

## Handout Film

### Image + Sound + Narrative + Performance → FILM

#### I. The image

The visual code. The smallest unit is a **frame** showing a single picture. If one projects a sequence of twenty-four frames per second on a screen, the human eye is deceived into seeing a moving image. A **shot** (“Einstellung”) is a sequence of frames filmed in a continuous (uninterrupted) **take** of a camera. A take stops when the camera stops rolling or goes offline. A sequence of shots makes up a **scene**. A scene is a sequence of action segments which take place, continuously, at the same time and in the same place. When you jump from place to place, or from time to time, it is a new scene.

**Shot types** are based on two distinguishing features: 1) the camera's distance from the object, 2) the size of the object. The four central categories are close-up, medium shot, full shot, and long shot.



1. **Extreme close-up.** A small object or part of an object shown large (a speaking mouth, a telephone receiver). Often a detail shot shows a plot-relevant object -- a ring, a telephone number on an envelope, etc.
2. **Close-up, close shot.** Full view of, typically, a human face. (**semi-close-up** shows the upper third of a person's body)
3. **Medium shot.** A view of the upper half of a person's body.
4. **American shot.** A three-quarter view of a person, showing her or him from the knees up.
5. **Full shot.** A full view of a person (*Halbtotale*)
6. **Long shot.** (*total*) A view from a distance, of a large object or a collection of objects (e.g., of buildings, a bridge). Often used to establish a setting (**establishing shot**). People, when present, are reduced to indistinct small shapes.
7. **Extreme long shot.** A view from a considerable distance (e.g., the skyline of a city). If people can be made out at all, they are mere dots in the landscape.

**Frame rate:** 24 frames per second is the normal projection speed. Increasing the speed of the frame rate during filming is called **slow motion**, decreasing it is called **fast motion**. **Freeze frame** occurs when a single frame is repeated.

**Camera Movement.** Usually, the camera is assumed to be shooting from a stationary position. If the **camera changes its position** while filming we get the following types of 'dynamic shots':

- **pan.** The camera surveys a scene by tilting around its vertical or horizontal axis.
- **tracking shot/pulling shot.** The camera follows (tracks) or precedes (pulls) an object which is in motion itself.
- **push in, pull back.** The camera moves towards or away from a stationary object.
- **zoom** (the camera actually remains stationary). The camera's lens moves towards or away from an object (**zooming in, zooming out**) by smoothly extending or shortening its focal length. Normally, this is recognizable as apparent motion only because the object retains its original perspectival aspect (and the camera actually remains stationary). Zoom shots are frequently used to direct attention to a particular detail.
- **dolly shot.** A shot taken from a camera mounted on a wheeled platform (a dolly). Normally used for moving through a location -- e.g., a dolly shot of a wedding party. "The camera dollies past a queue of guests waiting to be let in".
- **crane shot.** Camera is mounted on a crane structure.

**Camera angles** are a result of the camera's tilt: upwards, downwards, or sideways.

- **straight-on angle** The camera is positioned at about the same height as the object, shooting straight and level (this is the default angle).
- **high angle** The object is seen from above (camera looking down). (An **aerial shot** is a bird's-eye view taken from a helicopter).
- **low angle** The object is seen from a low-level position (camera looking up).

## Editing

**Continuity Editing.** A system of cutting to maintain continuous and clear narrative action.

**Cutting.** A **cut** marks the shift from one shot to another. It is identified by the type of transition which is produced. The two major kinds of cuts are 'direct' and 'transitional'. The direct cuts are as follows:

- **direct cut, straight cut.** An immediate shift to the next shot without any transition whatsoever.
- **jump cut.** Leaving a gap in an otherwise continuous shot. The gap will make the picture "jump". Jump cuts are indicative of either careless editing, or they may be used for intentional effect. They disrupt normal models of continuity editing.
- **shot/ reverse shot.** Two or more shots edited together that alternate characters, typically in a conversation situation. Characters in one framing usually look left, in the other framing, right.

Transitional cuts, in contrast, are based on an optical effect and usually signal a change of scene:

- **fade out (to color) ... fade in.** The end of a shot is marked by fading out to an empty screen (usually black); there is a brief pause; then a fade in introduces the next shot.
- **dissolve.** A gradual transition created by fading out the current shot and at the same time fading in the new shot (creating a brief moment of superimposition).

- **swish pan.** A brief, fast pan from object A in the current shot to object B in the next.
- **wipe.** A smoothly continuous left-right (or up-down etc.) replacement of the current shot by the next. Somewhat reminiscent of turning a page.

## II. Sound

- **diegetic sound (indigenous sound).** Noise, speech or music coming from an identifiable source in the current scene. For instance, we hear a weather report and we see that it comes from a car radio which somebody has just turned on.
- **nondiegetic sound.** Noise, speech or music which does *not* come from a source located in the current scene. For instance, we see waves breaking on a desolate sea-shore and we hear *Sea Symphony*. This supplied sound usually creates mood.
- **ambient sound** A diegetic background sound such as the clatter of typewriters in an office or the hubbub of voices in a cafe.
- **voice over:** (a) Representation of a non-visible narrator's voice; (b) representation of a character's interior monologue (the character may be visible but her/his lips do not move).

## III. Narrative

**Narration.** First, remember that not all films make use of **narrators**. If and when they are present, filmic narrators come in two kinds depending on whether they are visible on-screen or not.

- **flashback** An alteration of story order in which the plot moves back to show events that have taken place earlier.
- **flashforward** An alteration of story in which the plot presentation moves forward to future events and then returns to the present.
- **off-screen narrator**, also **voice-over narrator** An unseen narrator's voice uttering narrative statements.
- **on-screen narrator** A narrator who is bodily present on screen, acting and talking to the (or an) audience, shown in the act of producing his or her narrative discourse.

Depending on whether narrators tell a story in which they were involved themselves, or a story about others, they are either 'homodiegetic' or 'heterodiegetic':

- In a **homodiegetic narrative**, the story is told by a narrator who is present as a character in the story.
- In a **heterodiegetic narrative**, the story is told by a narrator who is *not* present as a character in the story.

**Focalization.** The ways and means of presenting information from somebody's point of view. Focalization can be determined by answering the question *Whose point of view orients the current segment of filmic information?* Or: *Whose perception serves as the current source of information?* Perception includes actual as well as imaginary perception (such as visions, dreams, memories).

The basic concept in focalization theory is **focus**, and this term refers to *two* intricately related things: 1) *the position from which something is seen* -- the **focalizer**; and 2) *the object seen 'in focus'* -- this is the **focalized object** or 'center of attention'. Consequently, in film analysis, we

will often ask two questions: Who sees and what is the object (thing or human being) that the focalizer focuses on?

- **point of view shot, POV shot.** The camera assumes the position of a character and shows the object of his or her gaze what the character would see.
- **gaze shot.** A picture of a character looking ('gazing') at something not currently shown. A gaze shot is usually followed by a POV shot.
- **eye-line shot.** A sequence of two shots: a gaze shot followed by a POV shot. Shot 1 shows the face of a character gazing at something.
- **over-the-shoulder shot.** The camera gets close to, but not fully into, the viewing position of a character
- **reaction shot.** A shot showing a character reacting (with wonder, amusement, annoyance, horror, etc.) to what s/he has just seen.

#### IV. Performance

**Acting.** There is enormous historical and cultural variation in performance styles in the cinema. Early melodramatic styles, clearly indebted to the 19<sup>th</sup> century theater, gave way to a relatively naturalistic style. There are many alternatives to the dominant style: the kabuki-influenced performances of kyu-geki Japanese period films, the use of non-professional actors in Italian neorealism, the typage of silent Soviet Cinema; there are the improvisatory practices of directors like John Cassavettes or Eric Rohmer, the slapstick comedy of Laurel and Hardy, or the deadpan of Buster Keaton, not to mention the exuberant histrionics of Bollywood films.

**mise-en-scene.** All of the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed/shot: the settings and props, lighting, costumes and makeup, and figure behavior.

**special effects.** A general term for various photographic manipulations that create fictitious spatial relations in the shot, such as superimposition (*Übereinanderlagerung*), matte shots (different areas of the shot taken separately and combined in laboratory work), and rear projections (foreground filmed against a screen; background imagery is projected from behind the screen).