CIN105
5 – Cinematography (20 May, 2025)

Lecture

Last class we examined mise-en-scène and the visual elements that comprise the stuff that we see in a given shot in a film. This week, we turn our attention to cinematography which is about how filmmakers render those photographic elements, how do we get that shot in the first place?

What we are concerned with is how the camera captures and represents a film's settings, figures, and action. This is something that we've already been doing passively in our discussions, so the idea this week will be to mostly put terms to some of the things we've already been seeing and describing.

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Cinematography, like narrative and mise-en-scene, assists in shaping the way we perceive action.

Just as many of the elements of the mise-en-scene are indebted to the stage, many of the cinematographic properties of film are derived from photography

But cinematography transforms the realm of photography just as the elements of mise-en-scene experience a shift when they move from theatre to cinema.

Most obviously and immediately, photography is a static art, whereas cinema adds movement. Cinema, as a term, comes from the French Cinematograph, which was the name of one of the earliest motion picture mechanisms and which was named, from Greek, to literally mean "writing in movement."

But cinema does not only move. Cinema is *durational*, it involves the representation of time in ways photography cannot. While a photograph snaps an instant of time and freezes it – and was indeed responsible, when it

was invented, for thus reconceiving what the very idea of "an instant" meant for people – film photography immediately reconceived early spectators ideas of time, because for the first time it became possible to, in real time, see various everyday movements over and over, recontextualizing them and, as a consequence, the shape of every day life.

So, as we have been doing each week, we are going to take on cinematography in an attempt to understand better what it is with a few things in mind

We're going to cover established techniques and learn how to recognize them, and the correct vocabulary to use, and then we'll use this knowledge to think through how a film's cinematography contributes to that film's overall effect, interacting with other elements in a systematic fashion.

Before we jump into the introduction and illustration of the many technical properties of cinematography, I want to prepare the ground for our work by defining something that may seem obvious but still merits a clear description, especially in light of your first assignment:

SLIDE:

-and that is, the distinction between a shot, a scene, and a sequence.

A **Shot** is an uninterrupted image. – whatever lies between two edits is a single shot. This is invariably true because what defines an edit, as we will see on Thursday, is something that disrupts a shot.

A Scene, in contrast, is a segment in a narrative film that takes place in one time and space. (We will complicate this in the coming weeks)

Scenes are generally composed of multiple shots – so most of the time the shot is a smaller portion of the film, and a scene is composed of multiple shots.

Occasionally, however, a single shot contains a whole scene, or even, in the rarest cases, a whole film.

A sequence, finally, is a single stretch of action or a portion of a film that is somehow of a larger piece.

The relationship of scene to sequence is the same as that of shot to scene, since a sequence can include anywhere from one to many scenes, but which constitute a narrative segment of some form, which is to say they are usually connected by unity of time or unity of space.

Sequence is more of an amorphous term because it's not really precise like a shot or a scene. Sequences are more flexible – we can make an argument whether a certain section of a film constitutes a sequence or not.

SLIDE

An example of a sequence might be a chase sequence in an action film, where the action takes place across multiple different locations, but they are all linked together temporally. Something like this motorcycle chase from Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Junior* is a sequence; we see Buster Keaton on the motorcycle that traverses many different locations but it's all linked together temporally, and it is linked through action.

So, onto cinematography…

SLIDE

Let's take a look at the opening shot from Orson Welles' 1958 film *Touch of Evil*. If this sequence sounds familiar, that is because it was mentioned by name in the opening shot of *The Player*.

Like that shot, this is an example of a long take, a very famous example of a long take, which is, in other words, a single shot of prolonged duration. We'll come back to this term later.

But I bring this shot up now because it illustrates the immense contribution that cinematography can make to a film's stylistic and narrative system. We considered this already briefly when we talked about *The Player* in tutorial.

This shot demonstrates how important the camera is for establishing the look and feel, the rhythm, and the flow of a scene – and of course for conveying crucial narrative information, including the layout of diegetic spaces and the relationship between characters.

In addition, this shot also serves to highlight how thoroughly mise-en-scene and cinematography can be coordinated.

Here, every camera movement is motivated – every action and aspect of the mise-en-scene is motivated and captured by the camera's roving eye with perfect timing. In this way, the staging of the action and the camera feel coordinated – which of course they *are*, because filming such a thing would require meticulous planning.

To go back briefly to our lecture about narrative from a few weeks ago, this is a good example of unrestricted narration: Welles allows us to know everything – much more than the individual characters – about the action in the diegetic world.

I bring this up now because Welles achieves this unrestricted narration via cinematography—that is, by endowing the *camera* with highly unrestricted agency and mobility – this camera can go anywhere and see anything – in doing so, it gives the audience a lot of narrative information that will come into play as the drama unfolds. We, as audience members, are literally afforded a view on the action of the diegesis that is not realistically bound to the world.

With that somewhat broad introduction to what cinematography can do in mind, let's get to nuts and bolts. Please note that there are more terms to learn this week than most other weeks, and I will be moving fairly quickly, so you should be sure to go through the textbook carefully.

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We're going to follow B+T and subdivide the characteristics of the Shot into three distinct categories:
-its photographic qualities
-its framing
-and its duration

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I. The Shot's Photographic Qualities

The photographic qualities of a shot determine how the camera renders – that is, how it captures and represents – the objects it films.

We call these the photographic qualities because they pertain to the photographic process itself, which up until pretty recently was entirely a photochemical process involving the exposure of analog film. The introduction of digital technologies, which are now ubiquitous, complicates some of the terminology slightly, we can talk about that as we go.

These photographic qualities pertain largely to the various tools that the director of photography on the set (or what we often shorten to "DP") chooses to use.

The DP can use different film stocks, or different digital technologies, different lenses, different developing or post-processing effects, different color grading, and filters – all to yield different results.

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We can begin to catalog those various results by breaking down the shot's photographic qualities into three components: Range of Tonalities; Speed of Motion; and Perspective.

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<u>Range of Tonalities</u>

When we talk about the range of tonalities in a photographic and cinematographic image, we're talking about

- how finely detailed the image is;
- how varied its tonal palette is;
- in the case of color images, how vibrant or muted, saturated or desaturated its colors are;
- and in the case of black and white images, whether they are characterized by chiaroscuro or not -- that is, whether they are highly contrasted images.

Such factors are largely determined by multiple variables, three of which I want to foreground:
film stock, rate of exposure, and use of filters.

Now, I can't possibly gesture toward all of the possible outcomes that emerge from the interaction of all of these three variables, but I will offer here some examples of images that differ considerably based on manipulation of just one of these factors.

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Film stock: Consider the difference in these gifs from the 2015 Danny Boyle film *Steve Jobs*, which used two different film stocks and a digital option to convey a different feeling for each time period the film was set in.

At the top, to represent the scrappy nature of Jobs in the early 1980s, we see 16mm, which has a distinctive grain because the individual film cels are comparatively small and is associated with low-budget productions and amateur filmmaking in the period due to its cheap cost.

In the middle, we have 35mm film, which was the standard stock for 99% of filmmaking from the earliest days of the Hollywood studios until very recently, say the mid 2000s.

Finally we have digital cinematography, captured on the Arri Alexa, which give the image a crisper, slightly too clean and more artificial but also modern look.

SLIDE

Rate of exposure: What do we mean by this? Well, we mean literally the rate at which the shutter of the camera remains open to let light pass through and hit either the film or image sensor.

Here are some exemplary images from two films that differ greatly in terms of their rate of exposure

The image on the right comes from a film noir by Anthony Mann called *T-Men*, and it is characterized by a low rate of exposure. Very little light was allowed to pass through the camera lens, which resulted in an image that is predominantly dark and that is intentionally emphasizing and exploiting this fact.

The left one comes from John Hillcoat's Australian Western *The Proposition*. Something that Hillcoat does repeatedly in that film is overexpose his shots so as to create the impression of a landscape characterized by tremendous heat and an inhospitable climate. To "over-expose" an image means to give it more light than it needs – this is what causes the whites in this image to appear *too* white, it gives the image this burned look – well, on film, that's because in a sense it is literally burned by too much exposure to the sun.

SLIDE

Filters can also have dramatic and expressive qualities. Here, for instance, is a frame from Jane Campion's film *The Piano*, which was shot by Stuart Drybrugh largely without filters, except occasional sequences in which he uses a blue filter to give the New Zealand landscape what Campion wanted to look like a wild, underwater world. Elsewhere he used yellow filters to create a feeling of warmth and insularity for interior scenes.

Note that we already talked about using filters place over lights to change the lighting quality.

Here we're talking about another option, which is to place a filter over the camera lens to change the color quality of the whole shot, not just wherever

the light is shining. The difference can at times be hard to identify, but I wouldn't ask you to compare a difficult case.

SLIDE

Speed of Motion – simply enough the speed at which a film is shot (and projected).

As your book points out, it is critical that the speed of filming matches the speed of projection.

One of the reasons older silent films often look abnormally sped up is because speeds of shooting were variable in the years before the introduction of sound, and thus these films which might have been shot at a speed of 16 to 20 frames per second are now being projected at a standardized higher speed of 24 fps.

Some films of course will sometimes deliberately shoot certain scenes at a speed other than that which will be used during projection in order to achieve certain effects

SLIDE

Slow motion is produced by shooting at a faster speed than usual. In essence, you take more frames of the action than normal, but project them at the usual 24 fps. The result is the action appears drawn out, durationally.

In prolonging an event on screen, slow motion tends to lend that event a degree of importance that it might not have otherwise and to produce a kind of visual lyricism

Yet is can also be used for additional effects as well –

CLIP of the Shining (300 frames per second) – for instance, in this clip from *The Shining,* the effect is to lend the event a supernatural quality.

SLIDE

Fast motion, in contrast, involves shooting at a slower speed than 24 frames per second.

CLIP from Requiem for a Dream
Looking at examples of slow-motion and fast-motion cinematography helps us clarify the difference between mise-en-scene and cinematography.

While a component of the mise-en-scene can be performed at normal speed, the camera can alter it beyond recognition if so desired.

In other words, the *what* of the mise-en-scene is always at the service of the *how* of the camera – the two must be considered as entwined to a considerable degree, and we need to know how to differentiate this what from the how.

SLIDE

Perspective

The one thing that is most integral to the perspectival relations produced within a given shot is the camera lens used.

The first thing that the camera lens determines is the extent to which a shot exhibits the qualities of traditional perspective, an idea inherited from Renaissance painting.

SLIDE

So what is this idea of Renaissance perspective?

Basically, this is a technique for representing spatial relationships and three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional plane, so as to produce an effect similar to that perceived by the human eye.

This perspective creates an **illusion of depth** by having all lines converge at a **central vanishing point** and by the **scaling of the size of objects**

according to their distance from the hypothetical viewer.

Renaissance perspective, incidentally, is called such because it became a standardized feature of painting and drawing during the Italian Renaissance, sometime in the early 1400s.

SLIDE

While this conventional history has been challenged in various ways in recent scholarship, generally speaking we can observe that in pre-Renaissance art, particularly in European medieval era art, two-dimensional representations were more iconic in nature, meaning that the size of its included figures was typically predicated on their relative importance, not their distance from the viewer.

This is not because artists during these periods were totally unaware of the very concept of perspective and indeed scholarship shows that such ideas were experimented with perhaps all the way back to the paleolithic era, in some form or another.

Rather, the entire visual regime was different for artists and craftspeople at this time. In medieval Europe, to take the example that Renaissance painting was directly compared to by people during the Victorian era, when many of these accepted historical wisdoms were first propagated, artistic representations were about principally about divinity and obsequiousness to God – perspective was irrelevant because these representations were not actually *supposed* to be *realistic* from a human perspective.

SLIDE

Now, most camera lenses are meant to reproduce Renaissance perspective to some degree and thus intentionally seek to not distort straight lines in any manner.

SLIDE

That said, there are also those who have highlighted their departure from mainstream norms by rejecting this convention entirely. Take, as just one example, experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage, who, among other things, shot a whole film through the bottom of hotel ashtrays. [The Text of Light, 1974]

While most filmmakers don't reject perspective in this way, some do experiment with variations on it.

SLIDE

The most basic way to do so is to opt for a different lens: either a wide-angle lens or a telephoto lens.

What are the differences between these types of lenses and what effects do they have?

Basically they all differ in terms of their focal length, which is, technically speaking, the distance from the lens's center to the point where light rays converge to form a point of focus; this distance is traditionally measured in millimeters

While **normal** lenses have a mid-range focal length of 35-50 mm, wide angle lenses have shorter focal lengths and telephoto lenses possess longer ones

SLIDE

A **Wide-angle** lens (short focal length) – distorts Renaissance perspective in that it creates an enhanced sense of depth and, in the process, distorts straight lines toward the edges of the screen. At the most extreme – wide-angle lenses we often call "fish-eye lenses" – this can create a circular fish-bowl like effect, where the edges of the frame appear curved into a circle.

As a result of this enhanced sense of depth, characters that are standing at varying distances from the camera seem farther apart from each other than they would otherwise.

It can also create the effect that movement to and from the camera seems more rapid.

These features are sometimes used to comic effect, or just to create a "weird" look, as in this example from Terry Gilliam's 1985 film *Brazil*.

SLIDE

A **Telephoto** lens, in contrast, magnifies objects at a distance, but at the same time it flattens space; the result is that depth is reduced — planes (foreground, middle ground, and background) can seem smashed together. Figures seem closer together than they actually are in front of the camera. As a result, movement to and from the camera is lengthened.

SLIDE

The last kind of lens to note here is the **zoom lens**, which is capable of changing its focal length over the course of a single shot. These lenses were incorporated into commercial filmmaking in the 1950s, but they really had their heyday in the 1970s.

The film we watched on Thursday, *Dreadnaught*, you may recall used extensive use of zoom lenses, but here is a clip from a different film that I also mentioned in last week's lecture, *Barry Lyndon*, exemplifying this.

CLIP from Barry Lyndon [note magnification/de-magnification]

What will be important to remember about a zoom shot is that it is produced by a manipulation of the *lens*, not by a movement of the *camera*; we refer to this as an **optical effect.**

As mentioned before, the first thing that the camera lens determines is the extent to which a shot exhibits the qualities of Renaissance perspective

SLIDE

The second thing it does is contribute greatly to the shot's depth of

field – by which we mean, the portion of space that is in focus.

Relatively speaking, wide-angle lenses possess a greater depth of field than a normal or telephoto lens.

The depth of field of a shot can range between deep focus and selective focus.

The key feature of **deep-focus** cinematography is that the foreground, middle ground, and background are all in focus

The opposite of deep focus is **selective focus**, wherein only one or a limited number of planes are in focus. Here, you can see an example of each from the same scene in *April Story*, on the left we have deep focus – all planes of action remain in focus simultaneously. On the right is an example of selective, or shallow, focus – only a part of the foreground is in focus, everything else is blurry.

Let's also watch a clip.

CLIP from The Insider – selective focus

When a DP is shooting with a selective depth of field, they may on occasion change the plane of focus within a single shot. This is known as **rack focus** (the action is called racking or pulling focus)

SLIDE

CLIP from The Insider

This clip demonstrates that the film makes use of selective focus to draw our attention to certain details in the frame and to foreground one character at the expense of the other.

- One last thing to note about deep focus is that it's important not to confuse deep focus *cinematography* with **deep space composition**— in other words, a composition that emphasizes elements of the shot in

both the foreground and background, which is an aspect of a film's **mise-en-scène.**

SLIDE: **FRAMING**

So that's us done with our broad overview of the photographic qualities of the shot, now we're going to talk about the next key element of cinematography, which is framing.

When we talk about framing, we are alluding to the borders of the cinematic image, the edges that bound an image and thereby produce a particular and limited vantage point.

What determines the framing of a shot is a whole host of issues related to camera positioning and movement, the shape and size of the image, and what is included or excluded from the camera frame.

SLIDE

Sticking close to your textbook again, we can describe framing in terms of the following **4** features:

- Frame dimension and shape;
- Onscreen and offscreen space;
- Angle, level, height, and distance of the camera, all of which determine its position vis-a-vis the object being filmed;
- the camera's mobility (or lack thereof).

SLIDE

Frame dimensions and shape

-the first thing we can say about the dimensions of the frame is that they allow for us to calculate a film's aspect ratio
-that ratio is the width of the screen to its height
-the aspect ratio considered standard from the 1930s through the 1950s was what is known as the Academy ratio: 1.37:1, modified from 1.33:1 to

accommodate a soundtrack, which on an analog film strip would literally be printed on the celluloid physically, on the edge.

- beginning in the 1950s the dimensions of the frame underwent sustained and significant change due to the introduction of a variety of widescreen processes (including 1.85:1 and 2.35: 1), at first principally to combat the influence of television, which was competing with the cinema for viewer's attention.

-in contemporary practice 1.85:1 is the most frequently employed aspect ratio in the cinema, while television in North America frequently uses a 1.77:1 aspect ratio, which is also known as 16 by 9, and is the exact dimensions of a standardized flatscreen TV.

Why 16:9 as the standard for TVs? Well, it was chosen as a compromise between cinematic widescreen formats and the 4:3 standard that had been established with tube TVs – the choice has just stuck around.

Even with the existence of these conventional aspect ratios, it is important to note that there is no restriction on what size or shape the film image can assume. Sergei Eisenstein, the soviet director we talked about last week, for example, tried at one point to convince Hollywood producers to adopt a square screen, or even a variable screen that could change shapes over the course of a film.

We should also note that within the dimensions of the frame, various compositional strategies are possible, including some that seem to change the very frame itself through the use of masks over a lens, or today more commonly through the use of digital effects.

SLIDE - CLIP

The most common of the masking techniques employed during the silent era, for example, was the circular iris – [The Mothering Heart example]

SLIDE

Masking can also create the possibility of seeing more than one action at a time, for instance in the use of the split screen – [Pillow Talk]

Nowadays, split screen is easily created using digital effects, and the result has been that we see it used much more frequently, especially in films from the 1990s when digital editing became more common.

SLIDE

Onscreen and offscreen space

One key *function* of framing is to define onscreen and offscreen space:

The edges of the frame constitute the boundaries of an onscreen zone; but by using those boundaries in a self-conscious way, a film can imply something that lies beyond them as well

To go back to that shot with which we began, part of what's fascinating about the opening shot of Touch of Evil is the way it continually redefines onscreen space and thereby extends our knowledge of a geography both visible and invisible.

As for offscreen space, there are six zones to think about:

The area above, below, to the right and the left of the frame comprise four of those zones.

The fifth one lies within the frame but behind barricades such as doors or curtains.

And the sixth is behind the camera.

Some films gesture toward and make use of as many of these zones as possible for deliberate effect.

Let's take a look at a pretty famous example of a film that plays continually with and at the boundaries of the image so as to produce shots that are

visually dynamic and never predictable.

SLIDE: clip from Rules of the Game

The key point here is that the camera functions in part to *select* what it is from the mise-en-scene that we get to see at any given time. Filmmakers use this understanding to dramatic effect, sometimes choosing to show us things and other times intentionally keeping things off frame for some effect. When you consider cinematography, don't forget to consider whether the film is intentionally *not* showing you something, and why.

Camera Position: Angle, Level, Height and Distance of Framing

When we talk about the angle, level, height, and distance of framing, we are talking about the position of the camera relative to what is being filmed.

SLIDE

In terms of **angle,** we're thinking literally about the angle the camera is tilted vertically. This means shots can range from high-angle (the camera is looking down on the filmed object)…

-to low-angle (the camera looking up)

-these would be in opposition to the straight-on shot which comprises the middle ground in between and is obviously the most common, essentially the standard shot, the others being deviations.

The **level** of framing refers to whether the camera is tilted horizontally. The results range from whether the image appears to be level, or somewhat off-kilter, like in this image here, which we call a **canted** angle frame.

Height involves where the camera is situated relative to the ground.

Generally camera height is a function of camera angle.

Low-angle shots demand that the camera be at a low height, high angle

shots that it be at a high height.

SLIDE

But sometimes the camera level is noteworthy for another reason:
-here is an example of a straight-on shot wherein the camera is positioned at ground level. Here, the camera is focused on this figures feat, so despite being so low to the ground it is still a level shot.

SLIDE

Distance

Finally, when we speak of distance, there is of course a significant range of options available – we call these options different **shot scales.**

When applying these terms to shot scale, we typically use the human figure as the point of measurement. Thus what distinguishes a close-up, for example, from a medium long shot is how much of the human body appears on screen.

In **Extreme long shots**, the human figure may be lost among other larger objects, most likely the landscape. The camera is very far away from the subject.

SLIDE

In **long shot**s, the figure is shown whole and more prominently

SLIDE

In **medium long shots** human figures are shown from the knees up. These shots are extremely common in Hollywood studio films, and as such were given the nickname *plan americain* by French critics, aka "The American Shot"

SLIDE

In **medium shots**, the figure is framed from the waste up;

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A **medium close up** is from the chest up

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A **close up** is usually only the face, or some similarly sized object or body part

SLIDE

Finally, an **extreme close up** features only a small detail or miniscule body part.

PAUSE

Now there are couple of things to bear in mind about camera position:

First of all, none of these aspects of camera position have an intrinsic meaning. High angles don't always mean vulnerability.

The reason I say this is because all meaning is contextual.

So when considering an aspect of cinematography or, more specifically, framing you must look at how that framing functions within the film as a whole before drawing any easy conclusions based solely on convention

That said, certain types of shots are used commonly for certain purposes, and therefore we may associate them with certain feelings. You should follow those feelings, but always interrogate them – ask yourself when you see a high angle shot *why* you think it makes you feel the way it does given the contextual filmic material that surrounds it.

Second of all, it is important to recognize how variation in framing across a

scene or even a whole film is significant. This will be really important when writing your assignment, where you will be asked to look for patterns of style and to elaborate on how stylistic tools are used to create meaning.

So the kinds of questions you want to ask yourself about camera position include:

- Does a close-up suddenly provide a clue which serves as a critical narrative turning point?
- Does an odd angle afford a vantage point on a character which leads you to understand her or him in a different way?
- Why has a particular portion of space been excluded throughout a scene and then revealed at a later point?
- And does some aspect of the framing of a shot encourage you to see it as a character's point of view? If so, why?

SLIDE

Mobile Framing

Now that we have considered the confines of the frame, we need to take up the possibilities that camera movement brings to the situation. While it is common in film for shots to be stable, it is practically as common for shots to be mobile.

This can occur when the camera moves from a fixed position on a stable support, as with a pan or a tilt, or when the camera moves through space, as in a tracking shot or a crane shot, and it could even be a combination of all of these, as when a camera is being held in someone's hands.

SLIDE

In a **panning shot**, the camera rotates horizontally as if on a swivel – something like turning your head side to side. This is important – it is part of the definition of a pan that the camera moves on a swivel, not simply that it moves side to side.

SLIDE

For a **tilt**, the camera rotates producing a vertical movement on screen much like a head looking up or down. Like a pan, a tilt involves a rotation, but not a movement of the whole camera apparatus from its fixed position – so, the camera stays in the same position, it just rotates.

SLIDE

In the case of **tracking** or **dolly shots**, in contrast, the entire camera apparatus DOES move. In these shots, the camera has theoretically unlimited mobility along the ground: it can move forward, back, right, left, and so on.

SLIDE

Tracking shots provide an increased sense of movement, which is one way to distinguish them from both pans and zooms. With a tracking shot it literally feels like we, the viewers, are on the move through space, whereas a zoom brings the image closer to us without moving through space. How can we tell the difference? Look at the edges of the frame – are objects static or are they moving in line with shifts in perspective?

SLIDE: Track vs Zoom in *The Shining*

The movement of the camera in physical space can also be combined *with* a zoom to produced unique visual effects. Here is an example from *Jaws*.

SLIDE: Track + zoom in *Jaws*

Here the camera is tracking toward the character – which is often called a push – while the lens zooms away from the character. When timed just right this produces an effect where the background appears to morph, turning from a flatter telephoto shot to a shot with deeper space, all while the character stays the same

Here is another example from the film *Goodfellas*, where the opposite occurs, the camera pulls away from the performs n

SLIDE: Track + zoom in *Goodfellas*

SLIDE: Singing in the Rain

If the camera moves above the ground into the air, it is usually called a **crane shot**, because for most of film history it involved putting the camera on a crane arm, though now the effect is sometimes achieved using drones, and this extends the mobility of the camera to up and down motions beyond what a tracking shot can provide.

SLIDE – A Touch of Evil

The mobile frame can also be produced by the movement of the camera operator's body through space. This can result in the deliberate shakiness of the **hand-held camera**

SLIDE

But this can also involve the smooth fluidity ensured by the controlled body-mount of a device known as the **Steadicam**, a brand name for a type of handheld camera mount that uses a system of counter-balanced weights to enable the camera to remain stabilized while moving through space.

SLIDE

Finally, cameras can of course travel in vehicles with their operators. The most common way we see this is through arial shots, which are typically capture from helicopters or, in recent years, captured by drones.

<u>Duration</u>

This brings us to the last defining feature of the shot that we need to discuss today, and that is the concept of duration.

When we talk about the duration of a shot we are talking about how long it lasts in real time.

In some ways, as soon as we start talking about shot duration, we are opening the door onto a discussion of editing, because the editor is often the one who chooses shot duration, and the duration of a shot gains significance principally through its relationship to other shots.

In other words, when we talk about shot duration, we very quickly find ourselves talking about things such as rhythm and pace, things which get established over multiple shots. But this will be our topic on Thursday.

For now, as a way of broaching the idea of duration, we'll simply single out two terms of note from your textbook: the **long take** and the **sequence shot**.

Average shot length in American cinema has traditionally been between 4-10 seconds (and this has gotten shorter recently), possibly closer to 4-6 seconds. Some filmmakers, however, still prefer long takes – which is defined as a single shot that lasts for a prolonged period of time, 30 seconds or more.

Be sure to note the difference between the ***Long take*** (by which we mean a shot of long duration) and the **long shot** (by which we're referring to the shot's size or scale).

The other term of note right now is **sequence shot**, which is a subset of the long take.

At the beginning of class we watched the opening shot of Touch of Evil, one of the most celebrated and cited long takes in film history. At 3 ½ minutes, that shot was much longer than the average shot in a film made in 1958, not to mention most films made today.

But there are other examples of filmmakers who even topped that duration – some by a long shot.

One example is from the first film we watched together – *The Player* opens with an 8 minute long take, a very elaborate one at that.

SLIDE
Other examples might include Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rope*, which was designed such that each shot would last for almost the entirety of a single magazine of film; as a result the whole film is composed of only eleven total shots, with an average shot length of 8 minutes.

SLIDE

As your textbook notes, with the advent of digital camera technologies, which enable new levels of mobility in shooting, not to mention purely the ability to shoot for longer periods of time because you aren't shooting on analog film stock, which is physically heavy, some feature films are able to be captured in a single take. For example, *Victoria* from 2015 is a crime thriller—clocking in at almost 2 and a half hours—and was filmed in a single take.

IF TIME

As you'll study more next year, for some film theorists, an approach to movie making that depends on the long take is far preferable to an approach that chops the world up into little pieces by way of editing, which we will discuss next week

-in their opinion what the long take does so well is allow the world to speak for itself, instead of being spoken by the filmmaker, through continuous images that are characterized by their temporal and spatial integrity

-one of the most vocal and persuasive champions of allowing the world to speak for itself through the long take was a French film theorist by the name of Andre Bazin who was quite prolific throughout the 1940s and 50s

-for him one of the most important and accomplished films ever made was Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*

-between its deep-space composition, its deep focus cinematography and its long takes, Bazin argued, Citizen Kane was capable of doing what film did best: capturing reality in all of its fullness

This is just one example of how attention to form and its different uses can allow us to make broader interpretations about what film is and value judgements about what it should be. To be able to do so, we have to learn the terms and techniques.