Film is structured like a language. Or is it? Composed of fundamental units, called shots, films rely upon edits to join shots together into larger strings called sequences (a series of shots united in time and space), just as words become sentences. Many films depend for their intelligibility upon rules or cinematic conventions, a form of film grammar that has evolved over time. A military parade, such as the masses in motion in the German propaganda film *Triumph des Willens / Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1935), always moves in the same onscreen direction, for example: flashbacks, or temporal ellipses of many sorts, are often signaled with a dissolve (that edit which joins two shots, the first fading while the second gradually appears). And, like a language, new elements, born of both technological innovation and imaginative invention, enter the cinematic lexicon, while others disappear or become anachronistic. Special effects master Dennis Muren’s compositing (mixing several visual components in one shot), as Hollywood insider Anne Thompson notes, “makes possible the morphing T-1000 in *Terminator 2* (1991) and the fleet-footed dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* (1993)” (A. Thompson 2005: 2). The use of the iris (another edit, a round mask that closes to black, or that opens to begin a sequence, or that encircles an important detail) has even come in recent years to signify “old-fashioned,” associated as it is with the silent narrative cinema and with its trademark use in the Looney Tunes. Like language, film opens to different uses or forms. Some films are like stories, others more like novels or serials. Some films seem poetic, others, striving perhaps toward profundity, seem simply nonsensical. Some documentary films want their language to seem transparent, as much of the language of journalism aspires to be, while other films want us to do nothing more than to notice their language, as with filmic explorations of the avant-garde and other experimental makers.

The comparison to language beloved of some introductory courses in cinema, however, faces serious limits, demonstrated by film theorists over several decades. First, if films involve screen duration: they cut out and rearrange time as they unfold in time (and as they unfold in time, in whatever format, remember that they are also dying). Films enlist our sensations, perceptions, and responses in and over time, as much as they appeal to our memories, our archives of what we know and have known, of what we have known and have experienced. They appeal to and become part of our personal and individual histories, and part of our collective lives. They also appeal to our linguistic being, such that what we might attribute to a film experience may in fact originate in our linguistic habits and expectations. I may experience the break-up of my relationship in the terms of melodrama, hunch lines such as “You never loved me!” in imitation of the best melodrama queens like Joan Crawford and Bette Davis; you show your friends the testimony in *Schindler’s List* (1995) to convince them that the slogan of “never again” (will Jews suffer genocide) is complicated by collective loss experienced variably and individually. Only by making appeals to the way we move through the world, literally our “common sense,” does the cinema endure, and only by doing so can cinema rearrange those unquestioned ideas, our unexamined relationships to the past, to history. Some films are notable for the way they dislocate time, fragment it, or interrupt its seemingly linear flow: Alain Resnais’ films *Nuit et brouillard / Night and Fog* (1955) and *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959) crucially contest our understandings of the monumental and personal devastations brought by the Second World War, in the death camps and in the
bombing of Hiroshima, respectively. But other films also play with history, in order to challenge pious or conventional ways of understanding the common-sensical attitudes toward simple ways of understanding the commonplace.

Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure (Stephen Herek, 1989) gives history over to the little guys. California high-school students who think Caesar is a salad dressing while The Watermelon Woman (Cheryl Dunye, 1996) invents Hollywood history from the perspective of a black lesbian who is searching both for love and for nonexistent images of herself in the world of cinema.

Second, cinema's reach is everywhere: its time is its entire past. I suggested in Chapter 1 that if film preservationists were to deposit a fraction of what the cinema has been into an archive, that collection of a dictionary does, a fraction can never represent, as a portion of a dictionary does, a fraction of what makes it daunting (for one can never imagine, much less see, even a smidgen of what has been recorded) but also what makes it powerful, compelling, fascinating. For it bridges a gap between the self and the limitless whole, between what we know intimately and what we can never know; between invention and repetition, cinema makes itself part of us, literally imprinting itself upon our retinas and lingering there. But also figuratively: we speak in the language of cinema, calling cinema the language of celebrity photographers "paparazzi" after the character in Federico Fellini's La Dolce Vita (1960), or challenging an opponent with the line Clint Eastwood popularized in the Dirty Harry films: "Go ahead. Make my day." We remember in the language of cinema; summoning our images of Hitler, of John F. Kennedy, of the first space walk, or of true love from its vast archive. We feel through the language of cinema, in the bone archive, the chilling effects of the thriller or the delusions we unleash in the "weepies." Even through these intimate experiences of the cinema, however, we will never really know what it has been or what it might become; its totality, as our own does, eludes us.

Finally, in understanding the comparison with language to obtain between scholarly approaches to film form and linguistic treatment of grammar - so that we are comparing the study of elements of film form and their rules of combination (shot, sequence, continuity, editing or challenges thereto) with the study of elements of a given language and its rules (words, sentences, "correct" vs. "incorrect" usage) - we risk diminishing both film study and our conception of language and its study. We reduce both, in other words, to normative analyses, for to study a system and its rules is to reduce a phenomenon in order to make it manageable. Grammar slides other fascinating realms of linguistics: history, texts (philology), comparative linguistics, the philosophy of language, the study of its use, and the like. Film analysis - the name for the study of film as "like a language" - through a taxonomy of its form and an examination of its rules - similarly brackets film history, theory, the philosophy of the image, random, technological shifts, industrial organization, and so on. Film analysis, furthermore, lends itself more powerful to the study of narrative film, a dominant form, to be sure, but, as we have seen, by no means the only one.

As the words in bold throughout this book indicate, however, I find some specialized language nonetheless helpful for describing what we see and hear and then thinking deeply about it, just as the ability. I believe, to parse a sentence renders one's own writing more precise and nuanced in order to make an argument. Here in this chapter, then, I condense key areas of film analysis; in the remainder of the book, I visit some of these other ways of thinking through the phenomenon of cinema. The title of this chapter, "The language of film," means, then, to suggest that one learn the language of film analysis precisely in order to say something meaningful about a given film, or about cinema. After reading this chapter, you ought, for example, to be able to identify and describe (and these are all defined subsequently) rear projection, the axis of action, or a tracking motif. The point, however, and to paraphrase Karl Marx, is not simply to describe the world you see on screen; it is to risk having a point in the description. The selection of key terms aims not to offer encyclopedic knowledge or the upper hand in trivia games, but instead to help you begin to think through different issues or questions that various formal strategies present. The question that ought to underlie close analysis, to put it bluntly, is "so what?" What is the function of x or y? What results from the choice of y over x? Why does it move me cold? Why does y move me?

A note for future study: many fine textbooks extend the discussions of film analysis you are about to read. Two of them upon
which many academics and college/university courses rely regularly are David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (1993), and Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience* (2004). Both texts multiply the number of terms I present here, and both acknowledge the paradoxical, if not impossible, nature of any taxonomy of film. In giving names to what we see and hear, that is, we necessarily translate; we represent, in the medium of written language, the sensory experience of watching and listening. (The still images sprinkled throughout this text and others repeat the problem on another register, insofar as they finesse the phenomenon of duration and exemplify in their stillness all that cinema sought to overcome in its illusion of motion. Would that the web overcame the hurdles of copyright so that you could read this with “live” streams.) This summary means, then, to spur you toward more watching, more listening, more reading, more thinking about what you see and hear. That said, there is no other chapter-length summary like it; it moves quickly and might function nicely as a reference to which you may wish to return.

**FILM ANALYSIS, THE BASICS: MISE-EN-SCÈNE**

We start with *mise-en-scène*. From the French—the not a bad language to sharpen if you’re drawn to cinema studies—in its initial use it meant the theatrical process of staging. In film study it retains the theatrical overtones, meaning to “put into the scene” and designating all that encompassed by the *frame* (the bounded axes of the image, discussed in the section on “Cinematography,” see pp. 36-42). In the study of auteurs, you will recall, it was in *mise-en-scène* that the French intellectuals found the evidence for authoritarian signatures and individual genius, but it is also in *mise-en-scène* that we often find a palpable manifestation of what we might call in the vernacular the “world of the film,” its feel, its attitude toward detail, its sense of its own reality against which we can measure its representations. It thus provides a useful starting point for describing what you’re seeing. If viewers of Edward D. Wood, Jr.’s *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959) observe gleefully that the “flying saucer” is in reality a metal pie plate suspended by a visible string, Wood’s earnest world of zombies and space travel, like many of the B-films spoofed on television’s *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, nonetheless retains its own wacky logic and appeal. Remember, in other words, that “reality” partakes of the functions of *mise-en-scène* more than the measurement of its elements against a presumed “real world,” at the same time as films summon our experience of living in that real world by way of our reactions and responses. In order to parse out how *mise-en-scène* establishes a film’s world through its visual style, it helps to divide its categories. There are six components to *mise-en-scène* if you believe strongly, as I do, that “hair” deserves its very own, to wit: setting (set and props), lighting, costume, hair, make-up, and figure behavior.

**SETTING**

Setting needn’t be constructed, although it often is. It refers to the streets of Dakar in Senegal, the city from which the characters Mory and Anna in Djibril Diop Mambety’s film odyssey *Touki Bouki* (1973) begin a journey toward an imaginary France (referenced in the film through Josephine Baker’s song “Paris. Paris. Paris,” looped on the soundtrack), just as much as it refers to the Los Angeles suburbs in which hundreds of B-westerns allege to have found “New Mexico” or “Arizona.” It refers to Victorian London as it is conjured through the smoky, gritty street scenes of the BBC production of Sarah Waters’ quasi-lesbian novel *Tipping the Velvet* (2004), as much as it refers to the pop-shorthand version of “London” on offer in *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (Jay Roach, 1999), with its impromptu pre-shagging Elvis Costello number, red telephone booths, and groovy double-deckers. Shooting on location—that is, using settings found in the world rather than constructed in the studio—does not mean that the world of the film thus created is not constructed or is simply “realistic.” Just think, as the joke goes, of how many apartment windows in films that take place in Paris just happen to feature a stunning view of the Eiffel Tower. Location shooting relies on deliberate choices to enlist the help of already-constructed locales in the production of the film’s setting. Wynn Thomas, the production designer for Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* (1989), masterminded the painstaking “recreation” of an actual block in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn to use as the
film's setting (see Figure 2.1). Another option, frequently used for narrative films with significant budgets, is the studio shot on a sound stage (a built locale in which every variable of light and sound can be calculated to simulate whatever environment a filmmaker wishes to create). Sets are not confined to measurable interiors, such as dwellings or workplaces, but can extend literally into the new worlds of galaxies and universes beyond our own.

If settings often blend found and constructed elements, props (short for “properties”) help to amplify a mood, give further definition to a setting, or call attention to detail within the larger scene. In Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), stuffed game birds peering down upon Norman Bates and Marion Crane in the Bates Motel define the word “creepy,” but they also give away the secret of the film (see Figure 2.2). [I won't reveal it here if you haven't seen the film.] Props can serve an overt narrative function. In an early American narrative film such as D.W Griffith's *The Lonedale Operator* (1911), the actress Blanche Sweet fends off two robbers who are after a mining company’s payroll money, delivered to the train station at which she serves as telegraph operator. The film’s punchline comes when the robbers learn that her “weapon” had all along been a wrench, masquerading in the dark as a gun. (You may practice your own psychoanalytic interpretation of what this “weapon” might represent at home.) In early prints of the film, Griffith tinted (colored) the wrench to stand out against the dusky night, so that
spectators would experience Sweet's captivity as suspense, in fear that her ruse might be exposed. Props can also serve less overt narrative functions, condensing meaning without declaring it baldly. To take another mining example, in the final shot of Douglas Sirk's wonderfully perverse melodrama *Written on the Wind* (1956) Marylee Hadley (Dorothy Malone) strokes a replica of an oil derrick as she assumes the position of family matriarch. In this story of a Texas oil family's debauchery and fall (a precursor to the television serials *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, to be sure) the erect phallic can only be an artificial one!

**LIGHTING**

Lighting, just as effectively as props, establishes mood and directs attention to detail. Obvious examples of extreme variations in lighting include the German expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), wherein fear and menace reveal themselves through angular sets and *chiaroscuro* (bold contrasts between light and dark) interiors and street scenes, or in the post-war American film movement known as *film noir* ("dark film"). Literally as descriptive of its settings in urban crime and mystery, and figuratively as descriptive of its investigations of shady lives and dark themes inaugurating the post-war landscape. These two examples disclose the extent to which lighting is often naturalized, thought of as emanating naturally from a film's setting. Perhaps because spectators frequently know little about how lighting works, or perhaps because filmmakers now manipulate it so effectively that we are drawn in by the illusion, we frequently overlook its power in the experience of cinema.

In fact, however, even the effect of naturalistic lighting in cinema takes an enormous amount of work, relying upon the repertoire of effects possible through the system of *three-point lighting*, developed during the studio era in Hollywood and largely dominant still today. As the name suggests, the system describes three sources of lighting, and is reliant upon a *key light*, a *fill light*, and a *backlight* in order to balance the lighting for effect in any given shot set. Also commonsensically, the key light provides the primary or primary light source. It tends to illuminate most strongly the shot's subject and it also tends to cast the strongest shadows. A fill light, which might be positioned near the camera roughly 120° or thereabouts from the key light, literally "fills in" the shadows thrown by the key light. Compensating for the key light's strength and tendency to throw harsh shadows, the fill light softens the illumination upon the subject and its surrounding area. The backlight, finally, comes from behind the subject (in our example roughly another 120° from the fill light) and separates the subject from the background, counterbalancing the brightness of the key light. By varying the intensities and direction of light through the three-point system, filmmakers achieve an astounding variety of effect, from the even *high-key* lighting of the classical Hollywood cinema (wherein little contrast between bright and dark obtains, soft and revealing of detail) to the *low-key* (high contrast, harsh, and hard) lighting frequently used in horror and mystery (including my previous examples drawn from *noir*). In the former case, the high-key style contributes to a worldview that values transparency, clarity, intelligibility; the most extreme example of high-key lighting is the television situation comedy. In the latter case, lighting helps to gesture toward the underworld, the shadowy world, uncertainty, fear, or evil.

Lighting helps viewers to understand setting as well as the characters and actors within that setting. Throwing a light under a character's face, under-lighting, creates a spooky or sinister effect. For example, whereas positioning a light behind the subject by *backlighting* may create a halo around the hair, suggesting the character's saintliness. Special kinds of lighting magnify the best stars have to offer: a *kicker* (backlighting on the subject's profile) reveals chiseled cheekbones, while an *eye light* (lighting the front, from a light placed on the camera) creates a glamorous twinkle. But films use other cues to build our perceptions of characters, both principal and marginal. *Costume*, in tandem with lighting and props, delineates the world of a film and its characters, too.

**COSTUME AND HAIR**

A term designating films of a common type, provides an easy

we can think easily of a cowboy's look as he

a flashing control board in a science fiction film. Because
genre is an effect of repetition, we learn its codes so that we can quickly orient ourselves to the new iteration of a given story. This form of “typing” is not limited to genre films, of course. Sergei Eisenstein’s *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) exploits “typage” in order to differentiate the heroic sailors from the rigid and oppressive officers on the battleship. The brawny sailors (actual sailors cast for type) wear white and gleam as brightly as the ship’s brass they polish proudly, while the officers’ dark uniforms amplify their sinister tendencies and hawk-like preying upon the enlisted men. And Eisenstein’s awareness of the importance of hair styling reveals itself through the outrageous wig worn by the character of the ship’s priest, his outdated fanaticism emblematized in his wild locks. Details of costuming contribute to the believability of a film’s world, in other words, but good costume design is not simply about historical fidelity or accuracy. “Unless of course the film requires it, I’m not interested in an exact replica of the period,” remarks Sandy Powell, one of the most accomplished designers in film’s history. “I look at the period, how it should be, how it could be, and then I do my own version” (Bellafante 1999: 82).

MAKE-UP

Make-up often goes unnoticed in many realist films. Indeed, it became recognized as an art with its own category for the Academy Awards as late as 1965. Epic historical films, such as Mel Gibson’s *Braveheart* (1995), or large-scale fantasy or science fiction productions, such as the *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* cycles, clearly draw attention to the role of make-up in creating imaginative dimensions of the film world. But make-up is one of those elements of the larger effect of glamour, which by definition remains concealed as a process and as labor. Star images depend upon the idea that stars “naturally” look better than mere mortals, and that their beauty shines forth with or without the efforts of a crew in the make-up truck. In Billy Wilder’s brilliant satire of Hollywood in *Sunset Boulevard*, (1950), aging actress Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson, herself a silent era legend) undergoes a barrage of face treatments, muscle exercises, and the like in the belief that she is on the threshold of a comeback. Wilder reveals how her star image constructed through hard work that is then rendered invisible through the mechanics of film stardom. It is of course true that actors are selected for their looks, whether glamorous or not, and that make-up aids in creating surfaces particularly congenial to be photographed. As Robert Towne observes, actors communicate powerfully through their screen presences:

*For gifted movie actors affect us most, I believe, not by talking, fighting, fucking, killing, cursing or cross-dressing. They do it by being photographed... Great movie actors have features that are ruthlessly efficient... The point is that a fine actor on screen conveys a staggering amount of information before he ever opens his mouth.*

(Dunne 1997: 160)

If their features are “ruthlessly efficient”, that efficiency is augmented by the careful application of make-up for the process of photography.

FIGURE BEHAVIOR

Actors also do, of course, talk, fight, fuck, kill, curse and cross-dress: these various activities the sometimes deadening language of film analysis flattens into the category of figure behavior. Since mise-enscène encompasses only those elements “put in” to the scene, figure behavior means to describe the movement, expressions, or actions of the actors or other figures (animals, monsters, animated beings, droids) within a given shot. Acting per se thus receives little attention in formal analysis, which is instead concerned with the various forms of expression, with the production of affect through the face as an apparent window onto interior feeling or, and with action that contributes to a film’s narrative, its construction and effect logic. Danish director Carl-Theodor Dreyer’s classic *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) records nuances of suffering as the martyred Joan is tried and subsequently hanged at the Cathedral. Maria (Renée) Falconetti’s performance, considered by many to be one of film’s greatest, thus receives formal analysis in terms of acting style than in terms of Dreyer’s
manipulation of point of view and use of the close-up of Falconetti's naked face (i.e. without make-up, which he forbade in the service of realism). As David Bordwell has shown in a remarkably careful reading of the film, Dreyer deploys the close-up precisely not in order to solicit identification with the martyred Joan, but instead to create a truly divine point of view or perspective of judgment that is distinct from both herself and her persecutors (Bordwell 1981).

CINEMATOGRAPHY

To notice any single element of *mise-en-scene* is also to notice an element of cinematography, since everything “put in” to a given shot is recorded by a camera. That camera, in turn, is placed to include some elements and to exclude others (to leave them offscreen in *offscreen space* or *implied space*). That decision involves the act of framing the *profilmic* event, or that which lies before the camera; even films that exist independently of a profilmic event (such as those experimental films discussed in Chapter 1) rely upon inclusion and exclusion for every frame. The camera records the shot at a given *camera distance* from the setting and its action. The camera chronicles the action from a fixed or changing *camera angle*. Even a stationary camera establishes and may change focus, in order to emphasize a particular plane or plane within the camera’s depth of field, the three-dimensional space the camera’s lens is capable of recording in focus in two dimensions, according to the shot’s role and logic. And the camera’s angle and distance may remain constant or change with the camera’s movement during the shot. Anything to do with the camera that belongs to the realm of cinematography.

Framing can be understood practically as well as philosophically, and I find it one of the most important elements of cinema and one that opens onto other aspects of cinematography, following upon the insights of Gilles Deleuze, who notes that “the frame teaches us that the image is not just given to be seen. It is legible as well as visible” (Deleuze 1986: 12). Ronald Bogue, a particularly fine reader of Deleuze’s work on cinema, summarizes five elements of framing we can isolate in order to explore its function:

1. In terms of content, it provides information. “The more information that fills the framed image,” suggests Bogue, “the more it may be said to be ‘saturated’; the less information, the more ‘rarefied’ the image becomes, until it reaches the limit of the empty black or white screen” (Bogue 2003: 42). If the film I mentioned in Chapter 1, *The Flicker*, represents the rarefied pole, Wes Anderson’s stylized 2001 film *The Royal Tenenbaums* works well as an example of the saturated other extreme, crammed as every shot is with detail and visual information.

2. The frame itself, as limiting border, functions either geometrically or dynamically. In the first case, “the frame establishes a fixed compositional grid of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal coordinates” (Bogue 2003: 43) within which elements are organized. In the second, the frame functions dynamically with that which is framed. Hitchcock’s framing of the fields of the American Midwest in *North by Northwest* relies on geometric framing; indeed, Hitchcock’s own *storyboards*, the drawings that provide a graphic vision of each setup or shot, lay bare his interest in the frame’s geometric function. Canted framing, in which the horizontal axis appears tilted, can also signal that something is “out of whack,” such as Spike Lee’s use of the canted frame (also called Dutch angles) in his film *Do the Right Thing* in order to indicate brewing tensions. By contrast, the use of iris shots in a film such as Germaine Dulac’s *The Smiling Madame Beudet* (1922) reveals the subjective life of the trapped bourgeois woman of the title. As Alan Williams observes of this “grizzly comic” tale, Dulac’s use of props and subjective camera divuls the extent to which “the heroine has internalized her oppressive situation so completely that the ways in which she can rebel against it... only serve as humorous illustrations of her terrible psychic imprisonment” (Williams 1992: 147–8).

The frame both separates and unites the included elements: parts are related geometrically, parts related dynamically. The horizon consistently on display in the genre of the Hollywood western provides an example of the former,
while images of fog or shadows provide movement which can unite what remains within the frame dynamically.

4 Every frame implies an “angle of framing” or implicit point of view. This point of view may have narrative motivation (which I discuss at length soon; see pp. 119–20), or it may provide a puzzle for the spectator to solve or ponder. From whose point of view or from what position am I seeing what is on-screen?

5 The frame both includes and excludes. Every frame determines an “out of field” beyond the framed image. Film critic Noel Burch distinguishes six spatial axes in the out of field: above or below the frame, to the right or left, in depth away from the camera or toward and beyond it. Deleuze proposes, in addition to the spatial out of field, an absolute out of field of durée, or duration.

Framing, of course, depends on other cinematographic choices. Every placement of the camera can be analyzed in terms of the distance between the camera and its object(s). Film analysis has evolved an anthropocentric taxonomy for describing distance, that is, using the human body as the reference point for each designation:

- the extreme long shot (ELS), in which one can barely distinguish the human figure;
- the long shot (LS), in which humans are distinguishable but remain dwarfed by the background;
- the medium long shot (MLS), or plan américain, in which the human is framed from the knees up;
- the medium shot (MS), in which we move in slightly to frame the human from the waist up;
- the medium close-up (MCU), in which we are slightly closer and see the human from the chest up;
- the close-up (CU), which isolates a portion of a human (the face, most prominently);
- and the extreme close-up (ECU), in which we see a mere portion of the face (an eye, the lips).

All of these designations can be brought to shots without humans in them, but the language of camera distance relies on a conception of the human in the frame in order to measure it. The height of the camera and its angle, as I have already noted, are also implicated in framing.

What we see of the object(s) in a given shot also depends upon the manipulation of light and of focus, in turn dependent, as with most types of photography, upon the selection of a camera’s lens and the film stock for its sensitivity to light. Lenses come in different focal lengths, selected for their ability to alter perceptions of depth and scale: short focus (commonly called wide angle) lenses, which exaggerate depth (and which bend straight lines at the fringes of the frame, creating distortions such as the “fishbowl” effect); middle focal length lenses of up to 50mm, which avoid distortion and reproduce Renaissance perspective; and long focal length or telephoto lenses, which flatten depth and magnify events at a distance, allowing us to see details from very far away. Unlike these lenses with fixed focal lengths (called prime lenses), zoom lenses allow a cinematographer to change focal length over the course of a single shot; changing, or racking, focus in the course of a shot can simulate camera movement, in which we may appear to be closer to an object or person, moving from, say, a medium long shot to a close-up, but in fact the camera remains stationary while the cinematographer adjusts the focal length of the lens. Film stocks vary as to their responsiveness to amount and type of light source; the level of a film’s exposure depends upon the calibration of light.

**BOX 2.1: CITIZEN KANE (WELLES, 1941)**

Depth of field – an element of cinematography – combines with the construction of setting – an element of mise-en-scène – famously in Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane*. Cinematographer Gregg Toland captured the vast sets constructed to display Kane’s opulent life in his mansion Xanadu in such a way as to keep many planes in sharp focus. The combination of short focal length lenses with very light-sensitive or fast film recording deep space came to be called, after Kane, deep focus and was used repeatedly throughout several decades.
source, stock, and aperture, which both controls the amount of light to which the film is exposed and also determines depth of field, or those planes which remain in sharp focus in a given shot.

Cameras, of course, may move, on trains and in hot-air balloons, sometimes. They are mounted on jet airplanes and carried in pockets. Some are handheld, and some handheld cameras require the complicated scaffold of the Steadicam to give operators minutes of control and balance. Several forms of camera movement have specific mention. When a camera rotates on its vertical axis—that is, when it remains stationary but for that rotation—we describe that movement as panning, frequently to scan a crowd or establish a vast space. When a camera rotates on its horizontal axis, again, when it remains stationary but for that rotation—the effect is tilting, frequently to establish a building’s height or a view from a lower to a higher perspective. When the camera is freed from a stationary position, it becomes mobile and reframes, of course, as it moves. Such mobile framing, then, involves a camera which is to be traveling, dollying, when it rests on a dolly or some kind of wheeled contraption (amateurs love wheelchairs, as they are cheap and accessible), tracking, when such a dolly travels on actual tracks laid on the set for that purpose, or, less frequently, trucking, as the camera rides on a truck or other vehicle on the ground. Such mobile framing can involve movement backward, forward, side to side, or around in circles, and can vary furthermore in terms of speed. When the camera leaves the ground, it is craning, frequently on an actual crane which lifts it from the ground to provide aerial perspective. Another famous Orson Welles innovation is the astonishing opening shot of Touch of Evil (1958), fully three minutes long, which sets up the locale of Tijuana and the action to follow in an incredible craning/tracking shot. Michael Snow’s Wavelength (1967) introduces the psychedelic effects of what appears to be (but is not only) a zoom lens adjustment which takes forty-five minutes to travel across a room to a photograph pinned on the wall. Shot duration, then, becomes an important companion to mobile framing, determined only by the amount of film one can load into a camera’s magazine for a single shot; duration has consequences for the spectator’s relationship to the image such as I discussed in relation to the long take in Chapter 1.

One final aspect of the single shot that bears further mention before I move to the combination of shots through editing is the process shot or composite shot. These are created through the use of special effects in order to layer multiple images or strips of film into a single shot. The simple form of such layering can happen in the camera, by exposing a single strip of film twice or even multiple times, creating the effect of superimposition. Laboratories can create effects such as superimposition, used often to create “ghosts” or translucent effects, or more elaborate shots, such as the use of rear projection or front projection. Developed in the 1920s in order to use the costs of filming on location, rear projection involved the use of a translucent screen, onto which location footage was projected and in front of which the actors played out the scene meant to take place in that location. Scenes of cars driving in 1930s cinema provide the paradigmatic example, the cause of mirth for spectators who are alert to the unconvincing depth cues and mismatches in quality of image, lighting, and shadow that often characterize such composite shots. (We think of them now, in other words, as funny.) The answer to the degraded image projected from the rear