Film Shots
Visual Semiotics &
The Language of Moving Images
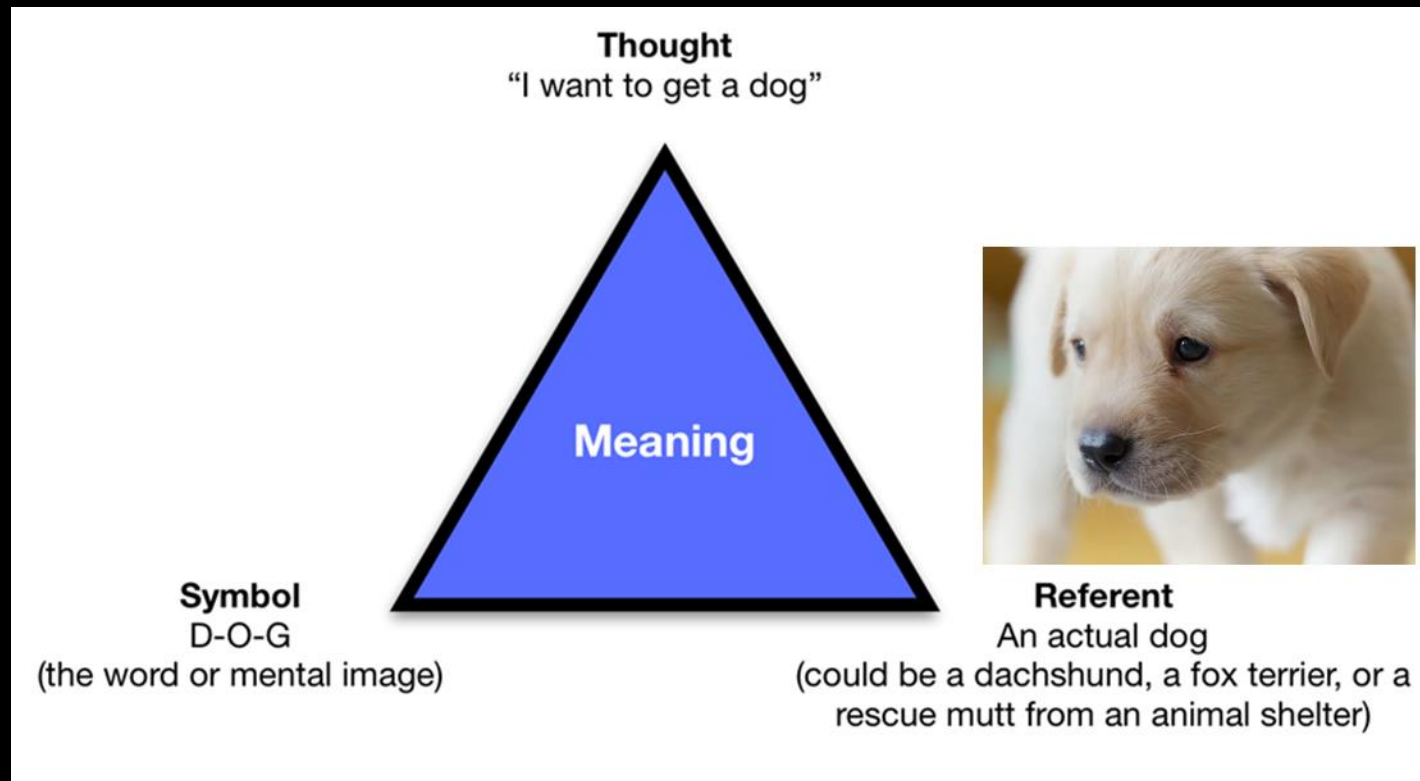
Terminology & Approaches

Se·mi·ot·ics

- **Ferdinand de Saussure 1857 -1913) Swiss** and **Charles Sanders Peirce (US)** The co-founders of 20th-century linguistics and semiotics.

- **MAJOR QUESTION: Is there a <u>SCIENCE</u> which can be developed and applied to language and linguistic meaning making?**

- **RESEARCH: "Proto-European Languages" = Latin, Ancient Greek and Sanskrit …searching for baseline commonalities in structure, syntax, development, meanings…**

- **Semiology** =
The study of signs and symbols; their use or interpretation. (Ferdinand de Saussure – Swiss Linguist, Comparative Language Analysis 1890s)

- *Semiotics* (also called *semiotic* studies)
Refers to the study of ***meaning*-making via signs and symbols**; the study of sign processes (*semiosis*) and meaningful communication using signs and symbols.

Ferdinand de Saussure

Charles Sanders Peirce

Se·mi·ot·ics

- **Two systems at play:**

    1. LANGUAGE is a system of signs– a **dynamic** semiotic system.

    2. Language is also a **social phenomenon.** It is an on going product of a community of people (the people who speak it and learn it).

Ferdinand de Saussure

harles Sanders Peirc

Thought
"I want to get a dog"

Meaning

Symbol
D-O-G
(the word or mental image)

Referent
An actual dog
(could be a dachshund, a fox terrier, or a rescue mutt from an animal shelter)

Christian Metz

Film Theory + Visual Film Language/Codes

"A film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand . . ."

Film semiotics = *Film* **Language** (Christian Metz -1970s France) **Understanding the various elements which contribute to the VISUAL composition of film, TV, and video productions.**

The MAJOR SEMIOTIC "Channels" for flim

1. **Visual Composition/use (Still photos)**
2. **Visual Composition/use (moving images)**
3. **Graphics-Illustrations**
4. **Text/Titles**
5. **Edited/Sequences**
6. ****Computer Generated Imagery (CGI)**

▷**PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT(emotion/drama)**

▷**STORY ADVANCEMENT**

Semiotics of VISUAL Composition

The Arrangement and PRIORITIZATION of objects within a FRAME

Considerations:

- Rule of Thirds + Look Room

- Sight lines

- VISUAL LAYERING & Object Placements
  - Foreground
  - Middle Ground
  - Background

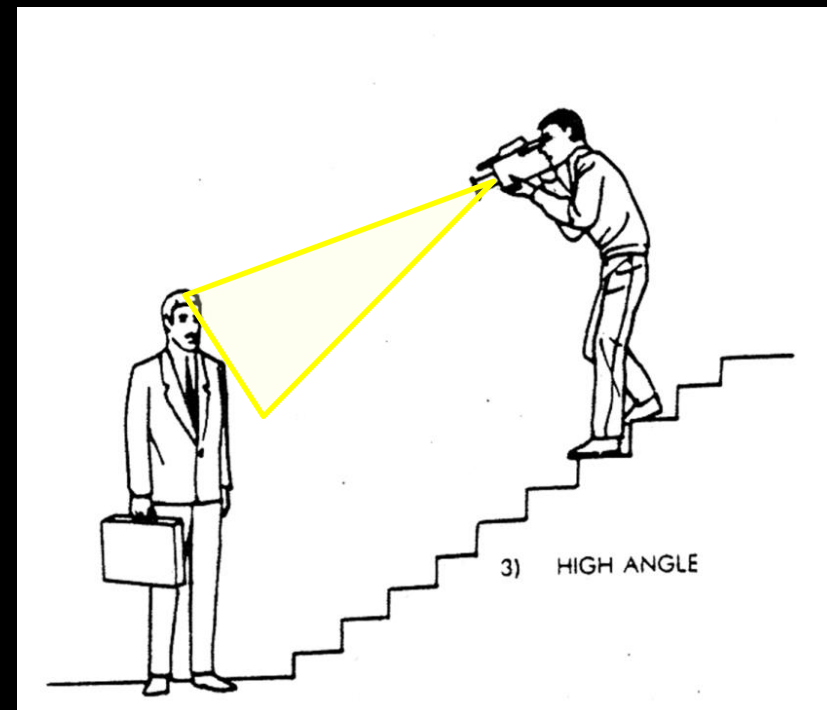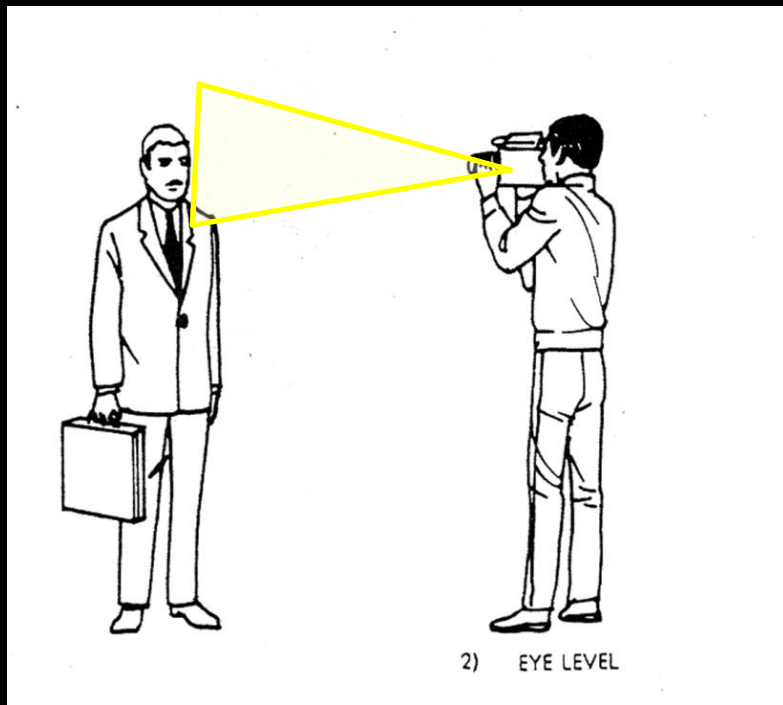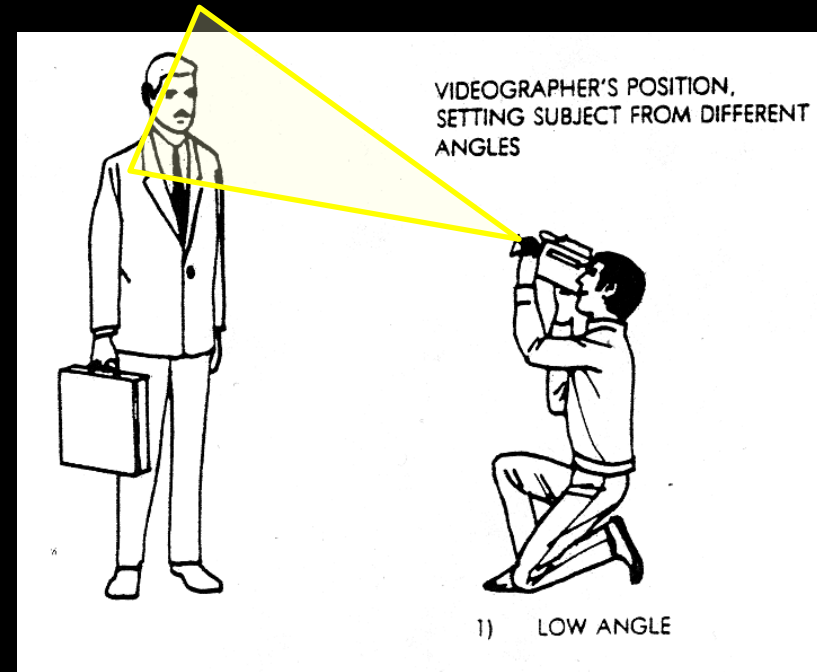- Size/Proximity (relative to the frame and other objects w/in the frame)

- Focus/Depth of Field

Camera Position & Camera Angles

(Relative to the subject being filmed)

- **Low Angle (LA)** ↗
- **High Angle (HA)** ↘
- **Eye Level (EL)** ➔

VIDEOGRAPHER'S POSITION, SETTING SUBJECT FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES

1) LOW ANGLE

2) EYE LEVEL

3) HIGH ANGLE

Establishing Shots (ES) and Establishing SHOT SEQUENCE (ESS)

Establishing shots (usually wide or long shots) are important for the development of a film and each new scene or place. An establishing shot sequence is made up of several shots edited together to form a larger whole (IMPACT).

1. **WHERE AM I? Space/Place/Setting) ➔** Establishing shots set the place. Enough visual information needs to be provided to establish approximately **where** we are situated—location/geography.

2. **WHAT TIME IS IT? ➔** Establishing shots set the **TIME.** That includes HISTORICAL, SEASONAL, WEEK, DAY/NIGHT.

3. **HOW DO I FEEL? Emotion-Tone-MOOD.** Establishing shots set the tone and mood for the project.

4. **Artistic or Aesthetic STYLE?** Color Saturation vs. black and white; Sepia tone, film grain, scratches, stylized lighting…

5. **STORY EXPECTATION(S) – ANTICIPATION(S)** of the likely story to unfold. Most viewers develop a series of **PREDICTIONS** or **expectations** or about what is to come.

BEIJING PARALYMPICS 2008

RIO
ONE YEAR BEFORE THE GAMES

Documentary Story
ARGUMENTS and Perspectives

- **Overall Arguments**
- **Disability (?)**
- **Paralympics & National Disability Laws/Practices**
- **Bigotry**
- **Perception**
- **Action & Activism**
- **Change**
- **Individual Vitality-STRENGTH OF CHARACTER**

Individual Profile Stories
Front-Back-Side Stories

1. Ellie Cole (Aus)
2. Jean Baptiste Alaize (FRA/Burundi)
3. Bebe Vio (Italy)
4. Matt Stutzman (USA)
5. Jonnie Peacock (UK)
6. Cui Zhe (China)
7. Ryley Batt (Aus)
8. Ntando Mahlangu (SA)
9. Tatyana McFadden (USA/Russia)

(ES) Establishing Shot– **DIAGONAL PERSPECTIVE**

Bebe Vio

Italy – Fencing + Commentary

(ES) Establishing Shot – (EL) Centered

Matt Stutzman
USA– Archery

(ES) Establishing Shot – (EL) Inverted/Upside Down Aerial/Drone

Tatyana McFadden – Wheelchair Racing
Entering a New World Sequence 1:03: 20
UpsideDOWN

(ES) Establishing Shot – **(EL)** Aerial/Drone
Tatyana McFadden – Wheelchair Racing

(WA) The Wide Angle Shot

- **Larger Perspective Shot** ➔ A wide angle shot generally frames an "**overview**" of a visual scene.

- Once you can **see a person's entire body** you are generally into the realm of a wide angle shot.

- **About PEOPLE in a PARTICULAR PLACE**➔ long/wide shots are usually about **people in a particular PLACE**.

- **FOCAL CUES**➔ **Sight lines, camera angles**, and **focused lighting** provide the focual cues for **WIDE ANGLE SHOTS**.

C U I   Z H E

The China Disabled People's Federation
was recruiting athletes

Different Types of Wide Angle Shots (WA) Capturing & <u>ACCENTUATING</u> Action

Jean Baptist Alaize - France/Burundi- Long Jumper

Ellie Cole
Australian Swimmer
WA Underwater Set Piece

WA PROFILE - (WA) Capturing & <u>ACCENTUATING</u> Action

Ntando Mahlangu (55:00)
South Africa Sprinter
Wide Angle Profile (no pan – no tracking)

(WA) Capturing & <u>ACCENTUATING</u> Action – AERIAL/DRONE

Ntando Mahlangu (55:00)
South Africa Sprinter
Wide Angle Aerial (Drone) Canted Frame

(WA) Capturing & <u>ACCENTUATING</u> Action (DIAGONAL PERSPECTIVE)
Ntando Mahlangu (55:00)
South Africa Sprinter - Wide Angle for Depth of Field

(WA) Capturing & __ACCENTUATING__ Action - ARCHIVAL
Cui Zhe
China - Powerlifter

Motivated B-Roll (50:20)

"I'm a bit of an adreneleine junkie….when you're hitting someone head-on, it's a bit of a car crash! …It's called MURDERBALL!"

Medium Shot (MS)

- **Head and Torso** ➡ A medium shot generally frames **the entire head and mid-torso**. Once you can see a person's entire body you are generally into the realm of a wide shot.

- **"Conversational" Intimacy** ➡ The medium shot provides a comfortable feeling for a conversation. It allows you to see a person's face and upper body features. You get to know them without invading their space.

- **Work horse shot** ➡ The medium shot is your bread and butter shot. It's versatile and it's used **A LOT** in film and TV.

- **Diagonal Perspective** allows for foreground-middle ground-background.

- **WALLPAPERING!** Wallpapering refers to the staging of important objects or artifacts in the nearground or background which contribute to the story.

JEAN-BAPTISTE ALAIZE

that I'd seen a stadium so full.

BRAZILIAN PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE 1997-2017
ANDREW PARSONS
IPC PRESIDENT FROM 2017

EDITING – NARRATIVE STORY STRUCTURE
Parallel Plot Structure
Two Stories told Simultaneously

	Plot A	Plot B

MS – LOW ANGLE (LA)
Jean Baptiste Alaize
Burundi – France – Long Jump

wanting to flee from something, I think.

Matt Stutzman

USA– Archery

MS – HA High Angle <u>Archival</u> "camcorder" footage ~ 1995
Ellie Cole
Australia – Swimmer

Ellie Cole
Australia – Swimmer
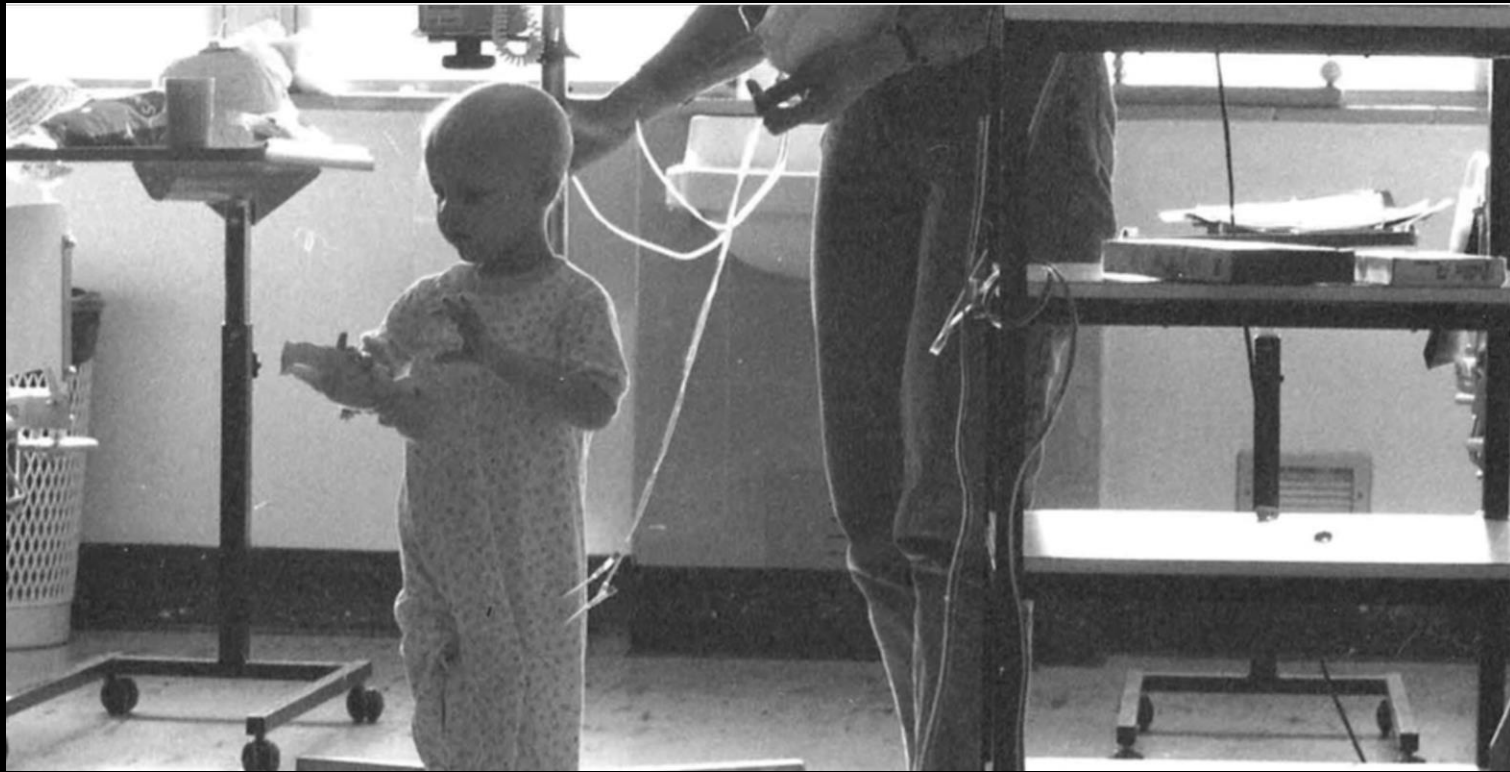
Close-up Shot (CU)

- **Filling the Frame--**The person or subject fills the camera frame. Frequently, facial close-ups will cut off part of a person's head and only show you the lower 2/3rds of their face (the expressive part).

- **Psychologically Involved and MORE Intense--**Close-ups are more emotionally POWERFUL!

- **Detail--**Close-ups allow you to concentrate on DETAILS and emotional reactions.

- **EMOTIONAL Reactions!** Close-ups work really well as insert or reaction shots or other kinds of illustrative shots to add texture and detail to your story.

Close-up Shot (CU)

Close-up Shot (CU)
Jean Baptiste Alaize
Burundi – France – Long Jump

And then I received four machete blows.
That's how I lost my leg.

CU – Close Ups + SPLIT SCREEN
Cui Zhe
China - Powerlifter

They just wondered what I would do when I grew up,

Matt Stutzman
USA– Archery

Extreme Close-up (ECU)

- **Proximity (within arms length)**
- **Uncomfortably close**
- **Extreme/Fine Details**
- **Intense Emotion**
- **Quick Reaction**
- **Subtle Response**

More ECUs

Extreme Close-ups (ECU)
Visual objectification ECUs (50:00)
Australia – Wheelchair Rugby

SEQUENCING of Shots & STORY ARC
The Classical Hollywood DRAMATIC EDITING Style & SHOT SEQUENCING

The **CLASSICAL** Hollywood style refers to a **FORMULAIC shot sequences** within a scene whereby we are taken from the outside (WIDE ANGLES) then moves CLOSER in (medium shots and close-ups) before moving outward again…

Rising Dramatic Action →

MS

ECU

CU

WA

CU

MS

MS

MS

WA

ES (L/WA)