

# A Brief Glossary of Key Cinematic Terms

Yes, you must study the images as well!

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**Academy Awards**--Prizes of merit given in a number of categories (e.g. Best Picture, Actor, Actress, Director, Cinematography, Music, etc.) by the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences--a professional association of people directly involved in the production of motion pictures. To qualify for the award, the film must have been released in Los Angeles during the preceding calendar year. The award itself takes the form of a statuette (of little monetary value) called an Oscar.



**Actual Sound**--Sound recording made on location to add authenticity to the sound track. Usually the sound recordist will ask everybody to remain absolutely quiet for a short time while the recording is made.

**Adaptation**--The use of literary material (novels, short stories, etc) in the making of a film. The adaptation process involves obtaining the rights to the material from its owners, and hiring someone to write the screenplay.

**Ambient Light**--Existing or natural light that surrounds a subject.

**Ambient Sound**--In filmmaking, ambient sound is that part of the film's sound track that provides authenticity to the location of a scene--e.g., depending on what the scene is, traffic noise, footsteps, birds chirping, children playing, water dripping, etc.

**Animation**--The creation of life-like motion in inanimate objects (cartoon drawings, graphics, clay-models, etc.) via motion-picture photography.

**Answer Print**--The first completed print with all the color values properly corrected received from the film lab. After it is approved by the producer, director and cinematographer it will serve as the basis for making release prints for distribution to movie theatres.

**Art Director**--The person who is responsible for designing sets and costumes. On big budget films the art director will work under a production designer. On smaller budget films the art director will also be the production designer.

**Artifact Music**--Appropriate music that accompanies a source seen or suggested in the film. (E.g. a radio in a scene may be accompanied on the sound-track by appropriate music to suggest that that is the music the subject in the scene is listening to.)

**Aspect Ratio**--The width to height ratio of the image on film/ television screens.

**Associative Editing**--The splicing together of shots of similar events. Also called relational editing. Example: scenes of people being killed inter-cut with scenes of animals being slaughtered.

**Auteur**--The principle film-maker (author) of a film; may also refer to a film director with a specific film style. This term also refers to a theory developed by French filmmakers concerning who should be properly defined as a film's author given the many personnel involved in the making of a film.

**Backlighting**--Lighting where the principle light source is at the back of the subject facing the camera.

**Back Projection**--Also called rear screen projection. A transparent screen is placed in front of actors and a scene projected on to the screen. When the actors are photographed from the other side an illusion is created to suggest that the actors are actually part of the projected scene.

**Best Boy**--The person who assists the gaffer.

**Blaxploitation**--Films intended for a black audience that exploit for profit their baser instincts. See also sexploitation.

**Blimp**--To sound-proof a camera; sound-proofing camera cover.

**Boom**--A moving mechanical arm with a microphone used to record sound on a set in such a way that the microphone does not appear in the film image.

**B grade Film**--Films of a general poor quality made quickly and cheaply. In the past when double features were common at film theatres these films were used as fillers for the second half of the double bill.

**Bridging Shot**--A shot used to bridge a sudden transition in time, place, etc.

**Casting Director**--The person responsible for determining and finding appropriate actors needed for a film.

**Character Actor**--An actor who plays parts that call for stereotype characters--e.g. a gangster, or an army sergeant, etc. A character actor is usually not the main actor in a film.

**Chiaroscuro**--Italian for clear and dark. A technique of producing images that employ light and shade or light and dark elements.

**Cineaste**--A film-maker.

**Cinematographer**--Person responsible for the overall quality of the photographic image on the screen by being in charge of the camera and lighting. (Also known as the 'director of photography' or 'lighting cameraperson.') The cinematographer does not necessarily operate the camera; that is the job of the cameraperson.

**Cinematography**--Film photography.

**Cinema Verite**--A documentary technique of making films.

**Clapper Board**--A chalkboard with relevant shot data on it photographed at the commencement of a shot. A clapstick attached to the board is snapped shut when the shooting begins so as to provide both sound and image that can be used later to synchronize picture and sound.

**Closeup Shot**--A lens magnified shot of the face of a subject or some other object. The lens used for close-ups is called a macro lens.

**Composer**--The person who composes the film score.

**Continuity**--The creation of the illusion of filming in one unbroken sequence by ensuring consistency of such things as wardrobes, hairstyle, lighting, movement, etc., etc., as the film is shot in different places and at different times during the course of its production. Continuity is an important element in enhancing verisimilitude.

**Costume House**--A business company that specializes in costumes for films. The usual practice is that a filmmaker will rent, rather than buy, whatever costume is needed for the film from the large stock of costumes kept by the costume house.

**Crane Shot**--An aerial shot taken from a crane.

**Cross-cutting**--Also called parallel editing where shots are intermingled to suggest parallel action.

**Dailies**--Also called rushes; refers to prints of takes that are produced immediately at the end of a day's shooting so that they can be viewed before the next shooting session begins. A take is a version of a shot. Often a filmmaker will make several takes of a shot, but the final version of the film will have only one of the versions.

**Deep Focus**--A filming technique preferred by realist film-makers where objects near and far are all in focus.

**Detail Shot**--A closeup shot, but even more magnified. A closeup of the eyes alone, for example, would be a detail shot.

**Dialogue Editor**--The person responsible for ensuring, after film shooting is completed, that all speech in the films is fully audible and there are no unwanted noises on the sound track. If an actor's lines are found to be inaudible then he/she will be called to re-record the speech at a sound studio.

**Direct Cinema**--The preferred style of making documentaries today in the U.S. where the filmmaker avoids any participation in the ongoing action; even avoiding, if possible, narration.

**Director of Photography**--See cinematographer. **Discovery shot**--Using a pan or a dolly shot to provide new information in a scene to the viewer.

**Dissolve**--The fading out of an image as a new one is faded in.

**Docudrama**--A film of a semi-fictionalized true story.

**Documentary**--A non-fiction or factual film/television program.

**Dolby**--Trademark of Dolby Laboratories. A sound recording system that permits the dampening of background noise inherent in tape recordings so as to produce 'cleaner' sound.

**Dolly Shot**--A shot taken on a moving platform that permits forward and reverse movements.

**Double**--An actor who stands in or doubles for another actor--usually in scenes involving stunts.

**Dramatization**--An actual event reproduced fictionally in film or theater (or in novels).

**Dub**--A rerecording of a dialogue in another language (usually to avoid the use of sub-titles). Also refers to the recording of dialogue in a studio after a film has been shot (usually done to ensure sound clarity not available on the set because of background noise).

**Editor**--The person who is in charge of putting the film together after all the different scenes have been shot so that the narrative flows logically. Next to the director, the editor is one of the most important persons in the filmmaking endeavor.

**Environmental Sound**--Also called wild sound. Background sound associated with time and place. (E.g. a chirping cricket in a night scene.)

**Episode**--Refers to any single show of a serial (usually in television).

**Establishing Shot**--A long shot, usually, that permits the viewer to know the place and context of the action to come.

**Exposure**--The measured amount of light that the filmstock is allowed to receive during photography.

**Expressionism**--Making films in a manner that is opposite to realism in which the film-maker will use as many technical and artistic devices as necessary to give the film his/her own unique perspective, style of communication, etc.

**Extra**--A person (who may or may not be an actor) who does not have any specific role in a film plot. For instance, extras provide the human background that may be needed for special scenes in a film--e.g. a scene of a football game may require hundreds of extras to serve as the spectators in the scene.

**Fade In**--A narrative transition device in which the screen starts out black with no image and then the image is slowly brought in until it reaches its optimum visual quality.

**Fade Out**--Opposite of fade in.

**Feature Film**--The principal film being screened when two or more films are to be shown. Today it also refers to narrative films of 75 minutes or more duration.

**Fill Lighting**--Lighting used to to soften shadows and illuminate areas not accessed by the principal light source (key lighting) so as to even out the contrast in the image.

**Film Noir**--A French term (now in common usage) for films that are set in urban environments with stories in which dark and violent passions dominate negatively. Many films made in the 1940s and 1950s in the U.S. were of this type.

**Film Rating**--Refers to the allocation of audience category to a film by means of alphanumeric symbols; specifically the following in the U.S.: G (for general audiences--all audiences can be admitted by a movie theater); PG (parental guidance recommended--some scenes in the film may not be suitable for children, hence parents are advised to preview the film before determining suitability for their children); PG-13 (parental guidance for children under 13 strongly advised); R (restricted--not suitable for children under 17 unless accompanied by an adult); and NC-17 (no children under 17--children under 17 are not to be admitted by a movie theater). The film rating system, it should be noted, is not a legally binding system but a voluntary one. Films are rated by the Film Rating Board comprising seven parents and a chairperson who see the films. The work of the Board is sponsored by the Motion Picture Association of America together with the National Association of Theatre Owners and a number of other independent film distributors.

**Film Score**--Music that is composed specifically for a given film to become a critical part of that film's soundtrack (together with dialogue and other sounds). The film score is an extremely important part of the film, because at the very least it carries the emotional weight of unspoken words in the film.

**Film Stock**--Unexposed strip of photographic material used in a camera to shoot a film (equivalent to photographic 'film' for still cameras). This is usually a color or a black and white negative film. After it is shot and processed a positive film print is produced for distribution to movie theaters. Note that increasingly, filmmakers are abandoning film stock in preference for digital recording.

**Film Time**--Length of time as portrayed by events in a story rather than actual playing time of the film.

**Final Cut**--The film that is finally released for public viewing (from the filmmaker's point of view the final version that the producer cannot temper with). (See also First cut.)

**First Cut**--The first edited version of a film (which may also be called a rough cut. (See also Final cut.)

**Flashback**--The past shown in the present in a narrative. A flashback can comprise a scene a sequence or even almost the entire film.

**Flash-forward**--Opposite of the flashback; the future shown in the present in a narrative.

**Focus**--The optimum sharpness of a photographic image of a subject.

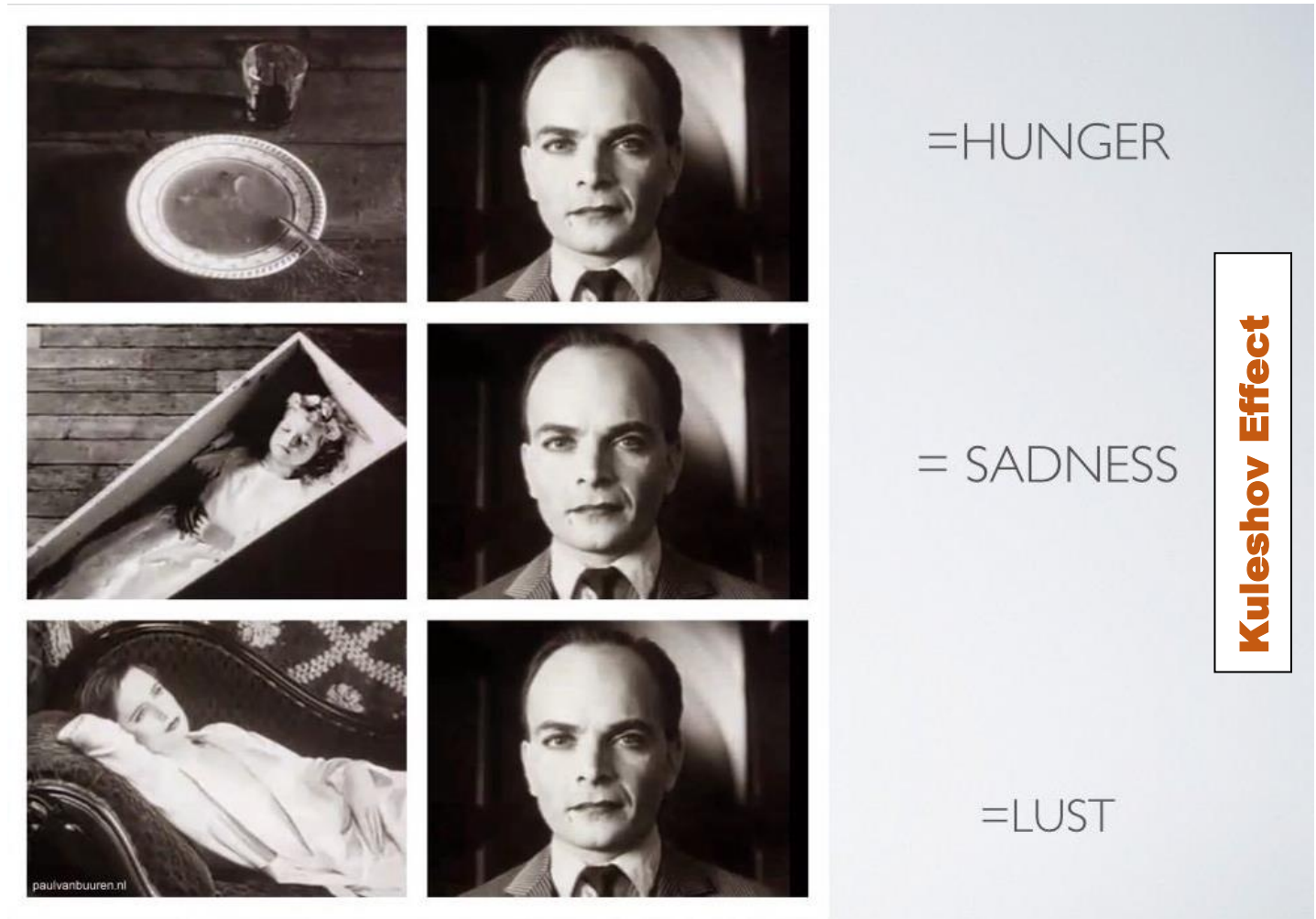
**Focus In**--A narrative transition device in the film where the image is brought into focus gradually.

**Focus Out**--Opposite of focus in.

**Follow Shot**--A shot that may involve tracking (actually moving the camera) or a zoom (simulation of tracking via a zoom lens) that follows the movement of a subject.

**Frame**--A single photographic image on an exposed and processed filmstock. It also refers to the shape and size of the projected film image on the screen.

**Freeze Frame**--The simulation of a still photograph on the screen produced by printing a single frame of an image many times in succession.



**Front Projection**--Opposite of 'back projection' where the image is projected on a screen behind the actors, and the actors are photographed from the same side.

**Full Shot**--A full length shot of a subject in which the subject dominates.

**Gaffer**--The person in charge of the electrical circuits, wiring, lights, etc. on a set. The gaffer is usually assisted by a person called the best boy.

**Genre**--A category of films that share similar styles, story types, character-types, etc. Examples of film genres include: action/ adventure, science fiction, horror, western, comedy, children, drama, mystery, documentary, romance, suspense, teen, etc.

**Grip**--The person responsible for props on a set.

**Jump Cut**--A cut within a scene (to be differentiated from a cut between scenes). Commonly used to eliminate unnecessary time in an action. For example, the middle portion of the time spent by a person traversing a room may be eliminated because the chief point of interest is the entry and the destination.

**Key Lighting**--Principal or main lighting.

**Kuleshov Effect**--See *Montage*.

**Lighting Cameraman**--Another name for a cinematographer.

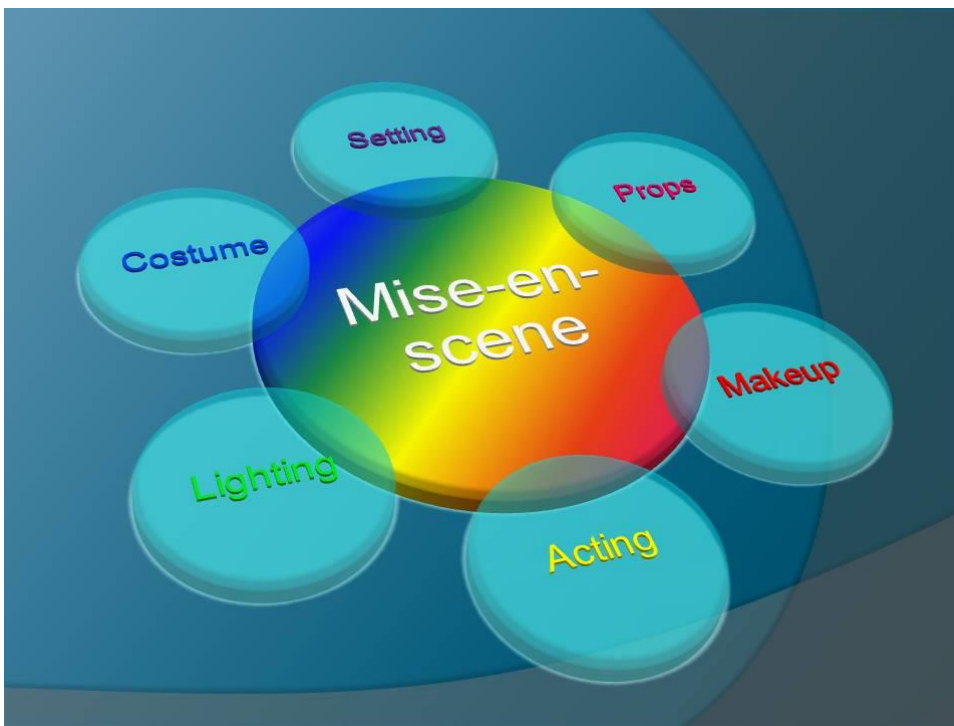
**Location Shooting**--Shooting a film in a geographic place (location) away from a studio set.

**Long Shot**--A shot in which objects and subjects appear in their entirety and usually involving a deep focus approach.

**Macro Lens**--A special type of lens that permits extremely close focusing (involving distances as short as a tenth of a centimeter from the lens surface.)

**Married Print**--A film print in which the image and sound are included (married) together.

**Master Shot**--Similar to a long shot but of a longer duration. It serves as a basis for putting together other shots (e.g. detail shots, close-up shots, etc.)



**Mise en scène**--A French term signifying what actually happens in a scene--in terms of placement and direction of actors, cameras, lighting, etc.--on the film set (as distinct from what happens in the editing room [*montage*] in the making of a film. *Realists* place heavier emphasis on the mise en scène approach to filmmaking, compared to *expressionists* who place greater emphasis on *montage*.

**Montage**--In simple terms, it means editing. However, usually it refers to a special type of editing in which two scenes are juxtaposed against

each other to produce a meaning that is not on film itself but an outcome of *viewer interpretation*. Here is a simplest example of montage at work: a shot of a person entering a supermarket; followed by a shot of the same person taking a cart of groceries to his car. However, we are never shown the person actually shopping in the supermarket, but the viewer assumes that that is what the person did. When the film was being shot scenes of the person actually shopping in



the store were also filmed. However, the film editor decides to get rid of those scenes in order to compress the length of the film. Montage helps to produce meaning out of elements that by themselves have no meaning for the film viewer—this effect is called the *Kuleshov Effect* (named after the Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov who stumbled upon it in the early 1900s).

**Multiple Exposure**--Two or more images are printed on top of each other.

**Narrative**--A story.

**Narrative Film**--Usually a feature film that tells a story (as distinct from say a poetic film).

**No-Budget Film**--A low budget film produced at a cost of around one hundred thousand dollars. In probably all instances, a no-budget film will be made by an independent filmmaker strongly committed to making the film. A low-budget film, it may be noted, is a film made at a cost of around five million dollars.

**Optical Printer**--A machine that allows duplication of film prints. It is also used for producing optical effects, as well as correcting color values (called timing) and correcting contrast.

**Out-takes**--Shots filmed but eventually remain unused in the final film because of editing decisions.



A brief hint of what goes into the enhancement of *production values* in cinema—from cinematography... to production design, to lighting, to camera equipment, to acting, to filming on location, to directing, to financing—everything, everything counts.



**Over the shoulder shot**--A shot taken usually when two persons are involved in a dialogue that permits the viewer to see the speaker over the shoulder of the listener. In such a shot parts of the head and shoulder of both the speaker and the listener will be visible in the film frame.

**Over Exposure**--Allowing too much light into the camera during photography causing the image to become too light.

**Pan**--Camera movement from left to right or right to left.

**Point of View Shot**--A shot of a view taken from the perspective of one of the characters in the film.

**Postproduction**--The phase of filmmaking that takes place between principal photography and the distribution of the film to movie theatres. In this phase such tasks as the following will be attended to: editing, addition of sound and visual effects, reshooting of scenes where necessary, music synchronization, making of answer prints, and so on. (See also preproduction.)

**Preproduction**--The phase of filmmaking that takes place between receiving financial approval to make a film and principal photography. In this phase such tasks as the following will be attended to: setting up a production office, hiring of film crew members, casting of parts in the film, designing of sets, planning of stunts, setting up a shooting schedule, and so on.

**Principal Photography**--The actual shooting of a film where the main photography of the film is accomplished (also referred to as the production phase). This is the phase that brings together all the work of the preproduction phase.

**Print**--A positive copy of a film. Films are distributed for viewing in this form.

**Production Values**—The quality of a film that gives it a professional look because its production involved professional input at every level—from acting to set design, from scripting to directing, from film scoring to wardrobe design; and so on; and so on. It should not be a surprise that, generally speaking, the bigger the film budget, the higher the production values.

**Pull back shot**--A shot that is reversed via tracking or zooming in order to reveal the context of the subject. For example, a shot that commences with a close-up and then gradually proceeds to reveal the entire person and finally the surroundings too.

**Realism**--A technique of making films in which the subject matter is more important than the film-makers personal viewpoint. It is opposite to expressionism.

**Real time**--Actual present time. A live broadcast of a performance, for example, occurs in real time (compare with a pre-recorded broadcast of a performance).

**Rushes**--Another term for dailies.

**Scene**--One or more shots that together produce a coherent segment in the narrative.

**Screenplay**--A film script with dialogue and usually (but not always) with indications of how each scene is to be photographed.

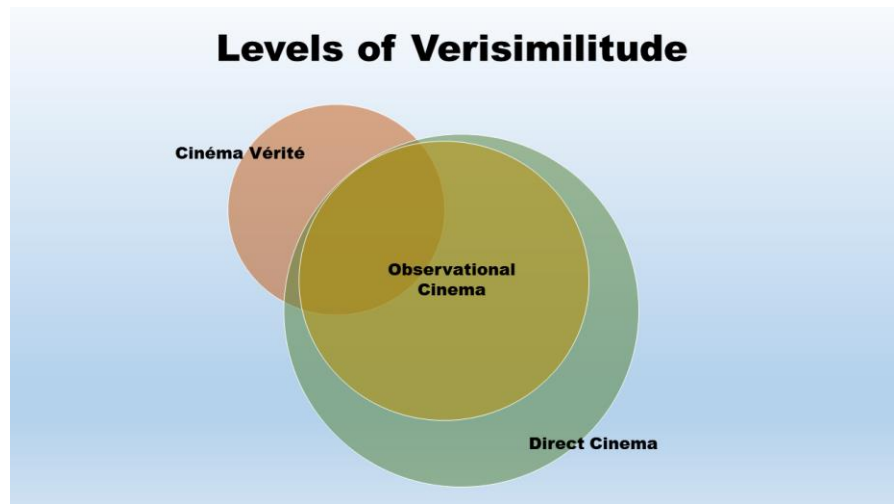
**Set**--The location where filming of a scene takes place.

**Shot**--A single piece of film made by continuously running the camera without cuts.

**Sound Designer**--the person responsible for the sound design of a film which is all the sounds that make it to the soundtrack—from the film score to dialogue to sound effects. The sound designer, for example, will decide if a particular scene should be accompanied by the film score.

**Studio**--This term may refer to a physical place where films are shot or it may refer to the huge conglomerate motion picture companies such as Columbia, Walt Disney, MGM/UA, Orion, Warner Bros., Paramount, Twentieth Century-Fox and Universal.

**Subjective Camera**--The point of view of the subject in a scene in contrast to the point of view of the filmmaker. In this situation the camera becomes the eyes of the subject (and the viewer is made to see what the subject is seeing in the scene).



## VERISIMILITUDE AND THE SOCIALIZATION OF MARGINALITY (with the U.S. as an example)

Human desire for pleasure in the form of performance entertainment (genetically determined? Probably). ↓

Leads to a permanent and insatiable quest for verisimilitude. ↓

Leads to the invention of cinema/television (and mass visual entertainment). ↓

Requires expensive technology aimed at high **production values** (and distribution). ↓

Requires large financial outlays—especially because films are almost always a gamble (in terms of viewership). ↓

Requires marketing to as large an audience as possible to recoup the financial investment. ↓

Requires themes and depictions that are in consonance with the outlook of the majority of the audience—Euro-Americans, males, etc. ↓

In the areas of race/gender/class relations these themes and depictions will play to preexisting racist/ sexist/ class stereotypes, as well as act to reinforce them. In other words, there is a dialectical relationship between say, racism and sexism in film, and racism and sexism in society at large. ↓

In addition, leads to textual erasure of people of color, women, etc. from scenes and storylines altogether—as if they don't exist in society at all. ↓

Final outcome: socialization of marginality of people of color, women, the working class, etc. (because films have become a powerful medium of socialization in general).

**Swish Pan**--A quick pan movement of the camera causing a blurring of details in a scene. Sometimes used as a transitional device where the viewer is 'transported' to a different time and place at the end of the pan.

**Take**--A version of a shot. Usually several versions of a shot will be taken to permit greater choice in film editing.

**Verisimilitude**--A quality of making something appear to be real.

**Workprint**--Duplicate print of the original print that editors can cut to produce the final film.