Introduction
Why study film?

> I have been in the kingdom of the shadows . . . If only you
> knew how strange it is to be there.
>
> (Maxim Gorky, 1896)

Gorky's response to film was one of the first ever published. The mixture of awe, fascination, curiosity and intrigue as to what film is and what it means has been implanted in the minds of most spectators of this most emotionally powerful of mediums. This book is designed to introduce students from any disciplinary background to the basic body of knowledge and many of the conceptual frameworks that enable us to study film. We also aim to enable any viewer to gain some insight into the making and consuming of films which will aid their appreciation of 'the movies'. We hope, as the current A-Level syllabus puts it, to 'deepen . . . understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of film'. Our manifesto begs the question: 'why study film?'

1. Cinema is an essential part of popular culture. It also makes a crucial contribution to the content and grammar of popular culture. Cinema has produced the canonical texts upon which so much of today's visual culture is built and to which so much of contemporary culture is indebted.

We believe that not only was film the major art form of the twentieth century, but also that it remains the cultural form of greatest significance at the beginning of the new millennium. Consumption of film remains the single most popular and important entertainment experience whether it be through (globally reviving) cinemas, video, films screened on television or subscription via television and multimedia. The 'art form' which might conceivably challenge film in the twenty-first century – i.e. computer games – is completely reliant on the forms and language of cinema to engage its audience. The oft-predicted

great art form of the future is in essence a more interactive version of 'movies'.

2. *Cinema is a national, multinational and global institution.* It is essential for an active citizen to gain knowledge and understanding of how cinema functions as a business and under which institutional constraints. Viewers will gain an understanding of particular films if they can locate them within the specific institutions which produced them and by placing those institutions within their economic social and cultural contexts.

3. *Film was, is and will remain a medium of messages and values.* The viewer can develop a mature and subtle understanding of this process of making meaning through application of critical approaches (and evaluating those approaches). It is also essential to develop a critical understanding of our own participation as consumers of so powerful a medium and to acquire an ability to identify messages and values, especially in the area of representation.

4. *Film is a language.* 'A language far more complex than words', as the great cinematographer Conrad Hall put it. All films can be better understood with a grasp of common threads of expression and tradition. All viewers can gain from knowledge and understanding of how films work formally and stylistically through critical understanding of the options available to film-makers. This understanding will lead to increased engagement. In addition, the study of film will develop skills to identify and explore your own response and to communicate those responses.

5. *Textual and contextual analysis is a transferable skill.* Critical approaches to vast amounts of information is a required skill in the new (or any) millennium. Studying film is as good a way as any of acquiring such skills and far more entertaining than most.

Finally, we should not forget that film is an entertainment medium. Whenever a film-maker, theorist, or political regime forgets this they lose their audience. Without the audience films are merely lights flickering in the dark for no purpose. That being said there is no reason to doubt that a well-informed critical audience can be a factor in an artistically thriving and stimulating cinema.

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1 *Mise en scène*

The proper use of light can embellish and dramatise every object.

(Josef von Sternberg)

The language of film is constructed from three elements:

- what is to be filmed – traditionally called *mise en scène*;
- how it is filmed – cinematography;
- how that material is put together (usually to tell coherent stories) – editing.

Cinematography (literally: writing in movement) is basically a form of *photography* (writing in light). Much as photography must have an object, cinema must begin with something to film. The film-maker(s) must place something before the camera. This may be done by the act of arranging objects within the viewing range of the photographic device and/or placing the camera before objects either found 'on location' or arranged for filming. Therefore, let us begin – as we must – with what is placed in front of the camera: *mise en scène*. The French term *mise en scène* means literally 'placed on stage.' It was borrowed from theatre by French critics and became a well-known term due to extensive use by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* writers in the 1950s (see Chapters 6 and 9 for a discussion of the significance of their theories). *Mise en scène* is what cinema has in common with theatre. However, cinema goes beyond placing things – it films them too.

This chapter aims to introduce the reader to the elements of *mise en scène* and will illustrate how the different elements of setting, costume and make-up, figure, expression, movement and lighting aid the construction of meaning. To illustrate the power of *mise en scène* we have included detailed guided readings of the opening

sections of *Metropolis* (Lang, Germany, 1926) and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Spielberg, USA, 1981). This chapter will also introduce one of the key areas of intellectual debate about film: realism versus formalism. The chapter concludes with a series of questions designed to help structure *mise en scène* analysis.

All film-making is a matter of choices. Everything that we see on screen has been *placed* – note *placed* – before the camera. The question becomes 'why?' and 'to what effect?'

The elements of *mise en scène* are as follows:

- setting
- costume and make-up
- figure, expression and movement
- lighting.

SETTING

Setting gives us a sense of place and time. It can be used to create a sense of historical reality, e.g. the computer-enhanced Roman Coliseum in *Gladiator* (Scott, USA, 2000); or it can symbolise a character's state of mind, e.g. *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Weine, Germany, 1919). Here the set is constructed from painted buildings and streets with weirdly distorted angles and shapes. The distortions in the set design symbolise the mental disturbance and social chaos of the characters. Alternatively (and perhaps most frequently) the setting can appear to be natural, the everyday background of house, office, city, street where the characters live, or it can create the sense of the fantastic and other-worldly often seen in science fiction films like *Star Wars* (Lucas, USA, 1977) or *Alien* (Scott, UK, 1979). Whatever kind of setting is used in a film, even if it appears to be an everyday, ordinary apartment where the characters live, is important and worthy of analysis. It can provide us with information, not just about where the action takes place and when, but about mood, characters, type of story and the genre of the film. Shots of Monument Valley, dusty and magnificent, a saloon bar or a homestead isolated on the prairie immediately signal to the viewer that the film is a Western. Thus from the setting a whole sequence of meanings and expectations are created.

In *Intolerance* (USA, 1916) D. W. Griffith, along with his cameramen Billy Bitzer and Karl Brown and his team of hand-picked designers, conspired to create the most expensive film ever made. The intertwined stories of man's inhumanity to man cover the whole of human history. The most spectacular scenes come within the Babylon episode, for which the entire city was constructed in one huge set. Here the audience was transported to another time and place. This world is pure fantasy but it is presented with painstaking (not to say very costly) realism.

In *One from the Heart* (USA, 1982) Francis Coppola, with cinematographer Vittorio Storora, produced perhaps the most expensive mistake in cinema history. The whole affair cost so much that Coppola had to liquidate his production company to pay off the debts incurred in building the sets. The fact that the whole film was shot on sets and that these sets – from the title sequence onwards – clearly are sets, is a deliberate attempt to place the viewer outside of the action. We know (and the film-makers want us to know) that it is all fabricated.

Here, right at the beginning of our study of film, we are confronted with a basic schism within film-making and indeed theorising about film: formalism and/or expressionism versus realism.

Formalism stresses the importance of form over content in film-making. It prioritises how things are shown rather than simply what takes place. Formalists consider that film is art when it goes beyond a representation of reality to become something more than reality. It is an act of personal expression, just like a painting. The fact that it is unrealistic helps rather than hinders its status as a work of art by making the viewer conscious of the way it has been constructed.

Expressionism, or German Expressionism, is a term borrowed from the Expressionist movement in art in the early part of the twentieth century, which rejected realist modes of representation. Expressionist films are highly stylised. Hallmarks of this style include oblique camera angles, distorted bodies and shapes, bizarre settings and stylised lighting design, with extreme contrast between light and dark creating dramatic shadows (known as chiaroscuro – see Lighting section below). Expressionist films were equally surreal in their subject matter, projecting on screen a character's subjective and often mad world.

Realism, on the contrary, claims that film's strength is its special relationship with the real world. Of all the art forms film has the ability to look most like real life. If we look at a painting we can see the canvas, the brushstrokes, the texture of the paint. In other words what we see is obviously constructed by man. Similarly,

with theatre the 'falsity' of a performance is ever present – in the curtain, the visible lights, the scene changes, and the actors appearing at the end – no longer in character – to take their bows. These aspects of the theatrical experience make it very clear that what we are seeing is not real but a representation of life. Still, we do not spend the entire performance after Macbeth has murdered Duncan muttering that he is not really dead. We willingly suspend our disbelief for the duration of the performance and enter into the world of make-believe. This process is made very easy for us with film. The artificial elements of construction can all but disappear leaving us with something that looks so natural and life-like that we can forget that what we are viewing is a representation (written, performed, filmed and edited) of reality, not real. As cinema developed (especially in Hollywood) realism became the dominant style (see Continuity Editing, Chapter 3, pp. 40ff.). It prioritises content and subject matter over form; therefore it could be called the style of no style.

Of the examples of setting above *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* belongs to the German Expressionist tradition, D. W. Griffith's 'Babylon' in *Intolerance* is in the realist tradition, and Francis Coppola's *One from the Heart* is in the formalist tradition. Choices in the *mise en scène* therefore are instrumental in creating the overall style of the film.

COSTUME AND MAKE-UP

Costumes are in a sense part of the set. The clothes worn on set indicate period and social milieu. Costume is also an instant indicator of social class, cultural background and of character traits. Whether we like it or not people make instant judgements by observing dress. This may well be because we have so little time to explore other means of forming opinions. The process of watching a movie – at least for the first time – requires the viewer to make instant judgements. The film-makers (including the actors) can push the viewer into certain verdicts by the choices of how they dress and set their characters. Members of the audience may of course choose to ignore and subvert the 'preferred meaning' offered. This process is discussed in Chapter 10.

Costume, which includes make-up and personal props, gives the viewer a sense of place, time and characterisation as well as

type of story and genre. Changes in costume can highlight changes in a characters feelings and/or situation. For example in *Titanic* (Cameron, USA, 1998) the character of Rose (Kate Winslet) is first presented to us by a very deliberate focus on costume. We see a detail shot (taken from above) of her gloved hand emerging from a car. The camera maintains its aerial position as she steps out of the car so that she is almost totally obscured by the brim of her elaborate hat. Her costume is being signalled as the most important aspect of her character at this point in the film – it separates her from the mass of 'poor' characters and defines her class and status. In a later scene when Jack (Leonardo Di Caprio) paints her she lets down her hair and takes her costume off. Thus the viewer can infer she is casting off the codes and conventions of her class which are symbolised in her dress. After the sinking of the ship we see her bedraggled and unkempt in steerage with the other third-class passengers who have survived. Her costume is still being used to represent status and social position but these things have changed as she has rejected the world of wealth and privilege. Similarly, in *The Godfather* trilogy (Coppola, USA, 1972, 1974 and 1990) costume is an important indicator of genre but it also helps us to chart the changing fortunes of the characters. Michael Corleone's rise to power in *The Godfather* is reflected in his ever more expensive-looking clothes as Vito Corleone's parallel relinquishment of power is revealed in his increasingly relaxed ones. Costume can therefore indicate a character's (changing) status in the world, their feelings about themselves, the feelings they wish to inspire in others. Costume can also be a trademark (for super heroes and comedians), e.g. various incarnations of Superman and Batman or Charlie Chaplin's tramp character in *The Gold Rush* (USA, 1925).

Costume includes make-up, which in itself can have many different functions and effects, from creating the glamour of a star to the generic horror of a ghoul. Make-up is important in maintaining the illusion created by a particular setting: for example, the glisten of sweat on the gladiators in *Gladiator*; the dusty faces of cowboys and the war paint of Indians in many Westerns; the blue-white faces of the characters freezing to death in *Titanic*. Make-up is also important in creating the illusion that time has passed, e.g. Kane's ageing process in *Citizen Kane* (Welles, USA, 1940) or the final scene in *The Godfather Part 3* where costume and make-up together create the effect of many years having passed.

FIGURE, EXPRESSION AND MOVEMENT

The word 'figure' covers a range of possibilities. It is most likely to be a character but it could also be an animal or an object. Movement looks at the position and movement of characters or objects within the frame. We generally think of figure, expression and movement as 'acting', which is made up of the visual elements of body language, appearance and facial expressions (as well as the sound elements of voice and sound effects) but it can incorporate other things.

The way figures stand or move is a key element in the formation of 'character'. In our day-to-day dealing with others we judge by observing body language. Cinema is moving pictures (cinematography – writing in movement), so the way a character moves is of central importance, particularly if they are a cultural icon (see Chapters 7 and 8).

There are various ways in which a film-maker can use position and movement within the frame to create meaning.

- If, for instance, a character or object is placed within the foreground of a shot, the viewer is likely to attach more importance to it than to something in the background of a shot.
- A moving body or object against a stationary background will automatically draw our attention (as it does in real life).
- Characters or objects positioned evenly within the frame will create a balanced feel to the shot. If all the figures are at one end this will create an imbalance for the eye and an unsettling effect.
- Positioning of characters within the frame can indicate the relationship between them. Characters engaged in an argument might for example be positioned at either edge of the frame, the space between them indicating their emotional distance from each other.

In a scene from *The Comedy Strip Presents: 'Strike'* (Richardson, UK, 1984) – a British television parody of how Hollywood distorts history, not to mention the intentions of writers and directors – Peter Richardson, playing 'Al Pacino', is faced with pages and pages of text to learn. He rejects the task, claiming: 'I can say all that by the way I stand.'

At the end of *The Searchers* (Ford, USA, 1956) the inability of the hero, Ethan (John Wayne) to belong to the civilised family group that he has struggled to restore is expressed in a single shot. We see him doubly framed, at the centre of the screen and through the door of the homestead, as he turns and walks away from the newly restored order that closes the film. In this single shot, position and movement within the frame express all the ambiguities and conflicts in Ethan's character and the film as a whole. The shot both provides a sense of closure (family order is restored) and simultaneously undermines this closure because the central character is excluded and left to an uncertain future.

Facial expression is an important part of acting, far more important to cinema than to theatre. The audience can and does get much closer to its object of scrutiny. It was argued that expression was more important in cinema than television, not least because the expressions projected were so much bigger. This is less tenable an argument now that so much 'cinema' is consumed via a TV screen and that so much television is built on the grammar of the tight close up (often as a 'talking head'). What is certain is that much screen time is spent focusing on the faces of actors. The audience observes these faces closely because of a natural tendency to identify and be interested in the faces of other people. Whether it is true or not we tend to believe that 'eyes are the mirrors of the soul'. We also tend to follow eye movements; thus a film-maker can draw attention to something or change a 'point of view' by moving the camera to match these changes (see Chapters 3 and 5).

LIGHTING

Photography is writing in light. It is worth remembering that no object can be seen, never mind filmed, without light. Film cannot be viewed without some form of light source. Thus light is crucial: no light no picture. Film lighting does more however than simply enable us to see the action. In conjunction with the other elements of film language it aids the viewer to construct meaning from the images. The film-maker's use of lighting will, for example suggest who/what is the key figure in a scene as well as how we should read the mood of a scene. It can be an indication of the genre of the film and is often central in the creation of mystery, tension and suspense.

Lighter and darker areas within the frame help create meaning by guiding the viewer's eyes to certain objects and actions. Bright illumination literally highlights an area of the screen thus drawing attention to key elements. Conversely the use of shadows can produce a sense of suspense about what might be revealed later.

The way in which an image is lit is central therefore to its impact.

There are four major features of film lighting:

* intensity
* source
* direction
* colour.

Intensity

Hard lighting creates clearly defined shadows, harsh textures and crisp edges. Soft lighting blurs contours, softens textures and creates gentler contrasts which are often seen as 'natural'.

Source

The light source can be natural (sunlight, firelight) or artificial (lamps). The source of light is usually motivated – in other words we can see where it is supposed to be coming from (sunlight streaming through a window or lamps on the bedside table). Often the effect of 'natural' light was created with lamps in order to provide enough light with which to film, although as cinema progressed faster film stocks (that need less light) were developed, which allowed cinematographers greater freedom of choice. A consequence of this was that film-makers were less restricted to studio-based film-making (where sets could be designed to accommodate the huge and heavy arc lights required) and had the option of filming on location. The directors of the French New Wave, for example, filmed on the streets and in their own apartments. They were enabled to do this because of the lighter cameras developed in the USA for documentary shooting that did not require elaborate lighting rigs. This meant that the budget for the films could be much lower (no set design, smaller crew, less equipment), enabling first-time directors to have a go. These practical

and technical factors had at least as much impact on the style of the 'New Wave' as the many theories of its directors (see Chapter 6).

Direction

This refers to the path of light to the object lit.

* Front lighting will flatten an image and remove shadows.
* Side lighting highlights features, e.g. nose or cheekbones, by casting shadows.
* Back lighting defines depth by distinguishing an object from its background.
* Under lighting distorts features.
* Top lighting 'bathes' an object (often a star) to create an aura of glamour.

Hollywood in its classical period (see Chapter 5) developed a system of using three light sources in each shot known as the Three Point Lighting system:

* the key light – usually the brightest and shining diagonally from the front;
* the back light – helping to counteract the 'unnatural' look of the key, coming from the rear (and usually above);
* the fill light – helping to soften the shadows produced by the key, coming from a position near to the camera.

'High-key' lighting, which uses lots of filler lights to obliterate shadows, has become the norm in most cinema throughout the world. 'Low-key' lighting is created by using only the key and back lights. This technique will produce a sharp contrast of light and dark areas on screen. Very deep distinct shadows are formed. The effect is known – in a term borrowed from painting – as chiaroscuro. *Chiàro* is the Italian word for 'light' and *oscúro* means 'dark'. Extreme use of this technique is most strikingly used in film noir. Film noir (black film) began as a term used by French critics to describe American detective films made in the 1940s and 1950s. These films were not only dark in their subject matter (crime, deceit and human weakness) but also in their look. The style reached its epitome with films such as *The Big Combo* (Joseph Lewis, USA, 1955) and *Touch of Evil* (Welles, USA, 1958). The lighting plans

owed much to the deep shadows and harsh contrasts of German Expressionism of the 1920s. It is interesting to note that one of the reasons for the stark, contrasted lighting schemes in these movies was economic. Less complicated lighting plans are cheaper to film.

Colour

We tend not to be aware of the colour of light in film unless we look for it. Naturalism is often created by the use of apparently 'white' light – but much lighting in film is produced by the combination of lights filtered to produce particular colours. Colours carry their own symbolic meanings. We are likely, for example, to associate reds, yellows and orange with warmth, and blues and greys with cold. In *The Piano* (Campion, New Zealand, 1992) the colour of light is instrumental in creating the mood and indicating the state of mind of Ada, the heroine. Scenes of intimacy, happiness and relaxation are delineated by warm amber colours, which provide a stark contrast to the cold blue white light of much of the rest of the film, where we see her struggling with adversity. Similarly, in *Jane Eyre* (Zefferelli, UK, 1996) most of the scenes of Jane's childhood, where we see her in a series of hostile environments, are filmed in cold blue/white light indicating the lack of emotional warmth she experiences. When she arrives at Thornfield Hall she is greeted with warmth and kindness by Mrs Fairfax and this is highlighted by the warm rosy colour of the light, apparently cast by the fire, bathing her face. Analysis of colour symbolism clearly should not be restricted to the area of lighting since it can be extended to the use of colour in the other aspects of *mise en scène*, and also to the choice of black and white or colour film stock (see Chapter 2).

In *Days of Heaven* (Malik, USA, 1978) cinematographer Nestor Almendros created a dream-like state by filming exclusively during the 'magic hour'. This period, when the sun has dropped below the horizon but still illuminates the sky, actually lasts less than 30 minutes each day. The exterior scenes – especially in the fields – are infused with a milky luminescence that suits the rural tale perfectly. Almendros left the film to begin work with Francois Truffaut. Haskell Wexler, a great American cinematographer, eschewed egotism for artistic integrity and finished the film in Almendros' style.

Lighting can also take a leading role as part of the action, as can be seen in *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, USA, 1982). The film follows a detective of the future as he tries – reluctantly – to track down a group of 'replicants' (androids on the run) through a futuristic dystopia. In the climactic scene the tables are turned and the hero Deckard (played by Harrison Ford) is being pursued by the final 'replicant'. Shafts of white light penetrate the gloom as Dekard is chased. The cinematographer – Jordan Cronenweth – uses the shafts of light to intensify the impression of threat towards the increasingly desperate hero.

Phillipe Rousselot's cinematography for interior scenes in *Diva* (Beineix, France, 1981) uses a very similar lighting plan – of shafts of light against an intensely dark background. Here, due to a slower pace and the fact that the characters move comfortably, the effect is one of stylised 'cool'.

To conclude, *mise en scène* is the term we use to describe everything we see within a single shot. In terms of film production and film analysis it is distinct and separate from cinematography (film stock, position and movement of the camera) and editing (the joining of shots), although meaning is created from the way these things work in conjunction with each other and with sound. The prominence of (and meanings attached to) costume in the example from *Titanic* were created through the *mise en scène* but also the type of shot that effectively highlights those aspects of the *mise en scène* the film-maker wants us to focus on. The distinctions between the different elements of film language are therefore rather artificial, but having different categories for analysis does help us to approach a film or sequence of film. Breaking it down into its different elements can help us to see how an overall effect is created. When approaching a film or sequence for the purposes of analysis it is very difficult to be simultaneously aware of the editing, the cinematography, the sound and all the different elements of *mise en scène*. It is much easier to approach an extract by looking at a single element, for example lighting, and then to view it again by looking at something else. In this way it is possible to see how meanings are created from the different elements of film language and, how they work in conjunction with each other. To aid this process we have included some questions on *mise en scène* that should act as a guide to analysis at the end of this chapter. The rest of this chapter consists of two readings from two different film sequences that focus on the *mise en scène*.

Things to watch out for and consider

Setting

* Where/when does the action take place? What details of the setting indicate this?
* How does the setting indicate genre?
* Does the setting indicate mood? If so, how?
* What does the setting suggest about the characters? Their status? Culture? Occupation?

Costume

* Does the costume suggest a certain historical period?
* How does the costume indicate genre?
* What does the costume suggest about the characters' social, cultural, national background?
* Do the characters significantly change their costumes over the course of the film? If so, what does this indicate about their changing feelings/fortunes/status?
* What do the costumes suggest about the way a character feels about themselves? The impression they want to make on others?

Lighting

* Is the lighting high key or low key?
* What kind of mood does the lighting create? Are different lighting techniques being used to create different moods?
* How does the lighting indicate genre?
* Does the colour of the light change for different scenes? If so, to what effect?

Figure expression and movement
- Where are the characters positioned within the frame? Does this reflect their importance? Feelings? Relationships with each other?
- What thoughts, feelings and emotions are evoked by the actors' performances?
- What kinds of movements do we see them engaged in (e.g. fighting/dancing)? What does this convey about them? Their feelings?
- What aspects of figure, expression and movement indicate genre?

2 Cinematography

> In the beginning there was just a guy with a camera.
> (Michael Chapman)

In Chapter 1 we did not stray from the realms of (admittedly filmed) theatre, but film is a more mediated medium – simply because it is filmed (and projected). This chapter aims to introduce the reader to the unique element of film that is cinematography. The chapter will include an introduction to the basic technical elements of photography and camera placement and movement as well as the types of static and mobile shot used in cinema. The uses of these techniques in order to produce meaning will constitute the central message of this chapter. The dramatic potential of cinematography will be illustrated by a reading of Chapman's cinematography in Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (USA, 1980). The relationship between cinematography and editing is discussed via a reading of Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (USA, 1958). This chapter concludes with a series of questions designed to help structure cinematographic analysis.

Cinematography, like every activity that contributes to film and film-making, is – of course – a matter of choices. Some of the choices that the cinematographer – or director of photography – has to make, including placing and lighting objects, have already been covered in the *mise en scène* chapter. The difficulty of demarcation is in itself evidence that the activities involved in film-making do not fit easily into pigeon holes. The difficulty in defining where the cinematographer's 'role' begins and ends is also evidence that film-making is a truly collaborative art. Setting and costume would need to be discussed and planned with production designers, position and framing (as well as lighting, lens and film stock) with the camera operator, logistics with the line producer and lighting choices with all three. Every decision

would have to be made with (or possibly by) the director and ultimately the producer.

The simple fact that the camera – as well as the *mise en scène* – needs to be deliberately placed, takes film beyond theatre. As the Hungarian film-maker/theorist Bela Balazs put it: '(theatre) always maintains its action in a spatial continuity, stable distance from the spectator and one unchanged angle'. Whereas in films both the distance and the angle from which we see the action can change. In positioning the camera there are a number of options available to the film-maker. These are:

* camera angle
* camera level
* camera height
* camera distance (from the action).

CAMERA ANGLE

In general, the viewer is used to encountering objects – in particular people – at eye level. Thus the audience feels most comfortable when the material they are viewing has been filmed close to eye-level. Drastic changes from this 'view point' produce powerful psychological effects.

A low angle means that the camera is pointing up. Thus the subject becomes big, possibly threatening but certainly empowered. Several of these monumental shots can be seen in *Citizen Kane* (Welles, USA, 1940) as Welles seeks to make Charles Foster Kane increasingly imposing. A high angle means that the camera is pointing down. Thus the subject becomes small, possibly threatened and clearly drained of power. In *The Truman Show* (Weir, USA, 1998), Truman (Jim Carrey) is positioned as a pawn in a game beyond his understanding by his controllers – and by extension us – frequently watching him from above.

CAMERA LEVEL

Camera level is important too. Day-to-day existence is experienced through two eyes positioned horizontally. We are used to

the horizontal view. Breaking that convention by tilting the camera from its horizontal axis ('canting the frame') can have powerful effects. In *The Third Man* (Reed, UK, 1949) Robert Krasker's striking photography is notable not only for its contrasts in tone but also in his use of angles. In the opening scene Holly Martins (played by Joseph Cotton) arrives in Vienna to visit his old friend Harry Lime.

Up to the moment Martins arrives at Lime's apartment the cinematography is unremarkable. As Martins rings Lime's door-bell, the frame is canted and the following scene – in which Martins is led to believe his friend is dead – played out in extreme, mannerist angles. The frame literally shifts to create a feeling of movement – not only of the image but within the narrative too. Martins' seemingly simple choice to join his friend leads him into a complex underworld he cannot possibly deal with.

CAMERA HEIGHT

Whilst the camera is normally at eye-level it is possible to alter the height but keep the angle level. Low-level shots in particular can enhance a feeling of speed in action.

CAMERA DISTANCE

Arguably the most important aspect of camera placement is distance. This term refers to how close or far away the camera is from the action. We call the end result the type of shot, e.g. long shot, mid-shot or close-up (see below for the full list). The camera distance from the action profoundly affects how we respond to the action. It is one of the tools at the film-maker's disposal for creating a 'preferred meaning' (i.e. guiding the audience to respond in a particular way – see Chapters 10 and 11). The type of shot affects the degree of our engagement with the characters and helps us to recognise who/what is the significant aspect of each scene. We engage with the protagonists of a film, for example, not simply because they are cleverer or better looking than everyone else but because they are likely to be accorded the greatest number of close-ups, thus creating a kind of voyeuristic intimacy.

For an understanding of how the choice of shot guides the way in which we read a scene it is useful to look at some examples of early cinema, e.g. *The Great Train Robbery* (Porter, USA, 1903), where the camera remains at a fixed distance from the action (for a reading of *The Great Train Robbery* see Chapter 4). Over time, conventions developed as to how the different types of shot are sequenced to create a scene (see Chapter 3).

Once the camera is placed and positioned the film must be exposed to create pictures. *The shot* is defined as a single, continuously exposed piece of film – however long or short – without any edits or cuts. 'Shot' is the term used in referring to the completed film; the term used whilst filming is 'take'. The 'shot' can be of various types from various distances and angles, and both static and mobile.

Static shots include:
   long shot (often an 'establishing' shot – to set the scene);
   two shot – containing two complete figures and clarifying their spatial relationship;
   full shot – a single figure from head to toe;
   mid-shot – from the waist up;
   close-up – from a 'head and shoulders' to 'chin to eyebrow';
   extreme close-up – tighter than a close-up;
   detail – a close-up of an object.

Mobile shots include:
   zoom (lens)
   pan (camera)
   track (dolly).

Narrative cinema began as filmed theatre. The films were short – up to 10 minutes – and consisted of a single 'tableau'. The action took place before a static camera which had to take in the whole set. The early film-makers directed from behind the camera. They were by nature an adventurous breed. Cameramen all over the world were stretching the boundaries of the form as soon as they started filming. Practically as soon as pictures moved picture-makers were looking at ways to get the camera moving. In the great days of silent cinema an entertainment became an art and the camera as well as the images moved. In France the impressionists used camera movement to express a character's state of mind, e.g. in Epstein's *Cœur Fidèle* (1923), or to highlight drama, e.g. Abel Gance's *Napoleon* (1927). In the USA camera mobility reached its epitome with the work of Billy Bitzer on such films as *Way Down East* (Griffith, 1920) through to *The Crowd* (Vidor, 1927), photographed by Harry Sharp. The flowing camerawork of late silent cinema came to an end when the needs of sound required the camera to be soundproofed. It could also be argued that the introduction of sound allowed dialogue to take over the major story-telling role that the camera had held in the 1920s. As cinematographer Nestor Almendros put it rather wistfully: 'The early movies seem to be freer . . . The camera was free.'

Shots can be given mobility by shifting the camera on its axes – the pan. The camera can be panned horizontally or vertically to take in a scene or to follow an action. Additional mobility can be produced by actually moving the camera while filming. This can be done on a track – the 'dolly shot' – or, once cameras became light enough, 'hand held'. A modern development that has allowed even more fluidity in 'tracking' has been the 'steadicam' – a counterweighted apparatus which allows the camera to be attached to and move with the operator. Particularly fine use of the 'steadicam' as pursuer/voyeur can be seen in *The Shining* (Kubrick, UK, 1980), *Goodfellas* (Scorsese, USA, 1990) and *Raging Bull* (for a detailed analysis of cinematography in *Raging Bull* see below).

Once the scene is 'set' and lit and framed by the camera, the next decision to make is about the quality and type of image. This decision involves the process of selection of lens and the selection of film stock. The cinematographer must also decide on the amount of light hitting the film (by a combination of exposure time and aperture size). In another example of interconnectivity it is important to note that both these choices must be made in conjunction with decisions about lighting.

CHOICE OF LENS

Lenses are made with various focal lengths, i.e. the distance between the centre of the lens to the point where the light is focused. The focal length of the lens controls the depth and scale of the image. The 'normal' focal length for the lens on a movie camera is 35–50 mm. A short focal length – less than 35 mm – is known as a 'wide-angle' lens. Used in a wide shot this type of lens will produce the 'fish eye' effect of curved edges to the image.

Using this type of lens (but not for a wide shot) with intense lighting it is possible to create deep-focus photography. Thus in *Citizen Kane* the director of photography, Greg Toland, could keep all the planes of action in focus.

A lens with a long focal length – i.e. over 50 mm – is known as a 'telephoto'. The telephoto lens produces a flattened image (accentuating immediacy and speed). In *The Seven Samurai* (Kurosawa, 1954, Japan) Akasaku Nakai used a telephoto in the scene when the peasants go to seek 'hungry Samurai'. Planes of action are tightened to a physically impossible pitch. Moving figures flash past the staring peasants who stand amazed by the hustle and bustle of the town.

Adjusting the focal length whilst filming can be achieved by use of a zoom lens. A zoom from a wide establishing shot to a more or less tight (telephoto) shot or – less usually – vice versa can create a dramatic focus. This technique should not be seen as an alternative to actually moving the camera (dolly). The photographic effect is quite different. In a 'dolly shot' the amount of action within the scene can be decreased (to present a detail) or increased to produce an establishing shot. This latter – rather disconcerting effect – is used with much aplomb by John Alcott on *Barry Lyndon* (Kubrick, UK, 1975). In the 'zoom' the image not only tightens or loosens but the image itself changes too.

Citizen Kane (1941). Reproduced with permission from BFI Stills, Posters and Designs

This effect of tightening the planes of action is unwittingly and all too often used in home videos. In the hands of a director with a cameraman's experience (Nic Roeg) either operating the camera himself, as in *Walkabout* (1971), or with a skilled cinematographer (Anthony Richmond) on *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), the zoom lens can provide rich visual fare. Roeg was able to accentuate elements of the unfamiliar world inhabited by the lost children in *Walkabout*, or the alien in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, as well as to highlight psychological states.

CHOICE OF FILM STOCK

A sequence from early in *Citizen Kane* (USA, 1941) shows Orson Welles and his cinematographer Greg Toland using a wide range of film stocks and photographic techniques to illustrate the passage of time: the news montage in *Citizen Kane* utilises cinematography as a story-telling tool. Not only was particular stock specifically chosen for particular time periods, the stock was treated and deliberately damaged to add 'authenticity'.

EXPOSURE

The clearest examples of the *use* of exposure are when a director of photography 'breaks the rules', e.g. Vilmos Zsigmond on *McCabe and Mrs Miller* (Altman, 1971). After ten years of low-budget documentaries and exploitation movies Zsigismond was given the opportunity to produce painterly images. Altman required a look that would evoke old photographs. The effect was achieved by 'flashing', using a wider aperture to allow in extra light to 'fog' the film.

Unlike Zsigismond, Toland and a whole line of directors of photography who broke rules by letting in 'too much light', Gordon Willis became known as the 'Prince of Darkness' after *The Godfather* and *The Godfather Part II*. The doomy shadows that dominate those two films were the result of underexposing the film stock. Willis went on to lend his skill with shadow to many of Woody Allen's finest films. With *Annie Hall* (1977), *Manhattan* (1979) and *Purple Rose of Cairo* (1984), Willis showed his ability to utilise both colour and black and white film stock.

COLOUR

The choice between colour and monochrome can be used to make its own points. In the case of *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, USA, 1939) the move from a very low-key black and white to vibrant colour signals the move from Kansas into the fantasy of Oz. In Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* (Germany, 1989) the 'real' world is seen in black and white by the angel Bruno until he finds love, chooses life and colour returns. In Powell and Pressburger's masterly *A Matter of Life and Death* (UK, 1946) a similar juxtaposition is used to suggest that human life is worth fighting for. In *Schindler's List* (Spielberg, USA, 1993) the monotonous monochrome of the film is broken only twice. As the Jews are rounded up for the ghetto one small girl runs frantically in the crowd. Her movements are high-lighted by the fact that her coat is bright red. Her plight person-alises the horror of the Holocaust. Late in the film we see the coat again – amongst a pile a corpses.

3 Editing

Film art begins from the moment when the director begins to combine and join together the various pieces of film.

(Lev Kuleshov, 1921)

Kuleshov's epithet on the central importance of the edit comes from his opening lecture to students at the First State Film School in Moscow. The film-maker, having placed the material (*mise en scène*) and chosen how to frame and film it (cinematography) must now make a final set of decisions around the issues of how that material is put together (usually to tell coherent stories): editing. It is important to note at this point that our separation out of the film-making process is a gross simplification made to aid analysis. The choices involved in *mise en scène* and cinematography, and in all likelihood editing too, will take place at the same time and all affect each other.

Whilst it remains arguable as to whether editing is the most important element in film-making, it is true to say that it is that most quintessentially cinematic element of cinema (writing in movement).

This chapter introduces the reader to the various methods of joining shots and the techniques of continuity. Central to this chapter will be a discussion of the relationship between editing and storytelling. The power of editing to tell stories and elicit responses from audiences will be illustrated by close readings of two of the iconographic moments in film history: the 'Potemkin Steps' sequence from *Battleship Potemkin* (Eisenstein, 1926) and the shower scene from *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960). The chapter concludes with a series of questions designed to aid the analysis of editing.

As we saw in the previous chapter, movies are made up of

shots. Almost all shots contain movement (within, in and out of frame) and some shots move in themselves (tracking, dolly, crane). All shots are given movement by the way they are combined. On the editing table the shots are selected and ordered to create a narrative structure and, hopefully, aesthetic interest.

Editing film enables the film-maker to take liberties with the space–time continuum. Real life and theatre can only happen in real time and real space. Editing allows us to both protract and contract real time, and to make spatial leaps approaching the speed of light. For example: the men are about to be shot, the pram is going down the steps, a time bomb is ticking; meanwhile . . . back at the ranch . . . This enablement gives a spatial omnipresence and omniscience (usually associated with narrators rather than readers) and a sense of empowerment (although it is an illusion).

If you pause to think about it, films are made up of hundreds of fragments (shots) stuck together most frequently by the straight cut, which means that the images we are viewing are constantly and instantaneously changing. It ought to be disorientating and confusing and yet it's not. As viewers we are usually not conscious of the fragmentary nature of film at all. There are two reasons for this:

the rules of continuity editing;
the cine-literacy of viewers.

The earliest films did not involve editing. The entire film would consist of one shot. The camera was set up in one position and the action would unfold before it in a continuous take. Sometimes film-makers would make a series of shots of the same subject but these were treated as separate films. Once it became possible to create longer films by editing shots together the artistic and narrative possibilities for film expanded enormously.

Editing allows film-makers to exercise control over space, time, narrative structure, the rhythm of the film and the visual impact that can be created from the juxtaposition of two shots. But at the same time editing presents the film-maker with problems. It fragments the film. Early film-makers soon discovered that this could cause confusion unless the spectator understood how the shots were related to each other in terms of time and space. Is time continuing without interruption or has some time been skipped? Are we still seeing the same space or have we moved to a new location? The challenge to film-makers is to find a way of overcoming these

potential areas of confusion by constantly signalling to the viewer where and when the action is taking place – in other words to make the relationship between shots clear and easy to follow.

When we look at editing there are a number of different areas we can focus on, all of which involve choices by the film-maker:

- editing style
- editing and space
- editing and time
- editing and rhythm
- matching
- graphic matching
- compilation shots
- montage
- editing and sound.

EDITING STYLE

How has each shot been joined to the next? The options are:

- the straight cut – which gives an instantaneous jump from one image to the next;
- the fade – where the screen fades to black;
- the dissolve – where one image is slowly brought in beneath another one;
- the wipe – where the new image pushes the old one off the screen to indicate that a sequence has finished and the story is moving to a different field of action;
- the iris – where the shutter of the lens is closed in to form a smaller and smaller circular picture (or the reverse where the shutter of the lens is opened out).

Over time, conventions developed as to which style of editing to use in different situations. Most film narratives can be broken down into scenes or sequences where the location is first established and then the action develops before the film moves on to a new scene. Straight cuts are likely to be used within a scene. Breaks between scenes are often marked with a fade to indicate the close of one sphere of action and the opening of the next one. (Fading to black gives us a more decisive break than a straight

cut.) A flashback or a dream sequence is likely to be signalled by a dissolve or fade, often on the face of the character whose flashback we are about to witness. The wipe, originally popular in the serials of the 1930s and 1940s, is rarely used nowadays except by George Lucas in the *Star Wars* films to indicate that a sequence has finished and the story is moving to a different field of action.

EDITING AND SPACE

Editing permits the film-maker to move between one location and another, in fact to relate any two points in space. Most films utilise different settings, even if this is limited to interior and exterior shots of a house. If the film is going to move between different spaces it becomes really important to signal to the viewer where the action takes place and when the location changes. Just relying on the background to look roughly the same isn't enough, as a location will look completely different according to the position of the camera. It is also necessary to maintain consistency of screen direction. If you film a character walking down a road from one pavement, and then cut to a shot of them walking down the road filmed from the opposite pavement, it will look as if they have turned around and started walking the other way.

Cross-cutting is the technique of cutting between two sequences that are occurring at the same time but in different locations. This technique was developed by the great American pioneer D. W. Griffith. The effect of cross-cutting is usually to create suspense and speed up the narrative, so it is often used in Westerns, thrillers and gangster movies. Particular film-makers, e.g. Francis Ford Coppola in his *Godfather* films, have developed the cross-cut into a visual signature.

EDITING AND TIME

Film involves time as well as space. Editing gives the film-maker the option of choosing the order in which we see events. Most film narratives are linear, which means that events move forward through time in a chronological order. The exception is the use of flashbacks which show scenes from an earlier time than the rest of the story.

Most films don't happen in real time. In the space of two hours a story that takes days, weeks or months can be conveyed. This means that chunks of time are being skipped and the narrative is moving on to 'later that day', six months, later, etc. These ellipses need to be signalled to the viewers so that they can follow events. Signalling methods include captions and voice-overs, wipes, the fade to black, the cross-fade and the dissolve.

EDITING AND RHYTHM

How long does each shot last? It could be a few seconds or it could be a few minutes. The length of each shot will determine the pace of the action (including changes of pace) and will affect the mood of what is taking place on screen. Extreme examples of long duration of shot include the ending of *The Third Man* (Reed, UK, 1949), where time seems to stand still as Anna strides past the waiting Holly Martins. Conversely, time itself speeds up by shortening the duration of shots at the end of *The Man With the Movie Camera* (Vertov, USSR, 1929).

MATCHING

The relationship between shots can be clarified if shots are matched according to action, subject, or subject matter. Match cutting ensures that there is a spatial–visual logic between the differently positioned shots within a scene. In a typical Western shoot-out a shot can go from a long shot of both protagonists via a cut to a medium close-up of one of the protagonists. The cut matches the two shots and is consistent with the action.

Matching is used extensively within scenes to seamlessly knit the action together but can also be used between scenes to bridge the action and make a connection for the viewer. A fairly typical device to indicate a connection between two characters is to match their actions. For example, a shot could show us one character looking at her alarm clock in the middle of the night. A cut could then show an alarm clock going off, indicating morning, but this time we see a different character in a different room switch it off. Thus we are encouraged to link these two characters.

Matching on action can often be used to smooth the transition between one period of time and another. If you want to suggest that years have passed and a character has grown from child to adulthood you can show the child performing some action, for example painting at an easel, dancing a particular dance, and then cut to a shot of the adult performing the same action. The abrupt nature of the ellipses is therefore made coherent to the viewer who understands that it is the same character grown up. Recent Disney films, e.g. *The Lion King* (1994) and *Tarzan* (1998) are particularly fond of this technique.

GRAPHIC MATCHING

This involves a smooth visual transfer (not an *absolute* match) from one shot to the next. The image doesn't have to be the same but it could have the same shape, the same patterns of light and dark areas, or the same positioning of objects/characters within the frame. *Schindler's List* (Spielberg, 1993) opens with the contemporary celebration of Passover. As the ceremonial candles burn out, smoke spirals upwards. This smoke signal is cut to the smoke from a train – at the beginning of the Holocaust.

COMPILATION SHOTS

This is the term used to describe a series of shots spliced together to give a quick impression of a place, e.g. the opening of *The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, USA, 1941) uses a brief compilation sequence of San Francisco to establish the city. Alternatively, a compilation sequence can be used to give a quick impression of a situation, e.g. police arriving at a murder scene: shots of the crowd, journalists, detectives, the corpse, or a story moving on, e.g. the 'montage' sequences in *Summer of Sam* (Lee, USA, 1999).

MONTAGE

A rapid succession of shots juxtaposing images so that the over-

all effect is greater than the individual parts (for a more detailed discussion of montage see the second half of this chapter).

EDITING AND SOUND

One of the ways in which a film-maker can minimise the fragmentary nature of film is to use sound to provide continuity from one shot to the next. The images might frequently change but they can be connected by a musical score that has the effect of knitting the shots together into a scene or sequence. Another way of using sound to the same effect is through sound bridges. Diegetic sound (sound which belongs in the world of the film, e.g. dialogue or music that a character is playing) continues from one shot into the next. In the opening scene of *Raging Bull* Jake La Motta ends his monologue with 'That's entertainment.' This line is repeated and becomes an ironic comment on the next image we see: the younger La Motta being beaten in the ring. In an early scene from Charles' life in *Citizen Kane* the line 'Merry Christmas . . .' is followed by 'Happy New Year', but said ten years later.

CONTINUITY EDITING

By 1917 in Hollywood a series of techniques to make the connections between shots clear and coherent had been developed – this became known as the continuity editing system. It is designed to make the fragments of film knit together invisibly and coherently so that the viewer understands the action and is not disrupted by the changes from one shot to the next. It is interesting to note that whilst it is called continuity editing many of the rules are about cinematography – the position of the camera and the type of shot being of paramount importance. Continuity editing is about getting the right kinds of shots that can be edited together in such a way as to be coherent to the viewer – more evidence of the collaborative interdependent nature of the medium, no single aspect is really separate from another.

THE ELEMENTS OF CONTINUITY EDITING

- the axis of action or the 180-degree rule
- the 30-degree rule
- the establishing shot
- shot/reverse shot
- eye-line matching
- matching on action
- re-establishing shot

The 180-degree rule

'The axis of action' is the term used to describe an imaginary (straight) line drawn between protagonists in a scene. The camera position is planned around this line. The purpose of the 180-degree rule is to ensure spatial continuity – to make sure that the viewer understands the overall space within which the action takes place and to maintain consistency of screen direction. The basic rule for film-makers is to plan the *mise en scène* around this imaginary line and then to position the camera so that it never crosses the line. (It is possible to cross the line with a moving camera but not with a cut from one side of the line to another.) If the camera crosses the line the effect will be disorientating, not only will the background change but screen direction will be reversed.

A typical sequence might read thus: shot 1 might be a long shot of two characters walking towards each other down a street and shot 2 might be a medium close-up of one of these characters. If both these shots are filmed from the same side of the line, the second shot will show the single character walking in the same direction as before (say from left to right). The viewer will assume that this shot continues from the previous one and the two characters are still approaching each other. If, however, the axis of action has been crossed by placing the camera on the opposite side of the street to film shot 2, screen direction will be reversed and the single character will now be walking from the right side of the screen to the left. It will look to the viewer as if he has changed his mind and turned around.

By following the 180-degree rule the film-maker ensures some

common space from shot to shot, orientating the viewer in the scene. Once the scene is finished a new axis of action is established to begin the next scene.

The 30-degree rule

This rule states that between shots the camera position must change by at least 30 degrees in order to avoid a jump cut. If the camera position obeys the 30-degree rule then the viewer will accept that they are viewing the scene from a new point of view. If the camera position is changed by less than 30 degrees the cut will appear startlingly obvious as the whole scene will appear to jump. (More than 30 degrees and it looks like you have moved to a new vantage point, less than 30 degrees and it looks like the whole world has moved.) Some film-makers choose deliberately to use the jump cut for its startling effect, e.g. Jean Luc Godard in *Breathless* (France, 1959) but it would be totally out of place in the classic realist tradition of Hollywood, which seeks to efface the editing process and join the narrative seamlessly.

The establishing shot

In the continuity system a scene will start with an establishing shot, which is a long shot delineating the overall space in which the scene is to take place. If the scene were to take place in a bar, for example, an establishing shot would show the whole of the bar before the scene is broken down into closer shots that might focus in on the central characters at a particular table. This ensures that the viewer clearly understands where the action takes place.

Shot/reverse shot

Once the space has been established (see above) and an axis of action created, closer shots of the characters are possible. Conversation between characters is usually presented using a shot/reverse shot, sometimes called an over-the-shoulder shot because the shoulder of one character is often within the frame. The second shot is not literally the reverse of the first (this would

mean crossing the line): the camera is in fact at the opposite end of the axis of action.

Eye-line matching

This is where the first shot shows a character looking off screen at something and the second shot shows the object/character being looked at (from the first character's point of view). Both shot/reverse shot and eye-line matching ensure that even if the characters are not in the frame together we are sure of their whereabouts.

Matching on action

Another way of moving the camera between cuts but still ensuring spatial continuity is to match the cuts on action. The first shot might show a character starting to walk across the room. The second shot shows the same character arriving at the other side of the room. The middle part has been cut out but continuity is maintained because the action is consistent.

Re-establishing shot

Once a scene has progressed for a while with shot/reverse shot showing the characters in close-up a re-establishing shot, which is a return to a long shot of the overall space, re-orientates the viewer into the scene.

The overall purpose of continuity editing is to present time and space in an unproblematic and coherent manner. Beginnings and endings of a scene are clearly demarcated. Shots throughout a scene orientate the viewer in time and space and a scene ends clearly indicating where the narrative will get picked up in the next scene. Abrupt changes of pace are avoided. This doesn't mean that the pace can't change, but it will do so steadily.

Two sequences can furnish us with examples of what can be achieved – and with what different dramatic effects – by editing. The opening sequences of *To Have and Have Not* (Hawks, USA, 1944) and *Breathless* (Godard, France, 1959) are justly admired for their effectiveness.

The opening shot of the *To Have and Have Not* (shot 1) presents us with the image of a map of the Caribbean. The camera slowly tracks closer and text anchoring the image explains that we are in 'Martinique in the summer of 1940 shortly after the fall of France'. Thus, in accordance with the continuity system, the scene is being established in terms of both time and space. Further text then gives us the specific location: 'Fort De France' and the film then cuts to shot 2, an establishing shot of a busy port. Harry Morgan (played by Humphrey Bogart) walks into the centre of the frame and up to the police navigation office window. He stops and says 'morning'. The film cuts to shot 3, a two-shot of Morgan and the police navigation officer. The cut is bridged by the dialogue as the officer responds 'Good morning Captain Morgan'. They are positioned in this shot so that a clear axis of action is established between the two characters whose conversation is then edited using shot/reverse shot (shots 3, 4 and 5).

As their conversation concludes, Bogart walks away from the window and the camera pans round as he walks down the dock away from and with his back to the camera. The film then cuts to shot 6; the camera is now on the other side of the action so that Bogart is walking towards rather than away from it. The potentially abrupt nature of this cut is masked by the match on action. In this brief opening sequence it is possible to see how the continuity system achieves smoothness. The transitions between shots are matched on action or bridged using sound. The system also creates a sense of coherence. The viewer is clear about where and when the action takes place through the use of the initial text and the way the shots are sequenced (establishing shot first, before the camera moves closer to the action to reveal the characters).

In this sequence the continuity system can be seen as a functional process. The system functions in establishing where and when the action takes place and defining the way the shots are ordered to make up the scene (establishing shot, dialogue presented by shot/reverse shot).

Breathless provides us with a complete contrast to *To Have and Have Not* (or indeed any classic Hollywood film) as Godard abandons the conventions of film storytelling made so popular by Hollywood in favour of a more experimental style. It's not that he doesn't know what the rules are but that he consciously chooses to break them.

The very first shot of the film indicates a departure from the continuity system as we see a close-up instead of the usual long shot to establish where the action is taking place. This close-up is of a newspaper ad. We see a girl, dressed briefly in frilled pants and a skimpy top, standing in a provocative pose. We hear a voice proclaiming 'so I'm a son of a bitch' but the connection between words and image is not clear – we cannot see a speaker. The camera pans up and we see the character of Michel (played by Jean-Paul Belmondo), hat tilted over his forehead, cigarette between his lips. He runs his thumb over his lips in a homage to Bogart (a visual reference to Hollywood cinema that will be developed as the film progresses). Michel looks off-screen right, following the convention of the eyeline match, and we cut to shot 2. At this point we begin to feel the consequence of the lack of establishing shots. We see a mid-shot of a girl against the backdrop of some city street. It is not clear if she is in the same scene as Michel or not. We cannot work it out from the setting. We have not seen enough of the overall space to orientate ourselves into the scene. Further confusion is added because she is looking off-screen right – the same direction as Michel in the previous scene. If this is an eye-line match we would expect her to be looking off-screen left as if back towards him. She turns her head to look at something off-screen left then back off-screen right and nods. It is not clear with any of these movements what/who she is looking at.

Shots 3 and 4 repeat the pattern of cutting between Michel and the girl which in itself invites us to link them, but screen direction still remains inconsistent with the coventions of the eye-line match. Shot 5 shows a couple getting out of the car. Is this what she has been looking at? Shot 6 shows Michel again looking off-screen left and then turning to look off-screen right. Shot 7 shows the girl nodding and waving. We now see that she is behind the couple leaving the car so we know at least that they are in the same scene together. Shot 8 shows Michel looking off-screen right and folding up his newspaper. Shot 9 shows boats on water, one of which is pulling in to dock – again the lack of an original establishing shot makes this potentially confusing until the camera pans round to show the girl. Shot 10 shows Michel hot-wiring the car. Shot 11 shows the girl running towards something. Shot 12 shows Michel getting into the car. Shot 13 shows the girl appearing and asking to go with him.

By the time we get to the end of this scene it is possible to work out the sequence of events, but by abandoning the continuity

editing system Godard forces the spectator to work hard at making sense of the relationship between shots. What is the effect of this on the spectator? The experience is a disorientating one which illustrates a number of things about how much as spectators we are used to having films constructed in a particular way. Whether we have studied film or not we are all cine-literate, we know how to read films (that is make sense of them) but this ability is based on our knowledge of the conventions of film storytelling developed in Hollywood in the studio era. We expect, without being aware of the expectation, to have scenes constructed according to the rules of continuity and for motivation to be clear (see cause and effect relationship between events in Chapter 4). In other words, we expect the film-maker to guide us in our reading of a scene by making space and time comprehensible, by making the relationship between shots clear and by highlighting important or significant moments through the cinematography (e.g. close-ups on important characters and reactions). When a film-maker breaks away from these conventions the effect might be confusing initially but is ultimately provocative, forcing the spectator to think.

Critics who like to see cinema as an intelligent art form, demanding of spectators more than passive engagement, often point to the (film-making and theoretical) work of Sergei M. Eisenstein (1898–1948) as a model.

Eisenstein's fundamental contribution to film-making technique was seeing that the shot was only the start of the film: the building block from which the actual film was assembled. The film was really made on the editing table. The edit itself became the essence of the art form.

In 1918 Sergei Eisenstein joined the 'red' side in the civil war sweeping Russia. After victory in the war he joined the Proletkult theatre. Thus his public career began in theatre. He was enlightened as to the power of cinema by his friend Esfir Shub, who was editing western films for the Soviet authorities. Eisenstein experimented with film inserts in stage plays before changing his career.

He wrote in *Lef*, no. 3, 1923 of 'the montage of attractions' as a new concept: 'a free montage with arbitrarily chosen independent (of both the particular composition and any thematic connection with the actors) effects (attractions) but with the precise aim of specific thematic effect.'

There remains a controversy about who – if anybody –

deserves the credit for this discovery. Eisenstein certainly did not invent editing. For that we must return practically to the beginnings of cinema and the work of Georges Melies. It was Melies (a professional magician) who first produced startling transitions by editing shots together. Eisenstein could not claim to have invented editing as a storytelling medium – juxtaposing action from different times and places – either. That honour should probably go to Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). The art of storytelling in pictures had already reached the highest levels of sophistication, with D. W. Griffith, a decade before Eisenstein ever filmed anything.

Eisenstein was not even the first film-maker/theorist to decide that editing was the pre-eminent element of film language. That honour is best claimed by Lev Kuleshov. At the first state film school in Moscow Kuleshov worked without film stock. He therefore conducted experiments with short sequences of old stock. A single shot of the great Russian actor Mozzhukin was combined with various other shots: a bowl of soup, a woman undressing, a dead baby. The combination produced meaning: hunger, lust, grief. Thus Kuleshov would claim (1921): 'Film art begins from the moment when the director begins to combine and join together the various pieces of film.'

However, Eisenstein is seen as the father of *montage* because he is its chief theorist. *Montage* is a vital and sophisticated form of editing in which the shots, frequently fairly short ones, are edited together in such a way that the finished sequence has an artistic effect greater than the sum of its component parts. It is the ordering, sequence and juxtaposition of the individual shots which creates the vital impact of montage.

Eisenstein's montage aimed to go beyond Kuleshov's 'A + B = A/B' where two elements were combined to produce a composite image. A + B could create C, a new meaning. A and B can be seemingly entirely unrelated in subject matter. C is the implied meaning, which is never actually shown.

Eisenstein was also an overtly political film-maker. His slogan became: 'ART THROUGH REVOLUTION: REVOLUTION THROUGH ART'. His first three feature films were a trilogy. In *Strike* (1924) he portrayed revolutionary consciousness in need of leadership. *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) was based on an incident from the failed revolution of 1905. *October* (1927) was the filmic version of the successful revolution of 1917. All three are brilliant, as in both very clever and shining formal pieces of film-making.

9 Auteur

Whether you like it or not, you are.
(Martin Scorsese (*Projections* 4, 1996))

What was I trying to achieve ? . . . a cheque
(John Ford in interview with a French journalist, 1967)

This chapter will answer several key questions:

What is auteur theory?
How did it develop?
What does it tell us about the way films are made?

In the 1950s the young writers of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* (see Chapter 6) argued a new theory: *politiques des auteurs*. This position began the critical tradition of 'auteur theory'. Auteur theory was born out of twin passions: a love of Hollywood product combined with a desire to raise film to the status of a unique art form. They argued a position that film's generic ideas produced creative conventions in cinema language which could then be exploited and developed by individual artists (auteurs) into a personal vision.

The *Cahiers* position was expressed clearly by the magazine's editor André Bazin in 1957 when he wrote of 'choosing in the artistic creation the personal factor as a criterion of reference, and then postulating its permanence and even its progress from one work to the next'.

Talk of artistic creation and the term 'auteur' (author) placed the director (and not the script-writer) centrally as the author of the film. The director 'wrote' in pictures. This position was a development of that taken by the critic and film-maker Alexandre Austruc who had written in 1948 of 'le camera stylo'. The *politiques des auteurs* was seized upon by the young *Cahiers* writers, e.g. Truffaut

and Godard in their war against the literary *cinéma du papa* of post-war France.

If the film-maker was to be seen as author they would have to exhibit through a series of films clear 'auteur' characteristics:

> visual style – mise en scène and cinematography;
> narrative structure and features;
> particular character traits/situations;
> sets of themes.

These characteristics will be clearly seen in all of an auteur's work (in whatever genre). Truffaut's favourite candidate for auteur status was Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock's themes are clear enough: crime and suspense. His characters are driven by guilt, obsession and a fair sprinkling of phobias. His narrative structure is one of flawed characters driven by circumstance, e.g. Bruno (Robert Walker) in *Strangers on a Train* (1951) or Scotty (James Stewart) in *Vertigo* (1958). The narrative builds to a denouement, often via false climaxes and waves of rising tension, release and further tension. The visual style is one of the privileged point of view (often enhanced by the tracking camera appearing to hunt his characters down).

This taxonomy reveals the first possible weakness in auteur theory. The characteristics in this list are clearly those of the thriller genre. Is Hitchcock simply a (very good) thriller director? There are personal touches in Hitchcock's work: the ice-cold blonde leading lady, e.g. Tippi Hedren, Eve Marie Saint, Kim Novak or Grace Kelly; the black humour; the use of the 'macguffin' (a largely irrelevant detail which helps to drive the story on); and the great man's personal cameos (usually as a passer-by early in the film). None the less, the criticism does leave nagging doubts.

Perhaps the auteurist would be on safer ground with a director who worked in many genres, e.g. Godard's favourite candidate, Howard Hawks. Hawks certainly has his themes: action, professionalism under fire. His characters do show certain traits particularly linked to the air of understated professionalism about the world of much of Hawks' *œuvre*. In addition the female leads in many of Hawks' movies show an unusually strong sense of independence, e.g. Marie (Lauren Bacall) in *To Have and Have Not* (1944) or Feathers (Angie Dickinson) in *Rio Bravo* (1959).

There is no discernible 'Hawksian' narrative structure, not least because he worked with a vast range of material supplied by the studio from the widest possible range of sources. There are also major questions about identifying a Hawks visual style (beyond an ability to suit his style to the genre and a flair for an empowering framing of his leading characters).

Orson Welles – leading man, director, writer, etc. etc. on *Citizen Kane* – might seem a prime candidate. Yet even the seemingly invulnerable Welles has had his detractors. The critic Pauline Kael in *The Citizen Kane Book* (1972) points to the importance of Toland as cinematographer and Mankewizc as scriptwriter to the towering achievement. Welles' career after *Citizen Kane* – including losing control of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) – illustrates that no film-maker can take on the role of lone creative genius.

Any attempt at a purist auteurism is undermined by even the most cursory knowledge of how film-making and the film industry operate. It could be argued that to 'qualify' as an auteur the director would have to do everything before, during and after the production of the film but it is better to see the 'auteur' as the orchestrator of a complex creative process – as portrayed in V. F. Perkins' *Film as Film* (1972). This approach does not lead to a thoughtless abandonment of the *politiques des auteurs* (which would be as bad as a slavish acceptance). Even at worst auteur theory can be seen – e.g. by Peter Wollen in *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema* (1972) – as a construct, but a useful one.

There are also arguments that other figures, apart from or in combination with, the director should be seen as attaining auteur status. Richard Corliss in *The Hollywood Screenwriters* (1975) puts forward an auteurist view which, by identifying *the writer*, is at the same time a complete antithesis of the *politiques*. Godard himself, via later film essays, e.g. *Histoire(s) du Cinema*, has identified the power of the producer and, in particular, Irving Thalberg's role at MGM. Richard Taylor in *The Politics of Soviet Cinema* (1979), etc., has pointed to the authority of various heads of the Soviet film industry and ultimately Joseph Stalin himself.

If everyone involved in a film begins to achieve auteur status we are fast approaching a position of denying any authorship. This view is at least in part supported by structuralist theory. Thus Roland Barthes in *Language/Image/Text* (1976) could write memorably of the 'death of the author'. Less strident structuralist-auteurist positions (as put forward by the magazine *Movie* in the 1970s) saw the author as one of many 'structures' influencing the final form and content of the film. None the less, to leave aside the ideological apparatus until the next chapter, certain individuals –

including Welles – at certain times do appear to have a strong personal input into their movies. This may be due to the force of their personality. This view, enshrined in American auteur theory, was led by Andrew Sarris via *The American Cinema* (1968): 'the strong director imposes his own personality on a film'. For Sarris the director's strength is measured in terms of the barriers he has to overcome. The result is a pantheon or league table of great directors of big films. Bazin was keen to distance himself from such machismo. The *Cahiers* school remained wedded to the idea of creativity within a cinematic system.

The identification of individual artists has its own biographical possibilities. The biographical approach is an element of 'auteurism'. It really works best when the auteur him/herself achieves star status (see previous chapter). This star status can be created by appearances before the camera and through subsidiary forms (see previous chapter), e.g. by Charlie Chaplin or Clint Eastwood, or through distinctive and personal contributions to high-profile productions, e.g. Stanley Kubrick and Martin Scorsese.

The biography of the director is only one way contextually to ground a film. In some cases it is particularly useful. Charles Spencer Chaplin was born in London, England in 1889. He died on Christmas Day, 1977. Central to Chaplin's world-view was that he was raised in poverty. His father died early of alcoholism and his mother went insane. He began his performing career in the music hall at the age of five. He toured England and later the US with Karno's London Comedians. In a moment of felicity that could have come from one of his own films he was spotted by early film impresario Mack Sennett and joined Keystone film company.

Chaplin started appearing in films in 1914, soon devising the character of the 'little tramp' with trademark baggy trousers, hat, cane and carefully trimmed moustache. He had transferred the faintly absurd mixture of poverty and carefully preserved dignity from his own English background on to the big screen. Later that same year he began directing himself. He was a household name by 1915. In 1918 he signed the film industry's first million-dollar contract. So far, so much 'star biography'. But Chaplin's authorial position comes from his directing (as well as acting and producing) and how he developed a personal style.

In the period from *The Gold Rush* (1925) to *City Lights* (1931) Chaplin was at the height of his fame and popularity. His subject matter and themes persist in film and television (particularly

comedy) today. The underdog (the little tramp) is always surrounded by enormous bullies, but always survives by way of his wit and humour. If his films no longer look visually fresh or original today it is because everyone has copied him (as well as Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton). Chaplin's authorial voice emerged from the pure comedy of the earlier films and developed the confidence to play moments of sentimental tragedy. The tramp character disappeared as Chaplin made more overtly political films such as *Modern Times* (1936) and *The Great Dictator* (1940). These films contain moments of comic genius but they are very didactic. Chaplin's popularity began to wane and declined further when the public reacted badly to *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) in which he played a murderer. Chaplin's star image, as well as the audience's expectation of his authorial voice, had been stretched too far.

None the less the public remained fascinated by his life – not least because of romances with much younger women. Chaplin had never renounced his 'Englishness' and thus never became an American citizen. In the hysterical anti-communist atmosphere of the 1950s his previously much praised anti-fascist stance led to suspicion. After attending the London premiere of *Limelight* (1952) his re-entry to the USA was blocked. He then lived in exile in Switzerland, but was eventually knighted in England and awarded a 'lifetime achievement' Oscar in 1971 – accompanied by scenes of sentiment that would have fitted into his silent movies.

To see the 'auteur' function – and to test the validity of 'auteur theory' as a critical tool we can look at the careers of two great American directors form different eras. For the purposes of this exercise we have chosen John Ford and Martin Scorsese.

JOHN FORD

John Ford was born in Maine, USA in 1895. His real name, betraying his Irish roots, was Sean Aloysius O'Fearna. He worked in many genres over a long career and he won six Oscars – including two that he won for his World War II documentary work – but he is best known for his Westerns, such as *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), *The Searchers* (1956) and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). *Stagecoach* (1939) is arguably the Western that made Westerns respectable.