tarr, a shot may go on for several minutes, and it would be impossible to analyze these films without an awareness of how the long take can contribute to form and style. One long take in Andy Warhol's *My Hustler* follows the seductive exchange of two gay men as they groom themselves in a bathroom **(5.199)**. The shot, which runs for about 30 minutes, constitutes much of the film's second half.



5.199 A long take in *My Hustler.*

Usually, we can regard the long take as an alternative to a series of shots. The director may choose to present a scene in one or a few long takes or to present the scene through several shorter shots. When an entire scene is rendered in only one shot, the long take is known by the French term *plan-séquence,* or *sequence shot.*

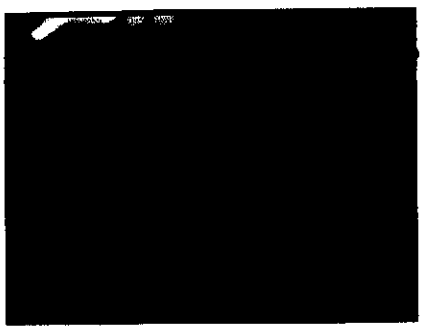
Most commonly, filmmakers use the long take selectively. One scene may rely heavily on editing, while another is presented in a long take. This permits the director to associate certain aspects of narrative or non-narrative form with the different stylistic options. A vivid instance occurs in the first part of Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's *Hour of the Furnaces.* Most of the film relies on editing of newsreel and staged shots to describe how European and North American ideologies penetrate developing nations. But the last shot of the film is a slow zoom-in to a photograph of the corpse of Che Guevera, symbol of guerrilla resistance to imperialism. Solanas made the shot a long take, holding it for three minutes to force the viewer to dwell on the cost of resistance **(5.200)**.

5.200 The final three-minute shot of *Hour of the Furnaces.*

Mixing long takes and shorter shots also creates parallels and contrasts among scenes. Bazin pointed out that *Citizen Kane* oscillates between long takes in the dialogue scenes and rapid editing in the "News on the March" newsreel and other sequences. Hitchcock, Mizoguchi, Renoir, and Dreyer often vary shot duration, depending on the scene's function in the entire film.

Alternatively, the filmmaker may decide to build the entire film out of long takes. Hitchcock's *Rope* is famous for containing only eleven shots, most running between four and ten minutes. Similarly, each scene in *Winterwind, Agnus Dei, Red Psalm,* and other films by Miklós Jancsó is a single shot. In such cases, the long take becomes a large-scale part of a film. And in such a context, editing can have great force. After a seven- or eight-minute shot, an elliptical cut can prove quite disorienting. Gus van Sant's *Elephant* traces events around a high-school shooting rampage, and it presents most scenes in very long takes following students through the hallways. Moreover, *Elephant*'s plot doesn't present the events in chronological order. The narration flashes back to show other school days, the boys' lives at home, and their preparations for the killings. So when a cut interrupts a long take, the audience must reflect for a moment to determine how the new shot's action fits into the plot. The effect of the editing is unusually harsh, because the cuts tend to break the smooth rhythm of the sustained traveling shots **(5.201–5.203)**.

Could a feature-length movie consist of one long take? Many directors have dreamed of this possibility, but the lengths of film reels have prevented it. A 35mm camera reel typically runs for only 11 minutes, so Hitchcock tried to hide some of *Rope*'s obligatory cuts. Extended 16mm reels of the type Warhol used in *My Hustler* (5.199) can run up to 30 minutes. With digital video, however, it is possible to shoot for over two hours on a single tape, and the Russian director Aleksander Sokurov seized this opportunity in his *Russian Ark.* The film consists of a single shot nearly 90 minutes long, as a Steadicam follows over 2000 actors in period costume through St. Petersburg's immense Winter Palace. *Russian Ark* takes us through several eras of Russian history, culminating in a stupendous ballroom dance and a



5.201 In a shot lasting two minutes, the camera follows Michelle into the library, where she starts reshelving books. Many of the long takes in *Elephant* frame the walking characters from behind. This conceals their facial expressions from us and emphasizes the school environment they move through.

5.202 Michelle turns as we hear a rifle being cocked.

5.203 We expect a reverse shot to reveal what she sees. Instead, we get a flashback to earlier that day when the two boys showered together before going to school on their deadly mission.

crowd drifting off into a wintry night (**5.204–5.206**). Sokurov rehearsed *Russian Ark* for several months and completed the take used in the film on the fourth try.

The Long Take and the Mobile Frame

The *Elephant* example suggests that a long take is likely to rely on camera movement. Panning, tracking, craning, or zooming to present continually changing vantage points that are comparable in some ways to the shifts of view supplied by editing.

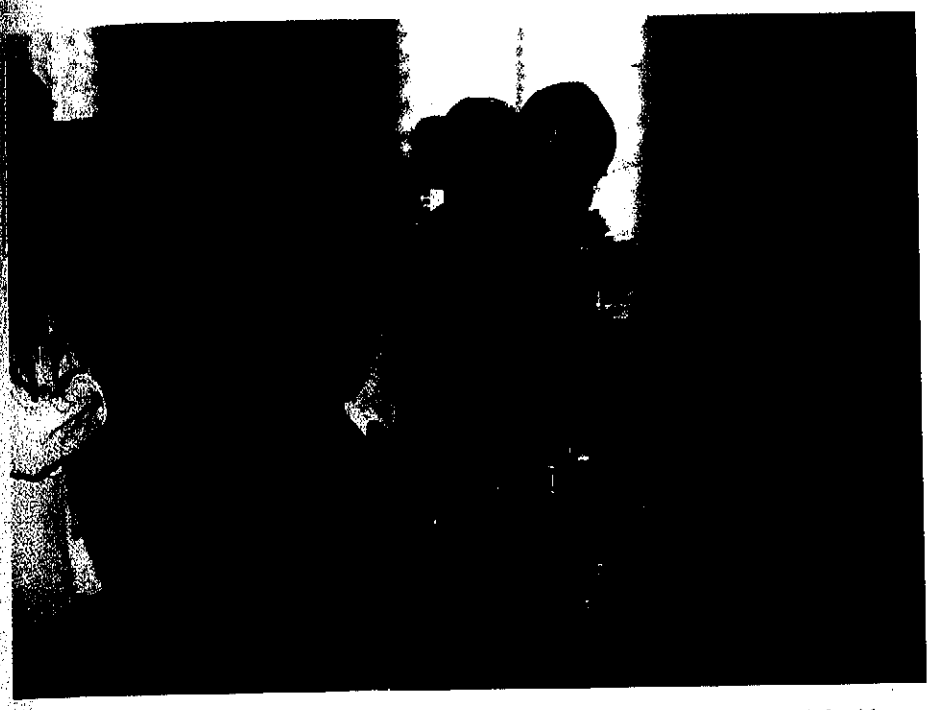
Very often, frame mobility breaks the long-take shot into significant smaller units. In Mizoguchi's *Sisters of Gion,* one long take shows a young woman, Omocha, luring a businessman into becoming her patron (**5.207–5.212**). Though there is no cutting, the camera and figure movements demarcate important stages of the scene's action.

As in this example, long takes tend to be framed in medium or long shots. The camera lingers on a fairly dense visual field, and the spectator has more opportunity to scan the shot for particular points of interest. This is recognized by Steven Spielberg, a director who has occasionally exploited lengthy takes:

> I'd love to see directors start trusting the audience to be the film editor with their eyes, the way you are sometimes with a stage play, where the audience selects who they would choose to look at while a scene is being played. . . . There's so much cutting and so many close-ups being shot today I think directly as an influence from television.

5.204 In *Russian Ark,* one episode takes place in the palace theater, with Catherine the Great pronouncing the rehearsal satisfactory.

5.205 An hour or so later, still within the same shot, hundreds of aristocrats and officers descend a staircase toward the impending devastation of the Russian Revolution.



5.206 Crew members moving through the Hermitage Museum, filming *Russian Ark* with a digital camera mounted on a Steadicam (photography by Alexander Belenkiy).

As we have seen in the previous chapter, however, the director can guide the audience's scanning of the frame through all of the technical resources of mise-en-scene. This is another way of saying that using the long take often puts more emphasis on performance, setting, lighting, and other mise-en-scene factors.

The example from *Sisters of Gion* illustrates another important feature of the long take. Mizoguchi's shot reveals a complete internal logic—a beginning, middle, and end. As a part of a film, the long take can have its own formal pattern, its own development, its own trajectory and shape. Suspense develops; we start to ask how the shot will continue and when it will end.

The classic example of how the long take can constitute a formal pattern in its own right is the opening sequence of Welles's *Touch of Evil* **(5.213–5.224)**. This opening shot makes plain most of the features of the long take. It offers an alternative to building the sequence out of many shots, and it stresses the cut that finally comes (occurring at the sound of the explosion of the car).

Most important, the shot has its own internal pattern of development. We expect that the bomb shown at the beginning will explode at some point, and we wait for that explosion through the duration of the long take. The shot establishes the geography of the scene (the border between Mexico and the United States). The camera movement, alternately picking up the car and the walking couple, weaves together two separate lines of narrative cause and effect that intersect at the border station. Vargas and Susan are thus drawn into the action involving the bombing. Our expectation is fulfilled when the end of the shot coincides with the explosion (offscreen) of the bomb. The shot has guided our response by taking us through a suspenseful development. The long take can present, in a single chunk of time, a complex pattern of events moving toward a goal, and this ability shows that shot duration can be as important to the image as photographic qualities and framing are.