CHAPTER II

The Language of Film and Its Relation to the Language of Literature

What you look hard at has a way of looking back hard at you.
— Ezra Pound

To like what one likes is a valid way of assessing a movie's worth, however, often this judgment is made uncritically, passively, and without solid reasons. In contrast, to know *why* one finds a film to be flawed or fantastic and to be able to see and communicate how it is skillfully or poorly constructed is to experience a broader and deeper sense of appreciation. This deepening of discriminating perception and expansion of critical evaluation begins with a basic knowledge of the fundamental elements of a film and the techniques that are specific to this medium.

Writing in *The New York Times*, Elizabeth Van Ness questions, "Is a Cinema Studies Degree the New M.B.A.?" Film and media images dominate international modes of communication (a heightened example of which, Van Ness explains, is the means by which terrorists and their opponents communicate in intricately "staged" videos). Van Ness asserts that "cinema isn't so much a profession as the professional language of the future" (sec. 2:1). The ability to use, appreciate, and manipulate the language of film, like any language, is enhanced through expanded understanding.

All films share a fundamental anatomy created largely by the specific and defining ways in which the camera is employed. While sound may also be incorporated in a movie and while the various sound tracks (spoken words, music, and effects) may significantly enhance the film, sound

is not an essential property of a movie. In fact, for many years (1895–1929), films were silent with, at most, a piano in the movie theater providing the only source of sound.

Movies are fundamentally visual, with the images recorded by a camera or created through computer imaging being their single, essential feature. Images are used in various ways that all amalgamate to produce the particular form and function of a given film; and while each movie is unique in the ways that it utilizes cinematic devices — including sound devices — each film does so by implementing basic properties common to all movie-making. Students of film, like students of any specific discourse, need to know the fundamentals of their subject — its language — in order to move forward in their understanding. Fundamental knowledge for a film student includes an understanding of cinematic structure, its anatomy or form. This knowledge of form is particularly important when given the added complexity encountered in analyzing (or anatomizing as it were) films that are based on literary works.

Knowing the formal properties employed by movies assists us in determining the quality and appropriateness of filmmakers' choices as they translate from the language of literature into the language of film. A knowledge of film trains us to be more alert to the concepts, techniques, and decisions that attend literature-to-film conversions.

Film and literature have aesthetic equivalents in methods and styles. Affinities exist between literary form and cinematic form. Much like literature, a film achieves its distinct style through its organizing and editing methods; its particular rhythms, tones and syntax; and its genre and subject matter.

Viewers consume a film much as readers do a literary work, over time. They turn pages or sit through sequences of shots, with the writer and filmmaker, arguably, more in control of the minimum amount of time that the reader and viewer must initially invest in experiencing the work than, for example, the painter is.

Like a work of literature, a film is the result of the process of composition, the meaning of which is "to make by putting together." Literature and film composition, unlike a painting, for example, both comprise a series of constantly changing images. The compositional structure of both is created from the splicing together of a sequence of smaller units: a paragraph (or stanza) in literature and a shot in film.* Paragraphs, stan-

**There are exceptions to this general composition principle, i.e., a film including only one shot, a single-paragraph literary work, and, in the other direction, a painting sequence.*

zas, and shots simultaneously function as both singular, separate units and as integrated, inseparable parts of the entire work. The splicing together of the smaller units creates the design-whole of the film or the book.

Our understanding of the meaning and significance of the literary or film text can be enhanced through a close reading of the smaller units that form the work. In analyzing a literary work, we look at a paragraph, a sentence, or a single word. Much in that same way, in analyzing a film, we scrutinize a shot, a sequence of frames that make up the shot, or a single frame.

Film is composed of a sequence of still images (frames) that pass through a projector at the rate of twenty-four frames per second. We are able to pause at a single frame (freeze it) and study it, much as we can pause at a single word in a literary work and scrutinize its importance. The frame, like the word, is important both as an isolated, self-reliant entity that yields meaning and as an interdependent element in the entire work.

Like words in a sentence, film frames are placed in a specific sequence. They have a definite syntactical structure; and, as in writing, the sequencing of the frames (which creates the film's particular syntax) helps to create the work's clarity of meaning and definition of style. Like words in a sentence that combine to make a paragraph or like lines of poetry that together form a stanza, frame sequences compose a shot; and shots combine to make the entire film much as paragraphs combine to make a book.

A shot is the amount of film footage exposed in a camera from the time that the camera is turned on until it is turned off. The running time of a shot is called its duration. Before a shot is incorporated into a film, its duration, as originally recorded by the camera, may be shortened, the film material literally cut in the process of truncating the shot. Thus the term "cuts a film" is synonymous with editing a film. Individual shots are selectively edited and then each of the individual, edited shots is spliced (edited) together to compose the whole film. A variety of editing practices are traditionally used which include hard and soft cuts, fades, or dissolves. Shots are visible on the screen as the intervals between these cuts, fades, or dissolves.

A 35 millimeter film camera, the commercial standard for theatrical releases, is able to hold in its canister one thousand feet or approximately eleven minutes of film. (The film feeds through the camera at ninety feet per minute.) A shot in film (in contrast to a shot made by a digital moving camera, for example), therefore, has a maximum playing length of eleven minutes. Once it is edited into a film, a single shot, thus, can be

no longer than eleven minutes. Theoretically, a shot can be as short as one frame, which runs one twenty-fourth of a second. The splicing-in of one frame is an editing possibility, but it would be impossible to be seen by a spectator watching it on a screen. Film mythology is replete with stories of short frame sequences (twenty frames or fewer) depicting propaganda or selling products, being spliced into feature films in such a way that the images are not consciously visible to the audience, yet are said to work quite effectively on the subconscious. Theodore Rosak's book, *Flicker*, is a fictional study of this very phenomenon and has at its core the sinister, yet risible and ironic, theme that *there is more to film than meets the eye*.

Film shots, like literary paragraphs, interact with those that precede and follow them. The smaller units (the shots, the paragraphs) are connected in a series (of shots/paragraphs) to form a single, coherent unit of dramatic action, a shot sequence in film or a chapter in a book. The shot sequence, like the book chapter, is a self-contained group of related scenes. It presents a small portion of the overall events that occur within the entire dramatic structure. In film jargon, a shot sequence is frequently referred to as a "chapter" since both have the same structuring principles. They are separate parts into which the film or book is divided, numbered, and often given a title; and they are unified according to a specific set of dramatic, aesthetic, or ideological values.

The final cut of a movie (the conclusive editing) assembles the various shot sequences into their appropriate succession. However, most films are not shot in the sequence in which they appear in the final cut of the film. Instead of being shot in sequence, a movie is filmed according to its shooting schedule which is structured around such practical concerns as the availability of the actors; the need to complete at the same time all shots set in the same location, no matter where they chronologically appear in the completed film; the terms of permission for use of exterior and interior locations; and the availability of an unoccupied sound stage.

Director Bill Paxton explains that in establishing the shooting schedule for *Frailty*, he only had the principal actors, Matthew McConaughey and Powers Boothe, for a few weeks, so he had to shoot all the scenes involving those two actors according to their very limited availability. The two actors, McConaughey and Boothe, play pivotal characters who appear throughout *Frailty* (2001). *Frailty* tells a dark and twisting story of Fenton Meiks (McConaughey) who confesses to FBI agent Wesley Doyle (Boothe) that Meiks's younger brother, Adam, was the "God's Hand" serial killer that the FBI has been searching for. Filmed fully out of

sequence, *Frailty* delivers a logical and coherent narrative, created, in part, through the work of very worthy editing.

In making *The Age of Innocence*, director Martin Scorsese had to schedule his filming, in part, according to the availability of real buildings that he wanted to use. Based on Edith Wharton's Pulitzer Prize–winning novel set in Old New York's grand society of the 1870s, *The Age of Innocence* (1993) is a period piece, which adds the complexity of maintaining historical accuracy to the filming process. Known for his scrupulous attention to authenticity in details, Scorsese and his pre-production team rigorously researched locations. Their work was rewarded. The Pi Kappa Phi fraternity house in Troy, New York, was used as wealthy Mrs. Mingott's 1870s New York City home and the current Philadelphia Academy of Music served as the old New York Academy of Music. Both locations are remarkably similar to Wharton's descriptions of these places, as are the redressed interiors of the Tilden House on Gramercy Park (now the National Arts Club), which became the Beauforts' house and ballroom in the film. Filming at those locations was scheduled around the availability of the sites and, later, those shots were appropriately edited into the film.

Traditionally, it is the job of the film editor to determine the sequence and duration of a movie's shots; and a film is successfully edited in proportion to the art and precision with which the shots are integrated. The film editor often works in close alliance with the director to determine the form that the final cut takes.

The director Alfred Hitchcock notoriously played a large part in the editing of his films, and he is highly regarded for the exactness with which his movies are edited. Hitchcock is credited for never holding a shot for a single frame longer or shorter than was needed to create the desired effect. This is praise that, while exaggerated in its literal specificity, is not exaggerated in its critical intent. Contemporary film editors study Hitchcock's cutting strategies, as do students of film. They repeatedly watch shot sequences to deepen their appreciation of the editing choices: the manner by which shots are sequenced and integrated, the methods of transitions used between them, and the precision of each shot's duration. Hitchcock's editing is amazingly refined and passes unnoticed by an audience swept up in the suspense created, in part, through his highly skilled editing sensibilities.

The length of time that a shot runs in a film varies much in the same way and for the same substantial reasons that paragraph length varies in a book. A writer creates variations in paragraph length in order to communicate information suitable to that paragraph and to modulate the work's stylistic textures, its music, tones, and rhythms. Filmmakers vary the duration of shots for the same reasons: to create modulations of rhythms (visual and auditory) and to convey appropriate and sufficient information. Shots longer in duration, composed, literally, of longer strips of film, produce slower rhythms, as would long, complex sentences in lengthy paragraphs. Shorter shots, like simple sentences in short paragraphs, produce a more rapid rhythm.

☞ *Select any film by Alfred Hitchcock and then a short sequence of shots within it. Count and number each shot, then clock the duration of each within the given sequence. Study the effect that duration has on the rhythms created and the dramatic information communicated by each shot within the sequence.*

It is vital for film students to be able to see where a shot begins and ends and to see how it functions within the shot sequence and the film, overall. The capacity to see individual shots is a foundational step in understanding the structure of a particular film. It develops an awareness of and appreciation for shot duration and editing strategies; and it fosters the ability to engage in "close readings" of film. Film, like literature, lends itself to close readings, i.e., the scrutiny of the various details and elements of the work, the practice of which sharpens and clarifies our capacity to see the film or literary text more fully.

To this end, director Martin Scorsese, who regards himself as a perpetual student of film, will study shot sequences of other directors to analyze how the mechanics available to filmmakers can be employed to create the miracles of film beauty visible on the screen. In interviews with him, many of which are available on the Internet through simple searches, Scorsese speaks openly of what his analysis yields and how he incorporates into his own work what he has learned from close scrutiny of other directors' strong films.

Good films, like good literature, are enhanced through effective editing. The editing in both literature and film may, but does not have to be, the result of a collaborative effort. Professional editors may be brought in or writers may edit their own work much as producers or directors may cut their own films. In literature and in film, the final editing occurs once the preliminary work is completed, that is, when the entire draft is written or the full filming is finished.

However, in both literature and film, editing also occurs as an integral part of the entire process of composition. From the first word or from

the first shot, writers and filmmakers are employing structuring devices, ever-deciding how to organize — edit together — the small and large units that make up their completed work. Both writers and filmmakers frequently employ an initial structuring device: an outline for the writer and a storyboard for the filmmaker. (Many DVD versions of movies contain storyboards among their extra features.) A storyboard is series of sketches placed in sequence, much like a comic strip, that provides a visual outline for the entire film. An example of a storyboard can be found in Appendix B. In literature and in film, the structuring methods — the design — by which thoughts, images, and ideas come to follow one another are the result of a complex process, only some of which occurs consciously.

The various revisions, minor and major, that a paragraph may go through in the process of composition are analogous in film to the multiple takes. A take is the single, uninterrupted filming of a specific shot. In the course of filming, several takes are normally recorded and numbered separately, and the best one (or a portion of it) is edited into the movie. A director may decide on multiple takes for any number of reasons: a desire to film the shot from different angles, an actor's mistake, a shift or flaw in lighting or sound, an interest in having the actors perform the same shot in various ways, the intrusion of visible crew or equipment into the frame, a change in the script, or a continuity mistake.*

A significant structuring method common to both literature and film is the manufacturing of transitions between one paragraph or one shot and another. Transitions are created through edits that join shots together in a film or paragraphs together in literature. There are two methods by which the writer or the filmmaker edits together, or arranges, as it were, the smaller units that form the complete work. In film these editing practices are called continuity editing and montage editing, but the same, basic essential editing principles operate in literature, also.

The first of these methods, continuity editing, connects each paragraph or shot in a sequence to the subsequent shot or paragraph by creating a logical continuation of the action and/or themes or ideas. In writing, this continuity occurs when the transitions between paragraphs develop in a logical, clear, and smooth manner. A writer will use transi-

**A simple Internet search for "continuity mistakes" will yield several sites that list these errors. Examples of continuity mistakes include:* Spider-Man *(2002): Peter Parker first learns he can climb walls after running out of his school. In that shot sequence, Peter is wearing different shoes on the wall and on the roof.* The Lord of The Rings: The Return of the King *(2003): Midway through the movie Frodo is hurt and has a scar on his lower right cheek, close to his chin. Several times throughout the film the scar changes position and size.*

tional devices between paragraphs to link a new phase of the idea or the action with the phase discussed in the preceding paragraph. The transitional devices used in writing include repetition and expansion of key words, ideas, or actions or the incorporation of mechanical connectives such as: thus, however, accordingly, nevertheless, and as a result. Effective continuity transitions are, ironically, most successful when they call least attention to themselves, when they occur naturally and unobtrusively within the cadences and tones of the writer's style. A writer who composes according to continuity values certain compositional qualities: the consistent sustaining of a smooth, clean progression from paragraph to paragraph and the avoidance of jolting leaps that appear illogical, unclear, discordant, or messy.

Continuity editing in film has the same goal: to have the movie progress (transition) from shot to shot in a smooth, clean progression that is most successfully accomplished when most unnoticed. In film the objective of continuity editing is to create the illusion that the movie is not made up of a series of short, separate shots, but that it is, instead, one ongoing, unspliced (seamless) whole. Continuity editing is accomplished by deploying those specific editing procedures which conceal or minimize the transpositions from one cut to the next, in effect making the edit as unnoticeable as possible. In continuity editing, shots are spliced together to follow the story's movement, to direct the audience's attention to specific objects and actions, and to present and enlarge upon repeating visual motifs. Much as writing incorporates certain mechanical devices to sustain the continuity of the work, film employs specific structuring devices to sustain its continuity. The fundamental editing devices used to structure and maintain visual or dramatic continuity are shown in Table 1.

☞ *The ability to see these principal editing devices at work is a developmental skill that occurs by training the eye to see them. This training, like any training, is strengthened through repetition. Train the eye to see the nature of editing devices by selecting any film and then a sequence of shots within the film. Scrutinize and write down the particular methods by which the individual shots are edited together. The more this exercise is done, the more you will understand editing methods and the more your appreciation will deepen for the skill and/or deficiencies in a given film's editing practices.*

Not all literature and not all films are organized in accord with the methods and the values of continuity editing. Some instead employ (in part or in whole) a very different approach, montage editing. Montage edit-

Table 1.
Principal Continuity Editing Strategies

Editing Device	*Description*
match on action or match on movement	the editing together of shots to create a continuation of a dramatic action or a particular physical movement across a cut to the subsequent shot
match on a line	the editing together of shots which cut from a line that is spoken to what is referred to by the speaker or shots which cut back and forth between speakers in accord with the rhythms of their lines
eye-line match	the editing together of shots which cut from a character to what that character is seeing
match on an object	the editing together of shots which carry an image of a person, place, or thing across a cut to the subsequent shot
cross cuts	the editing together of shots that jump back and forth between two or more locations, causing the audience to see a relationship between events, which often happen concurrently
fade	the transition between shots created by the gradual disappearance of an image (a fade-out) or the gradual visual strengthening of an image (a fade-in)
dissolve	the transition between shots created by a fade-out to a fade-in

ing is the rhythmic cutting of sentences or shots based on images and emotional responses in relationship to one another. Rather than arranging the paragraphs or shots in accord with narrative progression, as continuity editing does, montage creates its stream of shots or paragraphs based on the associational relationship of one image to another. In literature this montage effect is created through writing techniques employed by literary impressionism and its close associate, stream of consciousness.

Stream of consciousness is a style employed in prose fiction in which the inner thoughts and feelings of a character are presented as they occur. It attempts to create a record of the conscious experiences of a character as a continuous, flowing series of images and ideas running through the character's mind. Literary impressionism is a highly personal mode of

artistic expression in which the subject is presented as it appears to the artist's individual temperament rather than as it appears in actuality.

Kate Chopin employs the techniques of literary impressionism in her book *The Awakening*. Bold for its day (the book was published in 1899), *The Awakening* tells the story of a married woman, Edna Pontellier, who finds, outside of her marriage, a sexual fulfillment she has never known. Chopin implies the sexual act rather than openly depicting it. It occurs, discreetly, in the white space between the ending of one chapter (Chapter XXII) and the opening of the next one. The physical details of the adulterous assignation happen "off camera," as it were, in a literary equivalent of film's fade to black.

In the subsequent chapter of the book (Chapter XXIII), Chopin breaks with the stylistic convention of continuity narration that she has employed throughout the novel. She writes a brief, single-paragraph chapter that describes the *impression* that the experience has had upon Edna, her confusion of conflict in the aftermath of her prodigious first fulfillment, her first infidelity. Chopin creates a stream of impressions by linking images and emotional responses, by creating a montage of impressions, where each leads into the next, not by continuation of the story, but by an association of images and feelings edited into the literary text much as film footage is assembled in montage.

Stream of consciousness composition, which often, but does not always, employ impressionistic descriptions, also assembles words much as montage editing assembles film, through an association of images, ideas, and emotions rather than a continuity of story. The term "stream of consciousness" was first coined by William James in *The Principles of Psychology* (I, 239) and refers to writing that focuses on inner awareness rather than on outward exposition. Stream of consciousness assembles free associations, psychological conjunctions of words, and psychic impressions. The writing is often delivered in waves upon waves of words (Virginia Woolf titles one of her stream of consciousness novels *The Waves*) which often include characters' interior monologues. The story does not move forward by means of novelistic incident, but, instead, through slow and meditative introspection. Often there is a use of verbal repetition that may become incantatory. (*Yes I said yes I will Yes*, Molly Bloom affirms in James Joyce's stream of consciousness novel, *Ulysses*.) Stream of consciousness collides concepts, symbols, and images which are so personal to the character (or writer) as to be indecipherable with concepts, symbols, and images so universal as to be personally felt by the reader. The chaos of undifferentiated minutiae and the clarity of the vast importance of minutiae

simultaneously spill forth in the character's stream of thoughts, constructed of a literary syntax that, at its most radical, rejects the very organizing principles traditional to continuity narration. James Joyce composed *Ulysses* in accord with the techniques and values of stream of consciousness.

Set in a single day, *Ulysses* is the story of Leopold Bloom's wanderings through the streets of Dublin on June 16, 1904. (Bloom's travels parallel Odysseus's journey home in Homer's *The Odyssey*.) While a large portion of the book is told as a straightforward narrative — Bloom going about his daily activities — the work shifts throughout between external narration and characters' inner responses and meditations. The methods by which this inner discourse (this stream of consciousness) is rendered varies, growing more complex as *Ulysses* progresses.

Feeling increasingly alienated from his modern world, Bloom returns home that night, where he falls asleep beside his wife Molly. The last forty-five pages of *Ulysses* are Molly Bloom's interior monologue, a punctuation-free and powerfully sensual, nocturnal outpouring of her carnal meditations. Molly's monologue, with its musical affirmation of life (*his heart was going like mad and Yes I said yes I will Yes*), underscores Joyce's own affirmation of the redemptive powers of sexuality, kindredness, art, and love. Molly's great monologue is not the work of a logical, orderly progression of thoughts stitched together by an invisible order. Her monologue is not a seamless continuity of story and ideas. Instead, it is a speech that calls attention to its own methods: a rapid-fire succession of images, feelings, and impressions, a montage of words.

☞ *Read a passage from Molly Bloom's soliloquy from* Ulysses. *Scrutinize the specific ways in which Molly's free associations are the masterful work of James Joyce's organizing principles which create associational relationships that move from one image, memory, or emotional response to the next. Read the passage several times; look at it. Hear it. Try to see how Molly's soliloquy is a methodical construction created from the rhythmic and visual values of montage editing.*

☞ *Watch any one of the following:* Grand Isle *(1991) a traditional translation of Kate Chopin's* The Awakening; Ulysses *(1967) or* Bloom *(2003, video-shot), traditional translations of James Joyce's* Ulysses. *In what ways, if at all, do the filmmakers approximate the impressionistic technique of Chopin or the stream of consciousness technique of Joyce?*

Much like stream of consciousness and literary impressionism, montage editing in film often creates a rapid-fire, wave-upon-wave succession

of images, rhythms, and impressions. The rhythms can also be slowed or can be repeated. The patterned repetition of images, words, rhythms, or music in a film can create a meditative, sedating, or incantatory effect, much like effect of the repetition of a mantra. The meditative, incantatory power that montage editing can have on the viewer is evident in the film *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983), where the simple repeating tones of minimalist music punctuate the montage of contradictory images showing the "life out of balance" state of the modern world.

In montage editing in film, transitions between shots are not meant to be smooth. They jolt and jar, colliding noticeably, sometimes violently, instead of blending, elegantly and unobtrusively. Links between the shots are not created by using editing strategies that preserve the dramatic continuity, but, instead, are created from the ways in which the images, themselves, relate, or have a relational value, to one another. (See Table 2.)

Table 2.
Fundamental Montage Editing Strategies

Montage Editing Principle	*Example*
formal	a low angle shot followed by a high angle shot or a close-up followed by a long shot
ideological	a shot of a crowd of workers on a Chinese communal farm followed by a shot of a crowd of shoppers at an upscale American mall
emotional	a shot of the American World Trade Center's towers standing tall followed by a shot of the towers crumbling
political	a shot of a dove of peace followed by a shot of a hawk attacking or a shot of American military tanks in Iraq followed by a shot of a peace protest
abstract or impressionistic	a shot of billowing white clouds against a blue sky followed by a shot of an erupting volcano against a dark and fiery sky

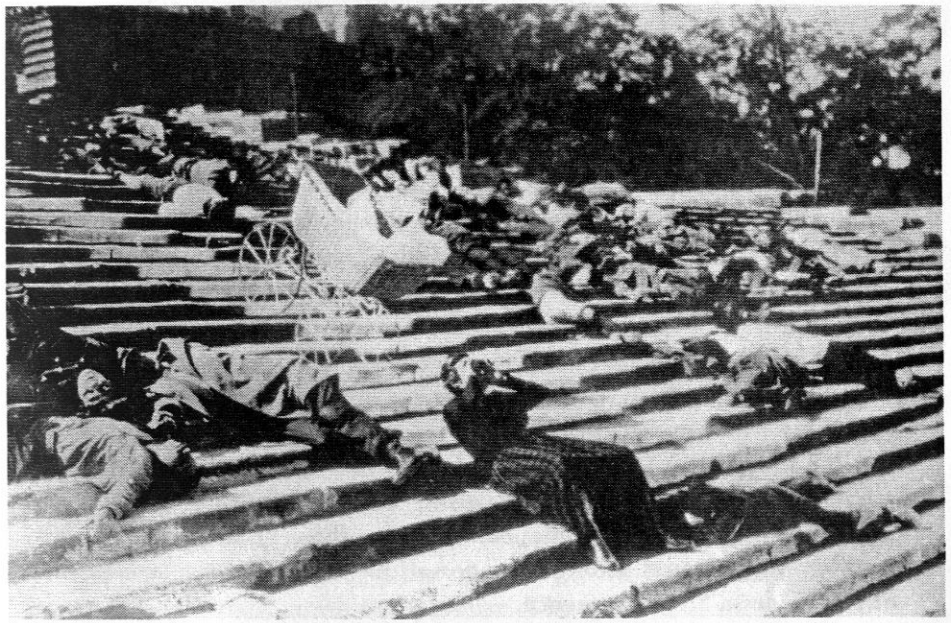
Montage creates an association of images in an effort to create a unity of effect. Refusing to construct fabrications of linear, dramatic, pseudo-realistic time desired by continuity editing, montage, instead, aspires to create emotional time. To this end, time may be mechanically altered —

slowed down or sped up — to underscore the emotional value of any given experience. The toppling of a building may happen in slow motion to accentuate the long-lasting effects of the devastation; a winning touchdown may be sped up to point up how elusive and fleeting the moment is.

The theoretical basis for montage editing was first articulated by the Soviet filmmakers of the 1920s, who were inspired by the principles and energy generated by the Russian Revolution of 1917. To these early film theorists, Lev Kuleshov, Alexander Dovshenko, Vsevolod I. Pudovkin, Dziga Vertov, and Sergei Eisenstein, the very stuff of film should be charged with revolutionary vigor. Sequentially, as well as ideologically, the revolution in film theory followed the Russian political revolution, and like the Soviet Marxist revolutionists shortly before them, the film theorists were influenced by the writings of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, especially his teleological account of history with its dialectical explanation of historical development.

History is dynamic to Hegel. It is ever-moving, ever in flux. Historical progression is a responsive energy to what immediately came before. It is a dialogue between two contradictory states or two opposing concepts. In Hegel's dialectic, one concept (the thesis) invariably collides with its opposite (the antithesis) and the two interact to form a new concept (the synthesis). The synthesis of opposites gives rise to a new thesis which, in turn, collides with a new antithesis and sets in motion the ongoing dynamic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Hegel's understanding of dialectics gained prominence in creative discourse, most notably among the Soviet film theorists, whose ideology and aesthetics insisted that, if the function of art is to depict truth, Hegelian dialectics can and should infuse art.

To the Soviet film theorists, thesis and antithesis — contrast, conflict, and dissonance — led to meaningful reconciliation (synthesis). Their position was in stark contrast to what they saw as the false reconciliations, the pat endings, and tidy narrative progressions with their illusion of linear time that the movies of the day, edited according to the polite rules of continuity, were delivering. Following and expanding upon the earlier work of V. I. Pudovkin, Sergei Eisenstein proposed that editing was the singular most significant feature in elevating a movie from banal entertainment to art, from facile escapism to truth. Whereas the shot is the basic unit in continuity editing, the collision of two shots — the thesis and the antithesis — became the essential unit for Eisenstein. Shots were to be cut according to dynamic juxtapositions, to couplings based on visual



***Battleship Potemkin* (1925): The tremendous wrong done by the Czarist militia firing on its own citizens becomes enlarged into the very conflict of history itself in Sergei Eisenstein's powerful images and rhythmic montage editing in the "Odessa Steps" sequence.**

conflict. This montage editing strategy, with its attending aesthetic and ideological values, infuses the greatness of the "Odessa Steps" sequence in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).

Battleship Potemkin tells the story of the justifiable mutiny of the crew aboard the Czarist naval ship, *Potemkin*, and the subsequent support of their mutiny by the citizens of Odessa, Russia. The "Odessa Steps" sequence within *Battleship Potemkin* recreates that historical moment when the citizens, rallying in joyous support of the mutiny, are confronted by the Czarist militia, which responds to their celebratory conduct by marching in and firing shots at their own citizens gathered on the grand Odessa steps. A slaughter of innocent citizens follows. Shots collide: peace and violence, light and dark, laughter and hostility. Visual patterns are constructed in accord with the dialectic of thesis, antithesis, synthesis. A static mid-shot of a soldier, with the dominant visual interest located in the left of the frame, is followed by a static mid-shot of his adversary, a mother, with the dominant visual interest on the right of the frame. The synthesis of the two shots is the third: a long shot showing the soldier in the

center of the frame, gun raised, moving aggressively toward the mother. That synthesis shot becomes the new visual thesis, which is followed by its antithesis: a close-up of the mother, moving in frightened reaction to the militant movements of the soldiers.

Throughout the "Odessa Steps," any sequence of shots can be bracketed-off and studied, with the same results: the editing occurs in strict adherence to the values of Soviet montage. Shots are cut to a definite rhythm. There is the linking — the clashing collision — of visual opposites: long shots are followed by close-ups; high angle shots by low angles; vertical lines by horizontal; left side dominated images by right side dominated images; gentleness with violence; and, always, the allegorical and literal use of light with dark. To heighten the emotional effect of the rampage, Eisenstein mechanically alters time, slowing down and stretching out the time that it takes a carriage holding a baby to roll down the long steps of Odessa. The enormous wrong enacted by the Czarist militia against its own citizen becomes enlarged into the very conflict of history, itself, communicated through the powerfully rhythmic montage editing of the "Odessa Steps" sequence.

☞ *Watch and count off the first twenty shots of the "Odessa Steps" sequence in* Battleship Potemkin. *Scrutinize them. Write out the specific ways in which the shots are edited together according to their oppositional visual and emotional qualities.*

The "Odessa Steps" sequence from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* is a virtuosity of Soviet montage. However, the political ideology and practices promoted by Soviet montage were challenged by subsequent filmmakers. In a sense, montage theory underwent its own Hegelian dialects as the "thesis" of Soviet montage was challenged by its own "antithesis," American montage.

Rather than adhering to the ideological and aesthetic value of montage as the visual collision of opposites, American montage, developed in the 1930s and 1940s, sees montage editing in terms of pragmatism. American filmmakers of this period realized that montage has the great practical, *functional* value of being capable of collapsing time and space, using devices like fades, dissolves, wipes, jump cuts, and superimposition to telescope events. In American montage, incidents that occurred over a span of years and over several locales can be collapsed into a matter of minutes — even seconds — of movie running time without the importance of the events and the intervening passage of time being lost. In some cases, the significance is even intensified through the compression of time created through the editing. A masterful example of American montage is the "breakfast table" sequence in Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941).

Citizen Kane tells the story of newspaper mogul Charles Foster Kane's rise and fall from power. (On one level the film is a biting satire of William Randolph Hearst.) Kane is fully incapable of sustaining a close relationship with another person, due, in part, to the early betrayal of his mother, who signed over the custody of her fortune and her young son to a bank trustee. In the course of his life, all of Kane's friendships and marriages (there are two) invariably disintegrate.

The disintegration of his first marriage is conveyed in the film's most famous montage sequence: the breakfast table exchange. Constructed of a series of five quick vignettes, all of which occur at the couple's breakfast table, the 135 second sequence spans the sixteen years of Kane and Emily Monroe Norton's marriage and chronicles its regrettable deterioration. The first vignette shows the couple early on in their marriage. All is well and married life is pleasant. The affectionate prattle of the couple's dialogue, their physicality, and the camera's movement animate the first sequence, as do their youth and promise. The warmth of the early marriage is captured by a two-shot, which holds both Kane and Emily in the same frame together, close and affectionate.

In each subsequent vignette, the warmth diminishes. The composition of the vignettes grows more static; the animated vitality of early marriage disintegrates. The couple's conversation grows more clipped as their intimacy and trust lessen. By the second vignette, the two-shot which held the couple affectionately in the same frame is replaced by each character alone in the frame: a series of one-shots, largely cut on the line, pointing up the growing alienation of the husband and wife. By the final vignette, the two-shot recurs, but to a very different effect. The couple has grown cold and estranged, and the frame that they share, ironically, registers the death of their union.

The disintegration of Kane's first marriage is delivered through this series of five vignettes that are edited according to continuity within the vignettes, but according to American montage between the vignettes. The transitions between the sequences are made by a flash pan, where the camera pans so rapidly that the images are blurred as they "flash" by. The sixteen years of Kane's marriage and the complex reasons for its demise are compressed into a little more than two minutes, with the flash pans going by at the speed by which life, itself, sometimes seems to pass.

Unlike continuity editing, which seeks to splice the shots in such a way that the editing is unobtrusive and creates the illusion that the film



***Citizen Kane* (1941): The composition of this two-shot shows that Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles) and his wife, Emily Norton Kane (Ruth Warrick), have grown cold and estranged, and the frame they share, ironically, registers the death of their union. It contrasts an earlier scene, where the couple, at the beginning of their marriage, share a tighter two-shot, depicting their then closeness and affection.**

is all of a piece, montage editing, in all its permutations, with its flash pans, jump cuts, and superimpositions, calls attention to the fact that film is composed of a series of separate shots, usually cut to a distinct design and/or rhythm.

☞ *Watch a television commercial that has been edited according to the principles of montage. Is the editing Soviet or American or a synthesis of the two? If it is Soviet montage, inspired by the values of a Marxist communist system, what ironic historical progression (what dialectic) has occurred?*

Most current films employ a combination of continuity and montage by selecting the editing practice that is most appropriate to the particular sequence in the film. An early example of the integration of continuity and montage editing is the classic, silent, surrealist film, *Un chien andalou* (1928), which uses continuity editing, ironically, to debunk the notion that life proceeds in any contiguous, logical manner.

Directed and written by Luis Buñuel in conjunction with Salvador Dali, *Un chien andalou* respects the customs of traditional narrative film, while simultaneously communicating a surrealist vision. In the opening of the movie, Buñuel uses just enough continuity to make us assume that we are watching a popular thriller, then, in most unpredictable ways, he divests the narrative of all expected progression. The shots are cut on the image in an altered montage practice that arranges the sequences in an apparently illogical, random manner. Buñuel's editing shows that he is interested in a different mode of a logic, "dream logic," or the "logic" that is readily acceptable to us when we dream. He understood that dreams conform to meaningful patterns of association. They have a design and a meaning which might be understood, in part or in full, through close analysis, even psychoanalysis. Human psychology interested Buñuel much more than the dialectics of history. *Un chien andalou* is a study in the capacity of film to recreate and to explore dreams, with their own lexicon of images and their own structure of time and space that defies all conscious temporal notions.

Un chien andalou reinforces the surrealist doctrines of the illusion of rationality and of the strange, perhaps even malignant, animus that can lurk beneath an ordinary surface (themes that David Lynch would later take up in *Blue Velvet*). The very normality of the opening continuity sequence (the normal-appearing man, the balcony, the moon) makes the man's violent, unprovoked, and senseless act even more shocking. *Un chien andalou* also demonstrates the power of film to induce automatic and strong physical reactions to illusions projected on a screen, an effect that would be replicated in everything from the French New Wave (1959–1966) to *The Blair Witch Project* (1999).

The technology available to a filmmaker affects the result of what we see on the screen. The invention and development of a lightweight camera that could be hand-held freed filmmakers to shoot almost anywhere with a minimum of setup. Especially useful for shooting documentaries, the hand-held camera became appropriated by the French New Wave, whose filmmakers saw in its technology the capacity to create the verisimilitude, the rawness and realism of life, the *cinéma vérité*, that they sought. The hand-held camera could record the spontaneity, the "reality," of what was occurring.

Rather than carefully composing the elements of the shot prior to filming it, the hand-held camera was used to record whatever passed in front of the lens. Under such conditions, things go in and out of the frame, naturally, haphazardly, sometimes even blocking the dominant view. The footage that is shot is invariably shaky, as it is impossible to keep the lightweight, hand-held camera fully steady. Recording every shimmy and shake of even the most stable human hand that is holding it, the hand-held camera can intensify the illusion that what is on the screen occurred, just as it was recorded by the cameraman who really was there, filming it. Whether in the French New Wave or a film like *The Blair Witch Project*, the rawness, the lack of visual refinement, of the hand-held camera technique — sometimes, its very bogusness, its highly constructed and *directed* reality — paradoxically can heighten the sense of realism the viewer experiences. Viewing extended footage, dominated by a pronounced shaking of the camera, often provokes a visceral response, causing the viewer to feel dizzy or nauseous.

The invention of the Steadicam combined the mobility of the lightweight, hand-held camera with the visual steadiness of a mechanical mount, producing footage that allows the hand-held freedom of movement for the camera operator without the jostled, shaky outcome that was earlier inevitable.

In the early stages of movie-making, the camera did not move at all. It was fixed on a stationary mount. As the technology developed, the camera's capacity to move became more sophisticated, but the camera's movement can still be defined in seven basic ways, as shown in Table 3.

Whether the camera moves or is stationary, it records images on film frames, each of which has its own distinct composition. When referring to a film's composition, the term mise-en-scène is used to describe the arrangement of all the elements within the frame, a term that originated in theater to describe all the stage components. Much as it does in theater, the *mise-en-scène* is composed according to particular styles. For example, classical composition stands in contrast to the compositional style of *cinéma vérité*, where realism is most highly sought and framing allows for inclusion of all the visual messiness of real life. In classical film composition, however, the *mise-en-scène* will appear balanced, elegant, and centered. The human body normally will occupy the middle of the frame; and even while the figure moves, he or she will be kept centered by a camera that pans or tilts in accord with the character's movement. Vacancy in the frame will often be reserved for characters who will enter momentarily. In film, the visual components that form any *mise-en-scène*

Table 3.
Basic Camera Movements

Camera Movement	*Description*
pan or panorama	the camera remains fixed on a stationary mount, but moves on a horizontal axis, side to side
tracking or dolly	the camera is attached to a mount that moves on a horizontal axis, along tracks, attached to a motorized cart, or on the back of a moving vehicle
oblique or tilt	a fixed camera is tilted so that the images recorded appear to lean diagonally
zoom	the camera's lens moves, pulling in toward or back from its subject
crane	the camera is attached to a bucket affixed to the arm of a crane
aerial or bird's-eye	the camera is placed at a great height, as attached to a helicopter or a plane
hand-held	the camera is held by the camera operator, who can take it anywhere that he or she can go

include standard theatrical elements: lighting, set design, make-up, costumes, actors, and arrangement of the objects on the stage or within the frame. *Mise-en-scène* is also comprised of purely cinematic components: the nature of the film stock (its grain, its absence or presence of color), the angles at which the subjects are being shot, and the distance the subjects are from the camera.

The distance that the subjects are from the camera results in the quantity of frame-space occupied by the subjects. If a camera is extremely close, the space within the frame will be dominated by a single subject. The closer the camera is to the subject, the more intimate and subjective the image appears, while the farther the camera is, the more remote and objective the effect. The distance of the camera from its subjects is defined in six basic ways, which use as a reference point the amount of the human body contained within the frame. (See Table 4.)

No matter the distance from the camera, each shot is accomplished in one of basic five angles. (See Table 5.) Camera angle refers to the position of the subject matter in relation to the camera lens, and it is created by the specific manner (the angle) by which the camera is pointed at its subject. Each camera angle produces a particular psychological effect upon the spectator.

Table 4.
Basic Camera Shots

Camera Shot	*Description*
extreme close-up	a portion of the human face; a small portion of an entirety or the entirety of a small object
close-up	the full human face, an entire small object, or part of an object
medium (mid) shot	the human body from the waist up, the full figure of a seated character, or the visual equivalent of another object
full shot	the human body, head to toe, or the visual equivalent of another object
long shot	the camera placed approximately twenty-five feet from the body or the dominant object
extreme long shot	the camera placed a long distance away from the body or the dominant object, even a quarter mile or farther

☞ *Choose a movie that you are familiar with. Select a sequence of ten to twenty shots from it. Analyze the passage you selected in terms of the angles at which the subjects are being filmed and the distance the subjects are from the camera. What psychological effects, if any, are created through the various uses of distance and angles? Watch the sequence several times. Try to see other compositional elements: set design, actors, camera movement, and arrangement of images within the frame. Based on all the choices made regarding these elements, determine the extent to which you find the sequence to be successfully filmed and edited.*

None of the compositional elements that the director arranges will be recorded by the camera if the set or locale is not sufficiently lighted. Lighting is crucial to both the quality of the image that the camera captures and the atmosphere that is created in the shot. Film is a technology-based medium and like most of the elements of film, lighting grows ever-more complex and sophisticated with technological changes that allow for greater versatility. However, whether in the technological sophistication of the twenty-first century or in the beginnings of film, the major source of lighting in the frame is referred to as the key-light.

Table 5.
Basic Camera Angles

Camera Angle	*Description*	*Effect*
high angle	the camera is placed above the subject and angled down	makes characters appear diminished, threatened, or vulnerable, as the camera presses down upon the subjects
low angle	the camera is placed below the subject and angled up	empowers characters, heightening their dominance or importance
eye-level or straight-on	the camera is positioned five or six feet from the ground and directed straight at the subject	is the most neutral of the angles
oblique angle	the camera is titled or skewed	creates the affect of psychological imbalance, inebriation, or pending horror
aerial or bird's-eye	the camera is positioned above the subject and at a great height	communicates a lot of visual information regarding location, but has a diminishing effect on characters, rendering them negligible, unimportant

While early movies were filmed outdoors in natural light, when filming moved indoors, to closed studios, the use of key-light became vital. Even in early films, key-light is seldom, if ever, created from just one isolated literal light, but, instead, from a composite of lights, designed to blend into one lighting effect. Key-light is augmented by fill-light, which is employed "to fill" any unlit or unevenly lit areas of the frame insufficiently illuminated by the dominant ("key") light source.

Key-light can be defined in two extremes: high-key and low-key, each of which has a different look and creates a different effect. High-key lighting refers to a bright, even light, with very few shadows or pools of light. Low-key lighting uses subdued lighting that is less bright. With literally less light illuminating the subject, the scenes look darker. Shadows are prevalent, and areas of deep and dark textures and pools of light emerge. The visual relationship of light and dark within the same frame is referred to as contrast. In high-contrast, the disparity of dark and light

is pronounced, the dark is deeper and the light is brighter, sometimes piercingly so. The combination of low-key and high-contrast lighting is popular in suspense films, a genre in which danger lurks in shadows and the world seems inhabited by extremes of good and bad, signified in the visual shadows and the extreme contrasts of light and dark.

Film, like literature, is classified according to **genre**, and no matter whether the work is fiction, non-fiction, docu-drama, or verbal or visual poetry (film examples: *Koyaanisqatsi*, *Meshes of the Afternoon*), the work invariably carries, even if only sometimes tangentially, a theme, or integral meaning. The discussion of integral meaning will inform subsequent chapters in this work.

Most films based on literature, both fiction and non-fiction, are narratives; they relate (narrate) a story, an event or series of events. (A non-fictional example of this would be the film *A Beautiful Mind*, based on the book biography of the same title written by Silvia Nasar.) A narrator is always present in the narration, and, although we may not be aware of the narrative voice, it is ever at work. The perspective through which the action is viewed is referred to as the point of view. Most narrations are told from either the first person or third person point of view, with second person narration being very rare.*

A first person narration is a story told by a major or minor character in the story who experienced the events. "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me," the character Holden Caulfield states at the opening of J. D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, a work which uses Holden's impressions of life to question whether he is crazy in a world that is sane or if he is sane in a world painfully crazy in its lopsided values (the same theme Emily Dickinson considers in her poem, "Much Madness Is Divinest Sense"). Words in the novel (such as "I," "my") and the various points of reference confirm that *The Catcher in the Rye* is being narrated by a character within the story.

First person narration is also used in film where words, most often via voice-over narration, establish that the story is being told from the point of view of a character who experienced the events about to unfold. Stanley Kubrick's film *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), based on Anthony

**Second person point of view is a story told from the perspective of "you," an example of which is Lorrie Moore's "How to Become a Writer." The use of the second person is much more widespread in electronic fictional forms (i.e., interactive fiction, literary hypertext narrative, or hyperfiction) than it is in conventional paper-based fiction.*



***A Clockwork Orange* (1971): Alex de Large (Malcolm McDowell, center) and two of his London "droogs" at the Korova Milkbar. Director Stanley Kubrick used low angles in filming Alex to confirm his sense of sovereignty in his world of ultra-violence.**

Burgess's book of the same title, is centered on the Beethoven-aficionado leader of a London gang that steals, rapes, and murders to assert their freedom against the conformity of a "clockwork" society. (Burgess wrote the novel, which incorporates graphic gang brutality, after an assault on his wife resulted in the loss of their expected child.)

The film begins with a voice-over narration that clearly situates it in a first person narration, consistent with the book's narrative voice. However, the film uses cinematic devices in addition to verbal ones to show that the events are refracted through the experiences and sensibilities of the main character, Alex de Large (Malcolm McDowell). The recurrent use of low angles that confirm Alex's sense of sovereignty, of long shots that frame his brutal acts of physical aggression depicted as if balletic movements seen on a stage, of editing in which the basest acts of violence are cut to the rhythms of Rossini music, and of lenses that distort what is actually occurring, all help render the film's point of view: the inner life and values of Alex, his distorted, lordly, nihilistic perspective.

The film is focalized through Alex, showing matters as he sees and responds to them. His narration is a futuristic nightmare in which survival of the fittest becomes the mode of entertainment, with brutality and

devastation the fashion. Alex is iniquitous and sees iniquity all about him. The horror of it all is exacerbated by the first person narrative perspective that reveals how indifferent Alex de Large is about the atrocities he commissions. It is likewise, paradoxically, exacerbated by our experiencing, through Alex's own eyes, society's equally horrifying means of "rehabilitating" him. Both the film and the book, *A Clockwork Orange*, exemplify the writer Henry James's critical conviction that point of view is the single most significant compositional element for establishing the meanings of the text.

Kubrick's bleak social commentary is made more forceful by the events being filtered through Alex's values and responses; but, while *A Clockwork Orange* is told from Alex's point of view, the camera does not always position itself to record matters as Alex literally sees them. Instead, the camera exposes the psychological result of how Alex sees rather than the literalness of what he is actually viewing. When Alex refers to himself and his "droogs," for example, the camera focuses on them, showing us the imperious Alex as he sees himself.

This is not the case in *The Lady in the Lake* (1946), a traditional translation of Raymond Chandler's novel. In keeping with the novel, the film is constructed around a first person narrative in which all the events are shot just as the main character and narrator, detective Philip Marlowe, sees them. The movie is composed of all subjective shots, where the camera is placed in such a way that it replicates what the character (Marlowe) would be viewing. The only time that the viewer sees Marlowe is when he looks at himself in a mirror. *The Lady in the Lake* was an experiment in having the camera sustain first person point of view narration.

Literature and film are also narrated from the third person point of view. Third person narration is frequently told from an "omniscient" perspective, that is, from a vantage that is all-knowing about the events and the characters' inner responses to them. E. M. Forster's novel *Maurice* is a sensitive study of a young man's coming to terms with his homosexuality, a bold topic for its day. (The novel was completed in 1914, but its publication was suppressed until a year after the author's death in 1970.) Narrated in third person by an omniscient narrator, the novel takes us to private moments of incident and emotions. Poised to see and understand all facets of Maurice's story and its underlying importance, the omniscient narrator leads the reader to see the integrity of the characters and their alliances and creates a plea for universal compassion, understanding, and tolerance of differences.

In 1987 the production team of James Ivory and Ishmail Merchant



***The Lady in the Lake* (1946). The original movie card advertising "the most amazing screen development since the Talkies" refers to the film's sustained use of the subjective shot, where the camera is placed so that all events are seen from the point of view of only one character, Philip Marlowe (Robert Montgomery).**

made a film of *Maurice* in which the camera, in conjunction with the screenplay, functions omnisciently, conveying events and their import with the knowledge, awareness, and understanding that is crucial to an omniscient perspective. The film also maintains the wit and clarity that define Forster's writing.

Not all third person narrations are omniscient. Third person point of view can also be "limited" or restricted to the understanding of one circumscribed perspective. Jane Austen's *Emma* is narrated in third person,

but done so through the limited perspective of incidents and responses being filtered through the eyes of the central character, Emma Woodhouse, a feature maintained in the film *Emma* (1996).* We are led to understand Emma fully because we are led to apprehend those qualities that do not appear through her surface conduct. We come to sympathize with Emma rather than criticize her. Viewed from a different perspective, Emma would be unlikable, as her avocation is manipulating the romantic lives of others, done less from warmth of feeling than from superiority, self-centeredness, and boredom. The same story would be very different had it been focalized through the sensibilities of a different character in the novel, such as Mr. Knightly, Frank Churchill, or Jane Fairfax. As Henry James understood, the meaning of the text would be radically altered by the alteration in narrative perspective.

The point of view in literature and in film does not necessarily remain stable, consistent, throughout a work. It can shift throughout the text, as it does in William Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury*. The first three sections of *The Sound and the Fury* are narrated by each one of three different characters (the Compson brothers), with the fourth section narrated from a third person omniscient point of view. In a sense, the novel tells the same story four times, as each of the four narrations recounts the same essential family history. However, the shifting points of view demonstrate that to tell a story differently is to tell a different story.

This same concept structures the film *Memento* (2000). The plot is fairly standard as *Memento*, ostensibly, is the story of a man who is searching for his wife's killer. In the course of the film, however, the telling of the story is not standard at all. The same basic story is told twice. The black and white segments are focalized through the husband's point of view in traditional chronology and the color sequences are narrated in reverse chronology from a third person omniscient perspective, with the editing integrating, inter-splicing, the two different modes of narration.

In film, the camera becomes the pen that creates the narrative perspective. Point of view is created largely through camera placement. When the camera is placed to show us what and how a character sees, the camera is filming from a first person point of view. Alfred Hitchcock understood, intricately, the camera's capabilities to narrate from a first person point of view, a perspective that he utilizes throughout *Rear Window*. In contrast, the camera can function omnisciently, also, taking us to privileged

**For an extended discussion of point of view in* Emma, *see Wayne C. Booth's* The Rhetoric of Fiction, *Chapter Nine: "Control of Distance in Jane Austen's 'Emma.'"*

incidents, revealing characters' inner responses, and prevailing over traditional notions of time and space.

A camera can work in ways that are similar to a writer's pen, an observation resulting in the concept of *caméra-stylo*, a term coined by the film theorist, Alexandre Astruc, in 1948. Much as a camera can function as a pen, a pen can function as a camera. The term *caméra-stylo* applies to those literary compositions in which the writer's pen (*le stylo*) works uncannily like a camera. A most classic example of this is Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, in which the book's point of view is ever-modulated. The narrator of *Madame Bovary* is, intermittently, very intimate with Emma and then very distant, remote, creating effects that are much like a lens of a camera that records events in intimate close-ups and also in more objective long-shots. Flaubert's pen provides highly visual representations of locations and of the people who inhabit them. Like images recorded by a camera, his work is kinetic and imagistic, with transitions between sentences, paragraphs, or episodes combining the techniques of both continuity and montage editing.

When we watch a movie, the work of the camera carries us forward, as if the sequences of frames were one sentence after another after another. As in reading literature, the experience of watching a movie may involve us fully in the reality being depicted. We occupy the time and the space of the film, as if transported. If someone near us in a theater so much as rustles a candy wrapper, we may grow annoyed, as the noise ruptures our relationship to the screen, pulling us back to the disappointing reality that we are, after all, just sitting in a movie theater, watching a film.