CHAPTER 9

Shooting the Movie

This chapter is about the production phase of making a movie: planning and organizing the shoot, directing the film, and camerawork. Given the range of possible types of productions—dramas and documentaries, student projects, and professional films—you may find parts of the chapter more or less relevant to your work. But the concepts and methods of one kind of production often apply to others, even if somewhat different in scale or execution.

Because shooting a movie draws on all the skills and techniques of filmmaking, in some sense all the other chapters in the book are relevant to this one. More specifically regarding the choices made by the director or camera operator, it’s important to have an understanding of cameras (Chapters 3 and 6), lenses (Chapter 4), and editing (Chapter 13). The financial and legal aspects of the topics in this chapter are discussed in Chapter 17.

THE GOALS OF PRODUCTION

At the most basic level, production is the time to capture images and sounds that you’ll use to tell a story. For a drama, production represents a tremendous collaboration between all those behind the camera (producers, writers, director, art director, cinematographer, etc.) and the actors who perform in front of it. In a documentary, there’s another kind of collaboration between the film crew and the film’s subjects.

It’s important to keep in mind that production is not an end in itself, but a means to an end: everything you do in production is to ensure that when you get to the editing room you’ll have the elements you need to tell the story. The director must constantly think about not just what the camera is capturing, but how that footage can be edited together. Part of the director’s skill is being able to visualize how scenes being filmed will translate to the screen and how they’ll integrate with scenes that have already been filmed and ones not yet shot. Having some editing experience is extremely useful for directors and cinematographers.

This is not to say that going into production the director needs to pre-edit the movie (though more on that below). In fact, hopefully the director will provide the
editor with material that can go together in multiple ways. Even tightly scripted films are often transformed in terms of pace, point of view, and storytelling in the editing room, and the director should anticipate the editor’s needs.

Thinking about shooting and editing at the same time can be even trickier with documentaries, where you may have limited or no control over what happens in front of the camera. You’re capturing events or moments, but you may not know their meaning and place in the film yet. This calls for even more flexibility on the part of the director and cinematographer.

This chapter is in part about the language of cinema, the grammar of how shots flow from one to the next. The kinds of shots you get and how they’re ultimately edited constitute a key part of the film’s style. People sometimes think of style and content as separate things, but each reflects on the other and affects how audiences understand the film. There’s meaning in every shot.

Though parts of this chapter address narrative filmmaking in particular, documentary work often involves similar concerns in terms of filming, editing, and production. Documentary and fiction filmmakers should be versed in each other’s methods.

Fig. 9-1. In these shots from Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho, composition, lighting, and selective focus work together to draw us into the scene and make us want to see what Norman Bates (Anthony Hopkins) is seeing through that hole. (Universal)

Scenes, Takes, and Sequences
Some terms that define how the camera captures action:

A scene is an event that takes place in one setting in a continuous time period. Two actors talking in a kitchen might be indicated in the script as a scene. However, if one of the actors walks into the dining room, and the camera follows or moves to the next room, that is often considered a separate scene in the script.

A sequence is generally a scene or a series of scenes that make up a unit. The above-mentioned scene could also be referred to as the “kitchen sequence.” However, sequences can be made up of shots that take place in different locales but together form a conceptual whole. For example, you might refer to the “baptism sequence” in The Godfather, which includes a scene in a church intercut with a series of scenes of murders being committed around the city.¹

A scene may be made up of a single shot (such as a wide shot of the entire action)

1. Nonlinear editing systems employ a different use of “sequence.” In an NLE, a sequence is a single timeline or grouping of shots that could range from one shot to the entire movie.
or it may be divided into several shots or camera angles (or just angles) that will eventually be edited together (such as paired close-ups of two actors talking to each other; see Fig. 9-3).

During production, whenever the camera is moved to a new spot to get a different camera angle or scene, that’s considered a new setup. Changing setups often means not only changing camera position, but changing lighting and other aspects as well. Simply changing the focal length of the lens to get a new shot from the same position is not a new setup.

Various takes are filmed, each trying to capture a particular shot. For example, “Scene 8, Take 14” is the fourteenth attempt to capture scene 8 in the script. Letters can be used to indicate a particular angle called for in the script. “Scene 8A, Take 4” is the fourth attempt to get the second camera angle (A) of scene 8. Another way to note it would be “Scene 8, Shot 2, Take 4.”

“Take” (or camera take) refers to each section of footage from the time the camera begins shooting until it is turned off. “Shot” is sometimes used to mean camera take and sometimes to mean the edited take—that is, the portion of the take used in the edited version of the movie. To confuse things further, “scene” sometimes means shot (as in, “scene-to-scene color correction”). Usually the context distinguishes the meaning.

COMPOSITION AND SHOT SELECTION

Types of Shots

Shots are divided into three basic categories—the long shot (LS), medium shot (MS), and close-up (CU). The long shot includes the whole body of the person in relation to the environment, usually taken from fairly far away from the subject. A wide view of a landscape is sometimes called a long shot or a wide shot. The establishing shot is a long shot that defines the basic space or locale where events will take place. The medium shot is not too detailed, includes part of the subject, and usually includes people from head to knee or from waist up. The close-up shows a detail of the scene; in the case of a person, it is a head-and-shoulder shot. A “two-button close-up” shows everything from the face down to the second button on a person’s shirt. In a big close-up, just a face fills the screen, or in an extreme close-up (ECU) part of a face or a small object fills the screen—for example, a watch or a fly.

Two shots taken from opposite angles are called reverse-angle shots. A conversation between two people is often shot with each person alone in the frame in three-quarter profile. When the scene is edited, we see one person looking right, then the other looking left (see Figs. 9-3 and 13-4). This shooting-editing style is called shot/reverse shot or angle/reverse angle. These shots are typically close-ups, but the back of the other person may be visible (a close-up that has the back of another person’s head or another element in the foreground is sometimes called a dirty close-up).

Shot/reverse-shot cutting is often contrasted with the two-shot, which is a single shot of two actors from the front showing them from the knees up (knee shot)
or waist up. The point-of-view (POV) shot is taken from someone’s or something’s vantage point (such shot 2 in Fig. 9-16). It can be taken from behind an actor over her shoulder or with the camera at the position of her eyes. POV shots also include shots from extreme vantage points, such as from directly overhead (bird’s-eye view).

Fig. 9-2. Shot division. The categories are not exact. (A) The extreme close-up fills the screen with a small detail. (B) The big close-up fills the frame with a face. (C) The close-up includes the head and shoulders. (D) The medium shot includes most of the body. When two people are shown in medium shot, it is a two-shot. (E) The long shot includes the whole body and the surroundings. (Carol Keller)

Fig. 9-3. This sequence from Born Yesterday begins with a two-shot, then cuts to a medium shot of Judy Holliday, followed by a reverse angle of William Holden. (Columbia Pictures)

**Composition**

Each shot is composed or framed in the camera viewfinder. When you film from a script, the action and framing for each shot can be blocked out, or planned, before the take. In unscripted work, framing and movement are improvised based on both what is seen through the viewfinder and what is seen and heard outside the frame. Framing can be thought of as a way to control viewers’ attention: directing them to certain elements in the scene, excluding other elements, and creating an image that’s visually satisfying.
The notion of composition comes from painting and in part from still photography, and it refers to the arrangement of objects within the frame—their balance and tensions. Composition in motion pictures is quite different, since objects move within the frame (subject movement) and the frame itself can move (camera movement). Furthermore, one shot is edited next to another, creating an entirely new set of tensions and balances through time.

Perhaps the most commonly cited compositional guide is the rule of thirds, which can help you avoid placing important areas of interest dead center in the frame, which tends to be dull. Instead, position important areas one-third of the screen width from one side or the other (see the upper-left image in Fig. 9-20). In a close-up or medium close-up shot, you can place the subject's eyes about a third of the screen height from the top (the nose will then be roughly centered in the frame; see Fig. 12-33). It should be noted that a great many well-balanced compositions do not conform to this “rule.”

Try to place objects and people naturally in the static frame—either comfortably within the frame or using the edge to cut them off decisively; don't place them so close to the edge of the frame that they seem to fight with it. Avoid large dead spaces or losing the subject in a mass of irrelevant details. Be particularly attentive to what's directly behind the subject, such as plants that may seem to be growing out of a person's head, or activity that distracts from what you want the audience to focus on.

A key consideration when framing a medium shot or a close-up of a person is how much headroom there is between the top of his or her head and the top of the frame. Individual shots vary tremendously in terms of how much headroom feels comfortable. In Fig. 9-14, the subjects' heads nearly touch the top of the frame, which works well in this scene. In shot 3A in Fig. 9-16, the space above Grace Kelly's head feels natural in the wide shot, but in the close-up (3D), the same amount of headroom seems perhaps unnecessary (the final frame might feel better balanced if the camera tilted down just a bit as it moves in). Many of the shots in Fig. 13-4 are framed so tightly that there's no headroom at all. Headroom—and composition in general—is subjective, and cinematographers and directors must go by their instincts in each setup.

Although there are no set rules for composition, compositions create expectations, and that may be used to surprise the audience or to confirm or deny their expectations. For instance, camera angles from below can be used to suggest the importance, stature, and height of the subject (or in some cases, it may just be an unflattering angle). In horror films, compositional imbalance often suggests something scary lurking outside the frame.

Because a shot often reveals its meaning through motion, it's possible to have strong film composition without well-composed still frames. Composition that is dynamic usually resolves tension by the use of subject or camera movement or through editing. A frame that seems off balance at first may fluidly become better centered as it develops. Or the off-balance quality itself may be used as an interesting pictorial element. These days, gross imbalances that violate the conventional notions of composition are often used to add flavor.
Leading the Action

When a subject has a definite movement toward the side of the frame, place the subject closer to the edge from which he is moving (see Fig. 9-4). For example, if you track someone walking from right to left, frame him closer to the right side of the frame as if to leave room for walking on the left. If the shot continues for some time, the person can advance in the frame to suggest forward movement, and even exit the frame to the left. Similarly, someone in profile looking off screen to the right should generally be framed closer to the left side of the frame, leaving space on the right.

Fig. 9-4. Leading the action. (A, B) Leave more room on the side of the frame toward which the action points. (C) The void on the left throws the frame off balance and may feel awkward or suggest something will happen (for example, someone may approach from behind). (Steven Ascher)

Other Elements in the Dynamic Frame

The focus may be “pulled” from the background to the foreground to shift audience attention. Some filmmakers consider this technique mannered unless it is used to follow a movement. Selective focus is used to accentuate a portion of the subject. In a close-up, it’s usually advisable to focus on the eyes. A tilt-focus lens (see Fig. 4-23) allows you to tilt the plane of focus, drawing attention to a narrow area. Lighting may be changed within a shot; for example, car headlights might suddenly illuminate a person.

Shots tilted sideways (tilted horizon line) are called Dutch angle or canted and are

Fig. 9-5. A shot with a tilted horizon is called a canted or Dutch angle shot. (Stephen McCarthy)
sometimes used, often in medium close-up, to add tension to a static frame (see Fig. 9-5). Sometimes one tripod head is mounted perpendicularly on another; the lower head sets the basic angle of the shot, while the upper head controls the amount of sideways tilt and even allows the camera to be smoothly tilted from side to side during the take (see Fig. 9-6).

Cinematographers often shoot at an angle that reveals as many sides of the object as possible in order to enhance the feeling of depth. For example, a building filmed head-on reveals one side; shot from an angle it reveals two sides; and shot down and at an angle it reveals three sides. Use familiar references to establish scale. An enormous boulder will seem larger if there is a person in the frame.

Hollywood directors frequently use camera angle, movement, and lighting to create a feeling of deep space in an image. This allows them to clearly distinguish foreground from background and exclude large areas of unmodulated black or white. European directors in the 1960s and 1970s often emphasized the flatness of the screen through their use of lighting and camera angle, sometimes shooting perpendicularly to a wall or allowing large areas of the frame to be overexposed or underexposed.

**Composition in the Monitor or Viewfinder**

There's a computer expression, “what you see is what you get.” Unfortunately, when framing up a shot in a video or film camera, what you see is often not what you get. That is, the image that's ultimately delivered to the audience may look a lot different from the one you’re seeing, not just in color or exposure, but also in the shape of the frame and where the edges of the picture are. It can be tricky in shooting to try to compose for the frame you’re seeing while keeping in mind the different ways it may get transformed.

**TV CUTOFF.** Traditional CRT television sets were designed to enlarge the picture slightly inside the bezel on the front of the TV, which crops off the edges of the frame (called TV cutoff or overscan). Web videos, on the other hand, usually show the entire frame, edge to edge. Between these two are flat-panel LCDs and plasma TVs, which are not supposed to cut off the edges, but sometimes do.

Because the audience may not see the edges of the frame, remember when shooting to avoid positioning anything crucial too close to the edges of the viewfinder frame (top, bottom, or sides). TV cutoff is inconsistent from one TV to another—you can’t count on how much the edges will get cut. Something undesired—like a microphone in the corner of the shot—may or may not show up.
The camera viewfinder should be able to display a \textit{TV safe action} frame as a guide to show which parts may be cropped. The \textit{TV safe title} area is even closer to the center of the picture to protect text and titles that have to be readable (see Fig. 9-7). Some monitors are switchable between \textit{underscan}, which shows you the entire image, and \textit{overscan}, which shows you typical CRT cutoff. Underscan will show you when unwanted things are definitely out, and also what the image will look like when shown on the Web.

\textbf{ASPECT RATIO ISSUES.} If you shoot in a widescreen format, be aware that your movie may be shown in a nonwidescreen format, particularly if broadcast. Similarly, if you shoot nonwidescreen, the footage will quite likely be converted to widescreen at some point. Please read the discussion of aspect ratio starting on p. 74 and particularly How Aspect Ratio Affects Your Shooting on p. 80. Fig. 9-7 shows the safe action and safe title areas of a center-cut 4:3 image extracted from a 16:9 frame.

Some cameras have interchangeable viewing screens or can display different aspect ratios, such as 1.66, 1.85, and 2.39. Sometimes a widescreen look is achieved by shooting in a relatively less wide format and cropping or masking the image in postproduction or projection. For example, you might shoot digital in 16:9 and then crop the top and/or bottom of the image to create 1.85 during post (see Fig. 9-8). If this is the case, be sure to shoot a framing chart at the beginning of the production so that the cinematographer's intentions in terms of framing are clearly indicated (see p. 269).

\textbf{THE MOVING CAMERA}

\textit{Static} or \textit{locked-off shots} (that is, shots that have no camera movement) can be contrasted with moving camera shots. A camera pivoting from a single point can \textit{pan}...
Pans and Tilts

Pans work best when motivated by a subject moving through space. Panning with a moving subject makes the rate and movement of panning natural. Panning to follow a subject is sometimes called tracking, but this should not be confused with the tracking shot, where the camera itself moves through space (see below). However, panning with a long focal length lens can be used to simulate a moving camera shot (more on this below).

The most difficult pans are across landscapes or still objects, as any unevenness in the movement is evident. These pans must be fairly slow to avoid judder or strob ing (see p. 393). The *swish pan*, a fast pan that blurs everything between the beginning and end of the movement, also avoids the strobing problem.

Panning is sometimes thought to be the shot most akin to moving your eye across a scene. If you look from one part of the room to another, however, you will see that, unlike the pan, equal weight is not given to all the intermediate points in the visual field. Viewers often read images from left to right, and scene compositions can take this into account. Pans often cross still landscapes from left to right, as though the world unfolds in this way.2

2. It would be interesting to compare films from countries where the language is written right to left (like Arabic and Hebrew) to see if there's any difference in how pans are typically done.
Cinematographers sometimes say that shots with camera movements like pans, tilts, zooms, and dolly shots are supposed to start from a static position, gradually gain and maintain speed, and then ease down to a full stop. This rule is often honored in the breach, and shots often appear in films with constant speed movement.

Keep in mind that the larger the movie is projected, the more exaggerated any camera movement will be. A quick pan or shaky camera may be far more disorienting or objectionable on a large screen than on a small one.

**Dolly Shots Versus Zooms**

When the camera moves through space, the viewer experiences the most distinctly cinematic of the motion picture shots. The moving camera is perhaps the most difficult and often the most expensive shot in the cinematographer’s vocabulary. A wheeled vehicle with a camera support is called a dolly. Moving camera shots are called dolly, tracking, or trucking shots: When the camera moves in, it is called dolly in or track in; when the dolly moves out, dolly out or track out. If the camera moves laterally, it is called crabbing or trucking (for example, crab left or truck right). A dolly with an integral boom provides up-and-down (vertical) movement, which adds enormously to the lexicon of possible shots. Of course you can also do tracking shots without a dolly, either by shooting handheld or by using devices such as a Steadicam or a slider to move the camera (see below).

Zooming, unlike the shots just described, does not involve camera movement. A zoom lens allows you to increase or decrease the focal length during a shot (for more on zoom lenses, see p. 163). Some people object to the zoom effect because

Fig. 9-9. The DSLR on the slider on the floor can make lateral movements; the camera on the jib arm can get high-angle shots and vertical movements (boom up or down). The operator watches a monitor mounted on the jib. (Amanda Kwok/SmallHD)
SHOOTING THE MOVIE

the viewer is brought closer to (or farther from) the filmed subject without changing perspective. In Fig. 4-3, you can see that with zooming, the entire image is magnified equally, similar to when you approach a still photograph. In a dolly shot, however, the camera moves in toward the subject and the perspective changes; objects also pass by the side of the frame, giving the viewer the sense of physically moving into the space.

The moving camera creates a feeling of depth in the space. The zoom tends to flatten space and can call attention to the act of filming itself. Some filmmakers like this feature and will use the zoom to pick out a significant detail in the subject.

Zooming in the opposite direction of subject or camera movement results in a treadmill effect. If an actor runs toward the camera but the lens zooms back, the viewer feels as though the actor has made no progress. Similarly, if you shoot out of a car’s front window and zoom wider, the viewer will feel as though the forward movement is disrupted. In *Vertigo*, Alfred Hitchcock combined zooming in one direction and moving in reverse to simulate the feeling of vertigo. The camera appears to move down a staircase and the lens simultaneously zooms back to keep the size of the field constant. Although the viewer sees the same subject matter, the perspective is exaggerated (since the camera moves closer), evoking the sensation of dizziness due to height. Similar moves were used by Steven Spielberg in *Jaws* and Martin Scorsese in *GoodFellas*—dollying in one direction while zooming in the other to create a disorienting effect.

**The Zoom Effect**

Zooming changes the image significantly and, unless it is handled well, can be quite disruptive. The classic, graceful zoom starts up slowly, reaches the desired speed, and gradually slows to a stop. There are also times when a “pop” zoom that jumps suddenly from one focal length to another can be effective. As discussed earlier, some people feel that all zooms should come to a stop before a camera cut. However, there are many instances of cuts while the camera is still zooming, especially if the zoom is slow, that work fine.

If you don’t like the zoom effect, but want to zoom within the shot to change focal length, you can hide it with another camera movement—for example, a pan. “Burying” a zoom in a pan can make the zoom almost invisible. Novices tend to zoom too often (“zoom happy”), which can be annoying. Zooms are most effective when they are motivated and deliberate, not random.

For a slow, smooth zoom, use a motorized zoom. Almost all video lenses have built-in zoom motors. External zoom drives are available for cine-style lenses used with 16mm and 35mm film cameras, digital cinema cameras, and some HD cameras. Zoom motors usually have a range of speeds. It’s helpful to have a very fast speed to reset the lens even if you don’t plan to use that speed in the shot.

It’s very important that the zoom control be able to accelerate smoothly from a stop and feather smoothly back to a stop. Sometimes an external zoom control has a more delicate rocker switch than a camera’s built-in switch. When shooting on a dolly or tripod, you’ll want an external control mounted on the handle of the tripod head so you don’t have to reach around to the lens. Some video cameras can be preprogrammed to execute a smooth move from one focal length to another.

Some filmmakers prefer a manual (nonmotorized) zoom, which puts you in di-
rect contact with the “feel” of the zoom. Many powered zoom lenses can be switched to manual mode. Manual zooming allows you to respond more quickly to fast-changing action. It can also be used for a deliberately “rougher” shooting style.

Some lenses can accommodate a zoom lever for manual zooming that extends perpendicularly from the zoom ring; the longer the lever, the smoother the zoom can be. Detachable drag mechanisms are available that adjust the resistance of the zoom.

**STYLE AND DIRECTION**

Style in movies, as all art forms, is continually evolving. At any given time, different types of movies make use of various conventions in shooting and editing. The conventions shift over time for a variety of reasons: a stylistically new film will spawn imitators; changes in technology make new techniques possible; ideas are borrowed from one type of moviemaking and applied to others. What follows is a deliberately sketchy history of some styles used in moviemaking, and some thoughts on directing, as a stimulus to thinking about the relationship of style and shooting possibilities. Also see the sections Some Film Theory and Approaches to Editing in Chapter 13.

**DRAMATIC FILMS**

**Narrative Styles**

In fiction and other scripted filming, the director must plan how individual shots relate to the action of the scene and to the juxtaposition of other shots through editing. At the most basic level, the director and cinematographer must decide where to place the camera and what to shoot in each shot.

In the deep-focus shot (see Fig. 9-10), the whole frame is in focus. The meaning of the scene thus develops in the deep space of the frame. The camera movement, subject movement, dialogue, lighting, costumes, and so forth all contribute to the forward movement of the film. The long take—that is, a shot of long duration—allows the action to unfold in real space and underlines the fact that the shot's meaning comes from filming, not from editing.

This staging of the shot, or *mise-en-scène*, is contrasted with *montage*, in which meaning and forward movement are conveyed through editing—through the juxtaposition of various shots that by themselves may contain less information or content. When the action of a scene is captured in many shorter shots, the filmmaker has an opportunity to control pacing and to direct the audience's attention in ways that may not be possible with longer takes. Montage also opens up the possibility of constructing entirely new meanings by suggesting connections between shots that otherwise might seem unrelated (for more on montage, see Chapter 13).

André Bazin, the French film critic often credited as the decisive influence on the French New Wave, thought it characteristic of advanced film directors of sound pictures to be concerned with *mise-en-scène*, with the integrity of the photo-
Fig. 9-10. Deep-focus shot from *Citizen Kane*. A wide-angle shot with both foreground and background in focus allows the action to develop within the frame. (RKO General)

graphed space. If you think of dangerous stunts, it is easy to grasp the visceral effect of seeing the events photographed rather than constructed. Among all the silent filmmakers, Buster Keaton seemed to understand best the power of unmanipulated space. His stunts, often performed in long shot, were clearly incredible feats. Much of the attraction of unmanipulated documentary is its ability to convince the viewer that what is seen on the screen actually occurred.

On the other hand, when audiences “suspend disbelief” and enter into the world of the movie, a carefully constructed edited sequence can deliver enormous emotional impact or bring out otherwise buried meaning. Staging and editing should not be thought of as opposites but as two stylistic tools at the filmmaker’s disposal.

The first dramatic filmmakers approached motion pictures as an extension of theater. A story would be acted out in front of a fixed camera. Though the early silent films of the 1900s were not actually shot on a proscenium stage, the camera’s relationship to the action was much like a theatergoer’s view of a stage play. D. W. Griffith is credited with first exploiting the power of the close-up. The camera comes in close to reveal nuances of an actor’s expression, creating a new relationship between audience and actor, necessitating a new, more subtle style of acting. The silent cinema defined the basic vocabulary of the film image. Today, shots taken without sound are referred to as MOS. The story goes that when the German directors came to Hollywood in the early 1930s, they referred to silent foot-
age as “mit-out-sprache” (a kind of fractured German for “without speech”), hence MOS.

Hollywood sound films until the 1950s generally were shot in studios using a classic shooting/editing style: Scenes are first filmed all the way through in master shots (relatively wide-angle, continuous takes). Then close-ups are filmed, if needed. The edited scene begins with the wide establishing shot to ensure that the audience is well oriented and comfortable in the setting before cutting to the closer shots. From this classic approach evolved a “traditional” style of filming a two-person scene using four camera angles: a master shot, a two-shot, a close-up of one character, and a reverse of the other. A radical exception to this style is found in Robert Montgomery’s Lady in the Lake, filmed with a subjective, point-of-view camera meant to reveal what the audience would see if they were inside the protagonist’s head.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as the general culture loosened up, so did narrative style in many films. The old dictates of master shot/close-up coverage gave way to a freer-form shooting that assumes audiences have the visual sophistication to understand a scene that might be played in, say, only an extreme close-up. John Cassavetes experimented with a style that seems to merge documentary and narrative sensibilities. To the audience, both the acting and the camerawork may appear spontaneous and improvised, with scenes that flow organically from one moment to the next. It has become increasingly popular to shoot dramas in a handheld, documentary style. This may be done to add a sense of “realism” to a fictional or semifictional story or as a parody of documentaries (“mockumentaries,” such as This Is Spinal Tap).

The 1980s brought the music video. Made by and for a generation that was raised watching TV, music videos introduced a new lexicon of quick cutting and the juxtaposition of wildly differing types of imagery. Stylistic touches exploited in music videos and TV commercials have found their way into many other types of movies; these techniques include deliberately shaky camerawork, distorted images, fast cutting, and intentional jump cuts (see below).

Today narrative films combine elements of all these styles. Many mainstream Hollywood or TV dramas are very straightforward stylistically, employing a style that will not “intrude” on the storytelling. Independent dramas tend to take more risks, but more often what sets them apart is the kind of stories they tell, rather than the fundamental visual language of shot selection and editing. As the Internet becomes increasingly important for distribution, it’s interesting to see how narrative styles adapt to the small size and generally short duration of online videos.

Perhaps the best way to think about shooting and editing style is to watch movies and note which scenes work especially well or badly. To understand the relationship of camerawork to editing, it can be particularly instructive to watch films with the sound off.

**Coverage**

As discussed above, one approach to capturing a scene is to shoot the entire action in a single, continuous master shot. Woody Allen often films scenes in an uninterrupted master, such as many dialogue scenes in Manhattan and Annie Hall (see Fig. 9-11). In some scenes there may be little or no camera movement. This puts a special emphasis on the performances and writing and at times may de-emphasize the filmic aspects of the scene.
Fig. 9-11. This scene from *Annie Hall* runs about three minutes as an uninterrupted master shot. It ends with Woody Allen directly addressing the camera, breaking the “fourth wall” and transforming an observational scene into one that calls attention to the act of filming. (United Artists)

On the other hand, the opening scene of Orson Welles’s *Touch of Evil* is an intricately choreographed continuous take that covers about three and a half minutes of action in close-ups and wide shots from high and low angles (accomplished with a mobile crane) in a tour de force of cinematic technique (see Fig. 9-12). At times, long master shots can give an audience a satisfying sense of being able to observe and discover things about a scene on their own.

For both aesthetic and practical reasons, filmmakers much more commonly parse or divide the action into various shots instead of simply shooting a single master. This helps both in shooting the scene and editing it. *Coverage* refers to the options (that is, different camera angles) that have been filmed in addition to the master. Having multiple camera angles available in the editing room allows you to change the pace of the scene, direct audience attention to different aspects, make use of the best performances, and edit around camera or acting errors. If a scene is covered with only one or two angles or takes, options are limited. Many an editor has lamented a director’s lack of coverage.

One logical and traditional way to break down a scene is to move from a long shot to a medium shot to a close-up. This orients the audience to the physical space and the progression of increasingly tight shots suggests forward movement into the scene, as though the camera is delving deeper into the action (see Fig. 13-2). When a scene goes wider, from a medium shot to a long shot, we expect action on a larger scale (for example, a new arrival in the scene) or a leave-taking from the action (as might happen at the end of a movie). Nevertheless, contemporary audiences are comfortable with a wide variety of cutting styles and the traditional rules about the relationship of shots don’t always apply.

**Point of View**

Among the arts, cinema has a unique ability to influence our thoughts and emotions and to allow us to see the world through the experiences of real and fictional characters. In a sense, the camera becomes the audience’s eye, and the filmmaker, through shooting and editing, has an enormous power over what the audience feels and understands.

What audiences know about the characters and which ones they identify with depends in part on how individual scenes are constructed and how the story unfolds.
Fig. 9-12. The opening sequence from *Touch of Evil* is an uninterrupted master shot that reveals the planting of a bomb, introduces central characters, and explores the urban landscape in continuously unfolding action. When Charlton Heston and Janet Leigh react to the sound of an off-screen explosion, the opening shot ends (1K) with a cut to a cutaway of the burning car (2). (Universal Pictures)

overall. How point of view is expressed in scene and story structure results from the way the script is written, how the director chooses to film it, and how the movie is edited. These aspects must be considered carefully before you go into production.

Let’s take the example of a series of scenes in which a man goes to his doctor, the doctor reveals that some test results are bad, then the man goes home (see Fig. 9-13). The following are a few possible ways to shoot and edit this sequence of events.
The camera could witness the day along with the man. We see him saying goodbye to his wife as she drops him off at the doctor’s office. He goes into the building alone. We see the doctor tell him about the test results and the man asks some questions. We cut to him at home, telling his wife the news.

In another way of portraying these events, we might start with the same shot of his wife dropping him at the doctor’s, but have the camera stay with her as he enters the building and she drives off. We cut to her later, thinking about the possibilities. Then we cut to her serving dinner as she asks how the checkup went.

In a third scenario, we begin with the doctor alone in his office, reading and reacting to the test results. Then the man enters. The audience already knows the news is bad. There might be no dialogue at all, just a silent shot of the doctor’s face. We then cut to the man silently at the table, not ready to tell his wife what happened.

Fig. 9-13. Three ways of covering the same events. See text. (Greg High)

Each of these approaches stresses different aspects of the story. In the first option, the camera is closely identified with the man and his experience. The second version is obviously more from his wife’s point of view—how she experiences these events. Depending on the story you’re telling, you might want to restrict what the audience knows and sees to what a particular character experiences. In Chinatown, like many noir and mystery stories, the camera stays with the detective (Jake Gittes, played by Jack Nicholson) and the audience gathers clues along with him. We have no access to events that Gittes doesn’t witness.

The third version of the doctor scenario differs from the first two in part because it may involve little or no dialogue. The audience understands the outlines of the

story and gathers emotional clues through expression and gesture. Another difference is that in this scenario the audience gets information independently of the main characters (since we learn of the test results before the man does). This approach affects the narrative in direct and indirect ways. When the audience has knowledge that a character doesn’t possess, a scene can at times be invested with irony, tension, or foreboding.

In interviews with François Truffaut, Alfred Hitchcock talked about the difference between surprise and suspense. He imagined a mundane dialogue scene in which there is a bomb under the table, which suddenly goes off, surprising the audience. He contrasted that with a different scene structure: in the second version, we see an anarchist plant the bomb, which is set to go off in a few minutes. Now, the same “innocuous conversation becomes fascinating because the public is participating in the scene. . . . In the first case we have given the public fifteen seconds of surprise at the moment of the explosion. In the second case we have provided them with fifteen minutes of suspense.” As shown in Fig. 9-12, Welles used this second technique in Touch of Evil.

CAMERA ANGLES AND MOVES. The different approaches to the doctor scene or Hitchcock’s bomb example represent choices that need to be made in the script and direction. Another set of choices apply to cinematography, since the camera’s point of view is expressed most directly through individual camera angles and moves. The eye line or sight line is the direction a person is looking relative to the scene and relative to the lens. A character’s eye line can indicate who or what she is looking at, and the angle of the eye line relative to the camera position can affect the way the audience experiences the scene.

The sequence from Born Yesterday in Fig. 9-3 is shot in a straightforward, observational style. The profile two-shot establishes the setting; the over-the-shoulder medium shots of Judy Holliday and William Holden cover the dialogue in a relatively objective way.

By comparison, in the scene from The Last Picture Show shown in Fig. 9-14, the camera is physically closer to the characters, and their eye lines are closer to the lens. Cybill Shepherd is filmed from above, representing Clu Gulager’s point of view. Similarly, he is filmed from below, at about the height of her position on the

Fig. 9-14. In this scene from The Last Picture Show, the camera is positioned close to the actors’ eye lines. High-contrast, hard light adds a moody feel (the shot of Cybill Shepherd evokes Hollywood black-and-white glamour photography from the 1930s and ’40s). Clu Gulager’s reflection in the mirror adds another dynamic element. (Columbia Pictures)
SHOOTING THE MOVIE

couch. These shots are not over-the-shoulder, but are clean medium shots, which can sometimes heighten the audience's sense of sharing the characters' point of view.

In some films and some scenes, the camera will more closely take on a character's point of view. For example, the shots from Rasbomon in Fig. 9-15 represent the subjective point of view of each character looking at the other. The eye line of each man is very close to the lens, but not directly into it. In some films, actors will look directly into the lens and talk to it as if the camera were inside the head of the other character (perhaps for an intimate kissing scene). This type of shot can easily seem awkward.

Fig. 9-15. POV shots. In this dueling scene from Rasbomon, the shot of Toshiro Mifune on the left represents Masayuki Mori's point of view; the shot on the right represents Mifune's POV. The eye line of each actor is toward the lens, but not directly into it. (The Criterion Collection)

Handheld camera moves are often used to represent a character's point of view and sometimes a character's emotional state. Panic or frenzy can be reinforced by a shaky or nervous handheld camera style. In real life, our remarkable human skeleton, gait, and sense of balance keep our head upright and steady and our field of view level in most circumstances, but the convention that wobbly handheld camerawork equals interiority or a subjective viewpoint is universally accepted. Horror films notoriously exploit tremulous handheld shots to telegraph the presence of an unseen onlooker.

Camera moves are often used to represent a character's experience. A character enters a room and the camera dollies forward, representing what the character is seeing. Audiences quickly make an association between a shot of a character looking off screen and a shot of what that character is supposed to be seeing. For example, in the scene from Hitchcock's Rear Window in Fig. 9-16, we start with a shot of Grace Kelly and James Stewart looking out the window, then cut away to their point of view of Raymond Burr across the courtyard (for more on this cutting pattern, see Chapter 13). When we cut back to Kelly (shot 3 in Fig. 9-16) the camera dollies in on her as the realization dawns on her that Burr's character may be a murderer. This kind of push-in to a close-up is commonly used in films to underscore a character's thoughts or to emphasize the seriousness of a situation.
In many films, fluid movement by means of Steadicam, slider, dolly, crane, and boom (sometimes in combination) is used to add flow and lyricism to a scene, but not to represent any particular character’s POV. In Psycho, Alfred Hitchcock at times uses camera moves in which the camera itself almost becomes a character, prowling around a room, manipulating the audience in a carefully calibrated way.

When determining camera position and moves, think about how you want the audience to experience the scene. Should any of the characters be favored in terms of point of view? When do you want the camera positioned at a distance, observing the action? When do you want it in close? Should the camera be a voyeur or a par-

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**Fig. 9-16.** This scene from *Rear Window* begins with three shots: (1) Grace Kelly and James Stewart looking off screen; (2) a POV shot of Raymond Burr; (3) their reaction shot. Shot 3 dollies in on Kelly to emphasize her shock. (Universal; Steven Ascher)
SHOOTING THE MOVIE

participant? Do you want it to lurch impulsively, creep stealthily, or weave with uncertainty?

Whether shooting dramas or documentaries, try to put yourself in the minds of the audience. What do you want them to see? How do you want the scene to unfold? Use blocking to reveal things rather than to merely show everything up front. Use mystery to your advantage. Some shots are most interesting for what they don’t show.

Fig. 9-17. In this continuous tracking shot from Psycho, the camera reveals the stolen money and a suitcase that tells us Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) is packing to leave town. There is a tension in the way these things are revealed in a continuous shot that feels very different than if they were shown in separate shots with cuts between them. (Universal)

The Illusion of Continuous Time

Live television shows are typically shot with several cameras. A talk show, for instance, might have one camera shooting a close-up of the host, another shooting a close-up of the guest, a third getting a two-shot of both, a fourth shooting the audience, and so on. By cutting back and forth between the various camera angles, we are shown many aspects of the scene, all in continuous time.

Dramatic films, on the other hand, are often shot with a single camera. The action is filmed from one camera angle. Then the camera is moved to a new angle, and the action is repeated or a new part of the action is staged. Depending on the action, it may be filmed from many different angles that may be shot on different days and/or at different locations.

Continuity style is the technique of shooting and editing shots filmed at different times so that the action on screen seems to flow continuously in time from one moment to the next. Continuity style is a grammar that audiences are familiar with from years of watching movies, and it is sometimes thought of as “invisible cutting” since the technique is so common as to be at times unnoticeable. Some scenes and films demand continuity style; others don’t (more on that below).

The rules of continuity style (they’re more guidelines, really) depend on the