

Film Shots Visual Semiotics & The Language of Moving Images

Terminology & Approaches



Se-mi-ot-ics

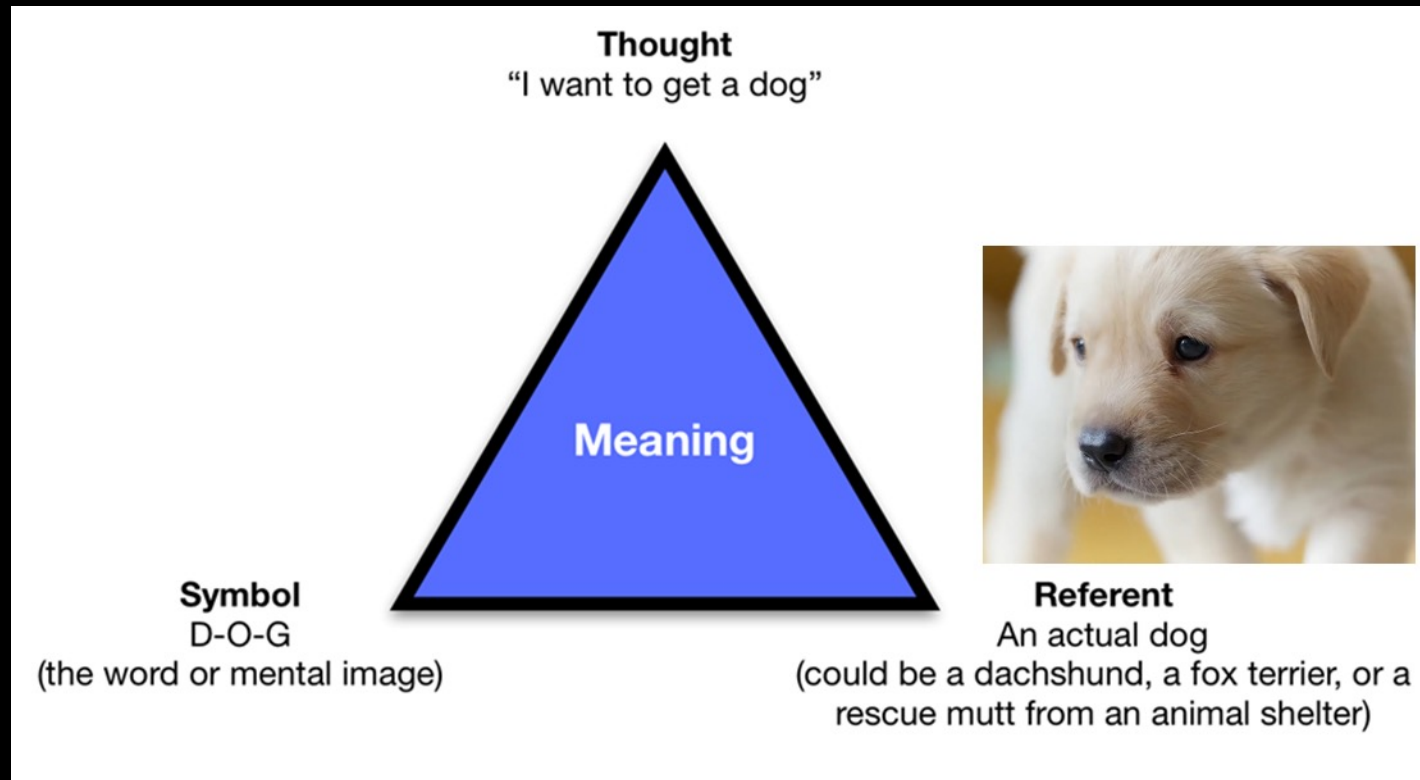
- **Ferdinand de Saussure 1857 -1913) Swiss** and **Charles Sanders Peirce (US)** The co-founders of 20th-century linguistics and semiotics.
- **MAJOR QUESTION:** Is there a SCIENCE which can be developed and applied to language and linguistic meaning making?
- **RESEARCH:** “Proto-European Languages” = 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.



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).



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. PHOTO STILLS Visual Composition/use
2. FILM/TV/VIDEO (moving images) Visual Composition/use
3. Edited Sequences/ **MONTAGE sequences**
4. AUDIO (synch, natural, sound FX, Music, etc.)
5. Text/Titles/Graphics
6. Performance/Acting

▷ 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)

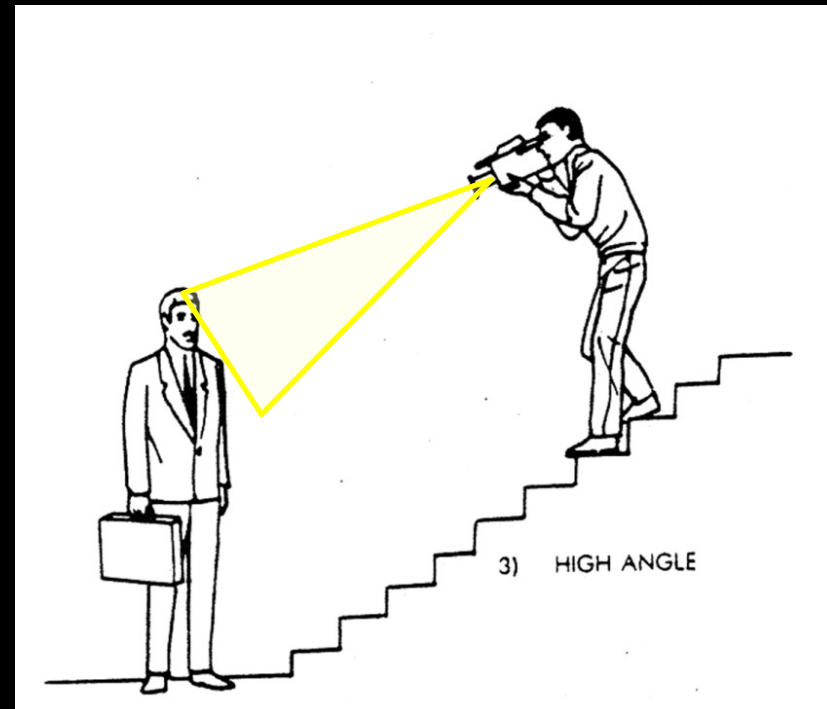
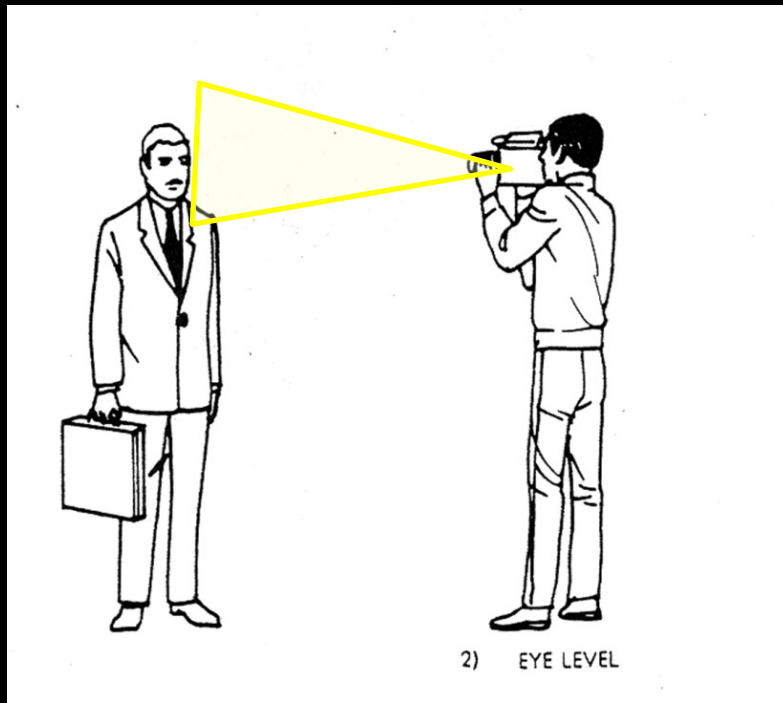
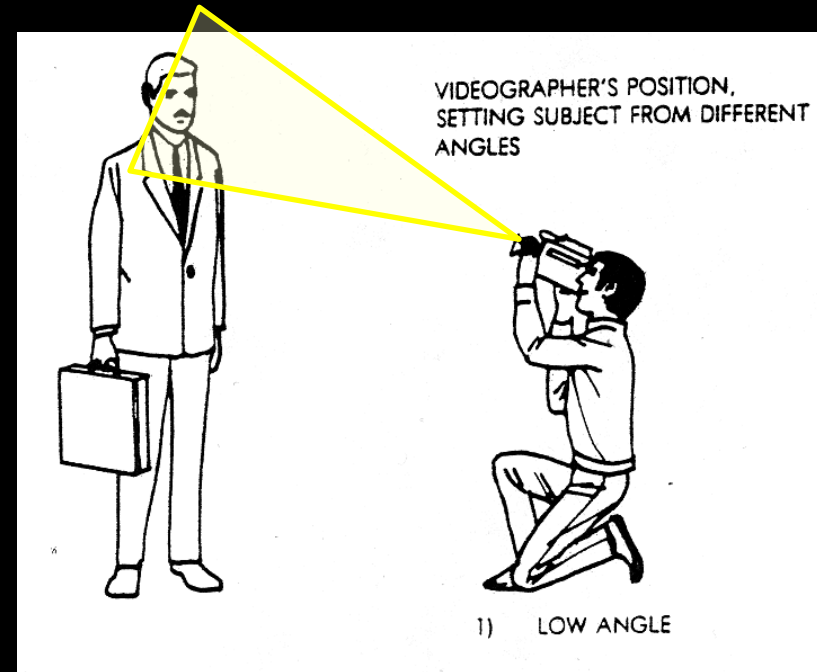
➡ Focus/Depth of
Field



Camera Position & Camera Angles

(Relative to the subject being filmed)

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



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.



(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 focal cues for WIDE ANGLE SHOTS.



Different Types of Wide Angle Shots (WA) Capturing & ACCENTUATING Action

Jean Baptist Alaize - France/Burundi- Long Jumper



Ellie Cole
Australian Swimmer
WA Underwater Set Piece



Different Types of Wide Angle Shots (WA) Capturing Action

Matt Stutzman - Hoops



WA PROFILE - (WA) Capturing & ACCENTUATING Action

Ntando Mahlangu (55:00)

South Africa Sprinter

Wide Angle Profile (no pan – no tracking)



(WA) Capturing & ACCENTUATING Action – AERIAL/DRONE

Ntando Mahlangu (55:00)

South Africa Sprinter

Wide Angle Aerial (Drone) Canted Frame



(WA) Capturing & ACCENTUATING 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 adrenaline junkie....when you’re hitting someone head-on, it’s a bit of a car crash! ...It’s called **MURDERBALL!**”



Medium Shot (MS)

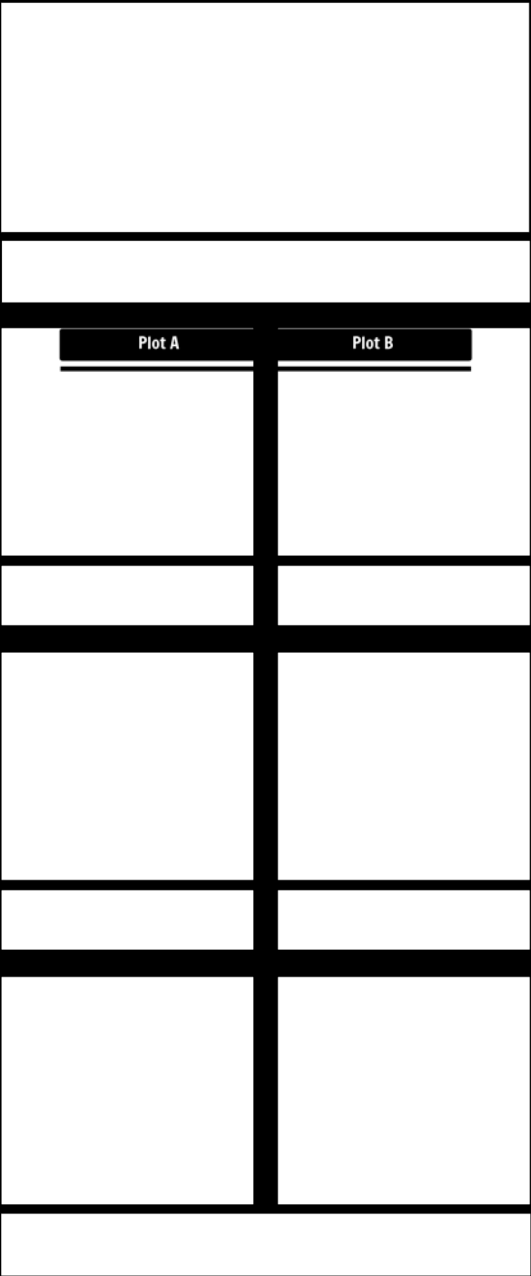
- **Head and Torso** → A medium shot generally frames **the entire head and mid-torso**. Once you can see a person's entire body you are generally into the realm of a wide shot.
- **"Conversational" Intimacy** → The medium shot provides a comfortable feeling for a conversation. It allows you to see a 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.



EDITING – NARRATIVE STORY STRUCTURE

Parallel Plot Structure

Two Stories told Simultaneously



MS – LOW ANGLE (LA)

Jean Baptiste Alaize

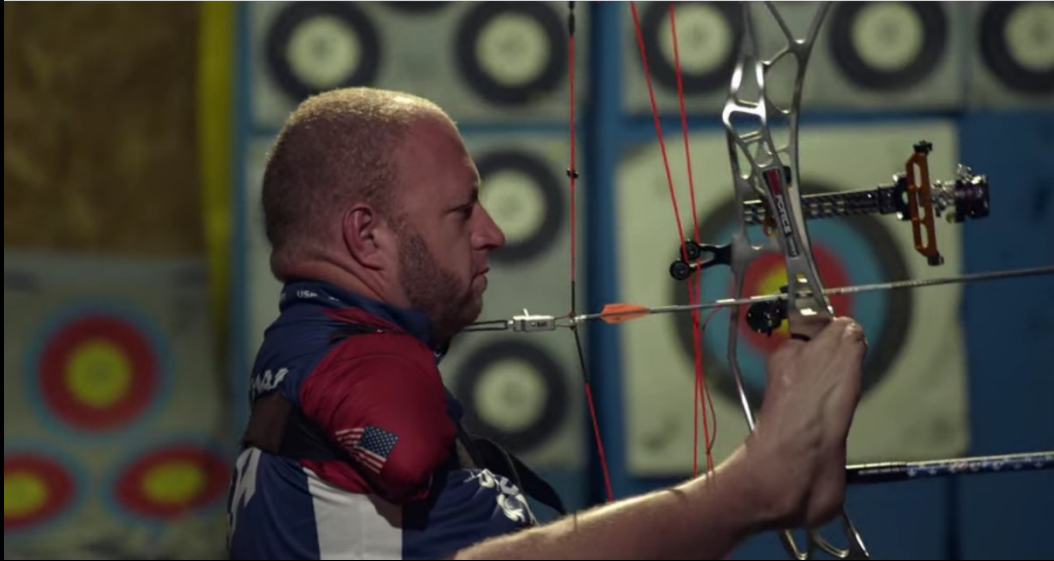
Burundi – France – Long Jump



wanting to flee from something, I think.

MS – Side Profile; MS Straight on Centered

Matt Stutzman
USA– Archery



MS – HA High Angle Archival “camcorder” footage ~ 1995

Ellie Cole

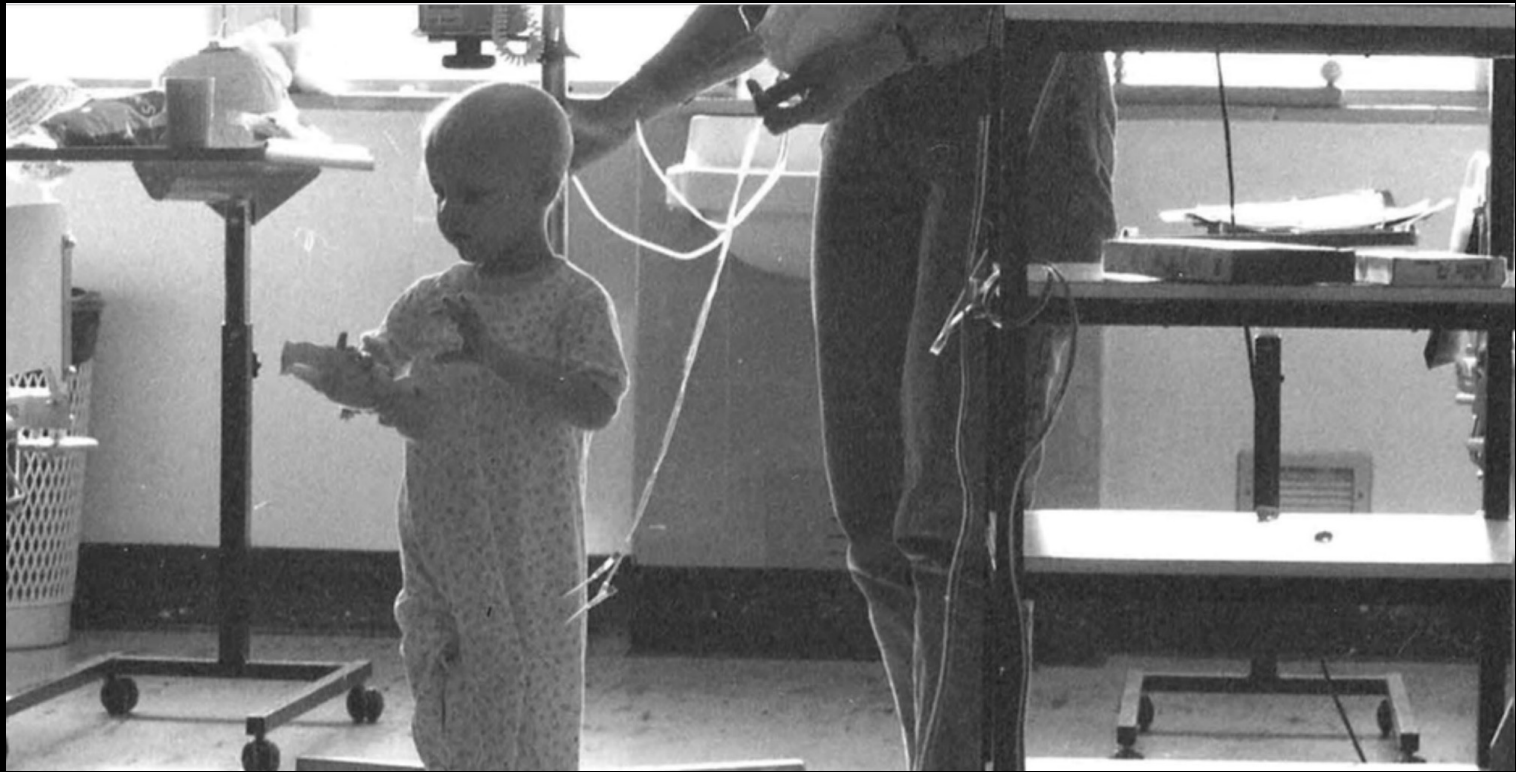
Australia – Swimmer



MS – EL Eye Level Archival “camcorder” footage ~ 1995

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

A close-up portrait of Jean Baptiste Alaize, a Black man with a mustache, looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a red shirt. The background is blurred, showing a light-colored wall and a dark area.

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

CU – Close Ups + SPLIT SCREEN

Cui Zhe

China - Powerlifter



Matt Stutzman
USA— Archery



CU Interview

Ryley Batt

Australia – Wheelchair Rugby



Extreme Close-up (ECU)

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



More ECUs



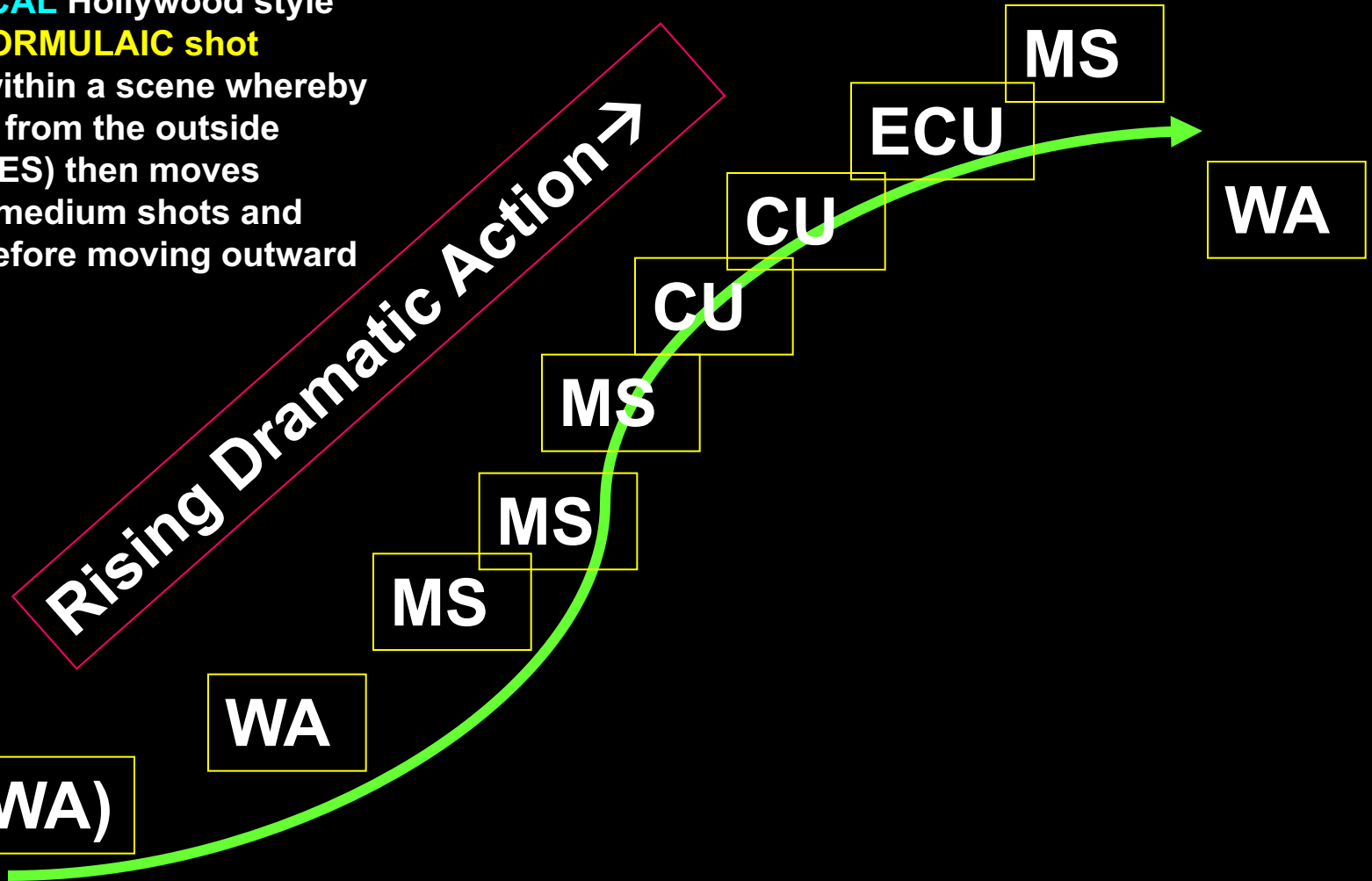
Extreme Close-ups (ECU)
Visual objectification ECUs (50:00)
Australia – Wheelchair Rugby



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...



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)

Pre-conceive BEFORE you shoot!

1. **Shot duration** → Length of time in which you hold your shots
2. **Proximity** → How close you are to the person, object, or events that you are shooting.
3. **Shot Angle** → The angle from which you shoot a scene/person
4. **Shot Sequencing** → How you order your shots within a scene. Classic Formula: **Movement** from Wide Shot -to-> Medium Shot -to-> Close-up and then back out
5. **Coverage** → Kinds and variation of shots used to "cover" a scene
6. **Reaction Shots** → Shots of people's faces "reacting" to dialogue or images in a scene
7. **Alternatives** → Possible alternative shot selection (shot angle, composition, framing, etc.)

Film Shot COMPOSITION should lead to...

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

→ **STORY ADVANCEMENT**

EVERY single shot should:

1. VISUALLY well COMPOSED with **INTENTION!**

2. Have a **psychological/emotional** impact in mind.

3. Reveal **DETAILS** about a **character**, **scene**, or **event**.

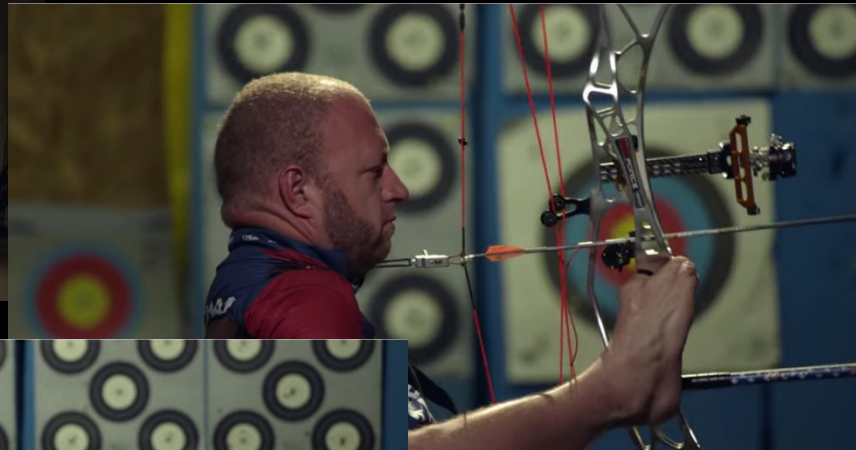
4. **ADVANCE** your story (**PLOT PROGRESSION**) in some way.

5. **THINK IN SHOT SEQUENCES** → **Work-horse shots**.

Not every shot needs to be extremely dramatic. Many shots are “work-horse” shots. They function to propel the larger story.

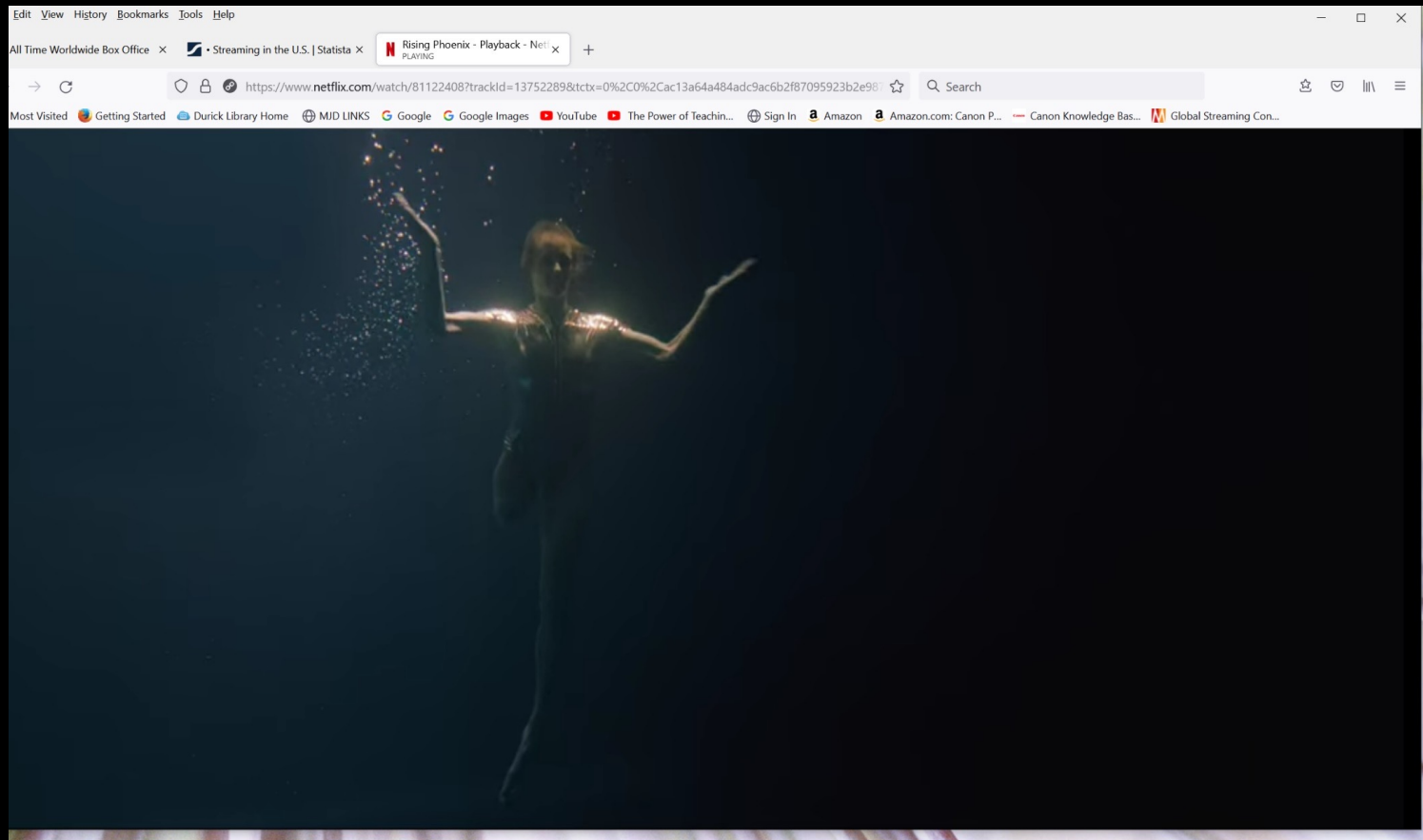
• Ultimately, you should be able to justify every single shot/scene that you use to tell your story.

Matt Stutzman
USA— Archery











Jean Baptiste Alaize
Burundi – France – Long Jump



Jean Baptiste Alaize
Burundi – France – Long Jump



A male athlete, Jean Baptiste Alaize, is shown from the waist up, looking down. He is wearing a white sleeveless athletic top with red and blue trim. The top features the Adidas logo on the left chest, the French flag and 'FRANCE' on the right chest, and the number '2282' on the front. He is also wearing a black arm sleeve on his right arm. The background is a blurred stadium with spectators.

7 FRA 		JEAN-BAPTISTE ALAIZE			F44 
1	2	3	4	5	6
6.15M	X	6.19M	6.04M	5.98M	
+1.9M/S		+0.9M/S	+1.5M/S	+2.1M/S	
749PTS		762PTS	713PTS	693PTS	

Jean Baptiste Alaize
Burundi – France – Long Jump



Jean Baptiste Alaize
Burundi – France – Long Jump



Jean Baptiste Alaize
Burundi – France – Long Jump



Jean Baptiste Alaize
Burundi – France – Long Jump



Jean Baptiste Alaize
Burundi – France – Long Jump



Jean Baptiste Alaize
Burundi – France – Long Jump

A close-up portrait of Jean Baptiste Alaize, a Black man with a short beard and mustache, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. He is wearing a red collared shirt. The background is blurred, showing a light-colored wall and a dark area.

And after that, I was forced to witness...

Jean Baptiste Alaize
Burundi – France – Long Jump



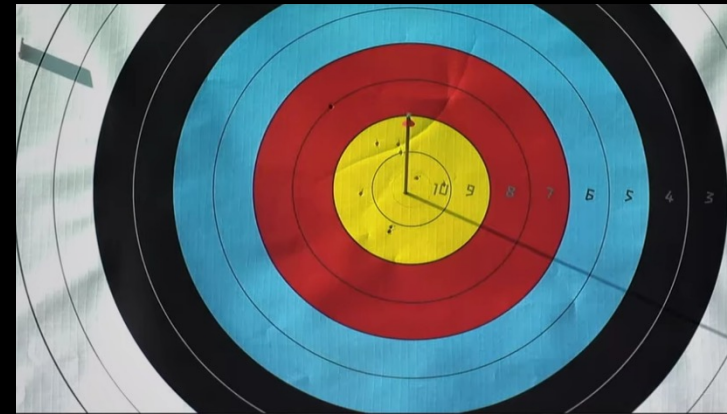
Matt Stutzman
USA— Archery



Matt Stutzman
USA— Archery



Matt Stutzman
USA— Archery



Jonnie Peacock
Great Britain– 100m



Jonnie Peacock
Great Britain— 100m



EVALUATED



Ryley Batt
Australia – Wheelchair Rugby



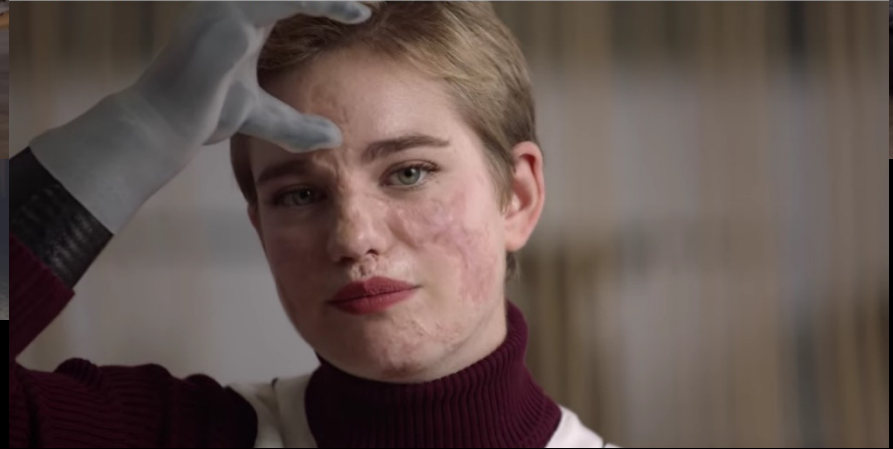
Ryley Batt
Australia – Wheelchair Rugby



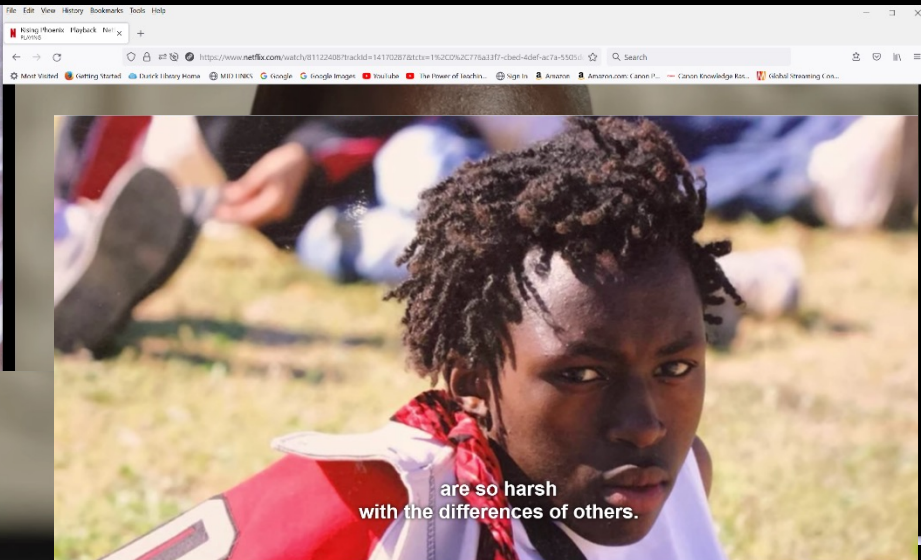
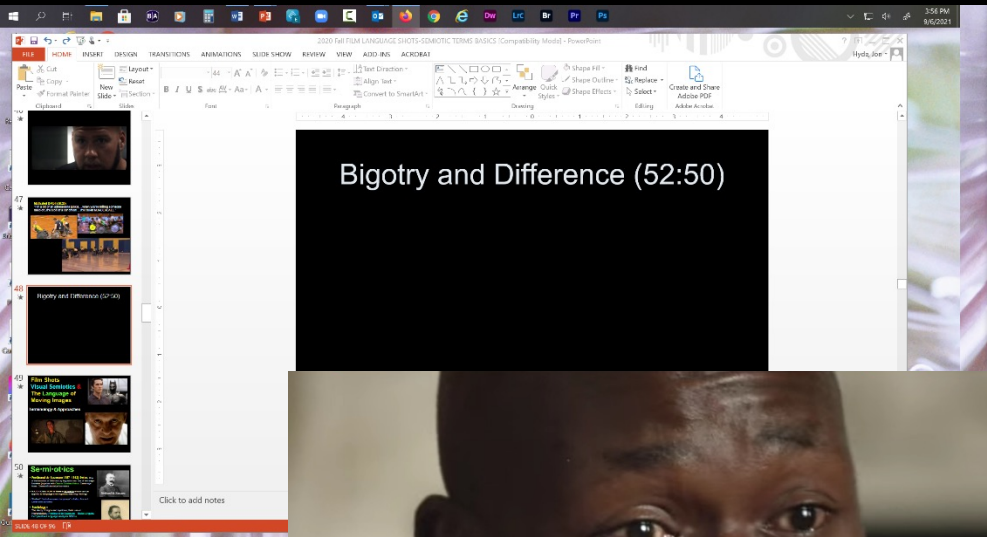
Bebe Vio
Italy – Fencing + Commentary



Bebe
Italy - Fencing



Bigotry and Difference (52:50)



Jean Baptiste Alaize
Burundi – France – Long Jump



*The Hutus wanted to exterminate
all Tutsi reproductive families...*

Ntando Mahlangu (55:00)

South Africa Sprinter

NTANDO MAHLANGU



Ntando Mahlangu (57:00) INTERCUTTING
Cheetah - Sprinter



Rio, Brazil

Time Lapse Shots of Rio Development



BEIJING PARALYMPICS
2008

Rio, Brazil
OVERHEAD DRONE SHOT



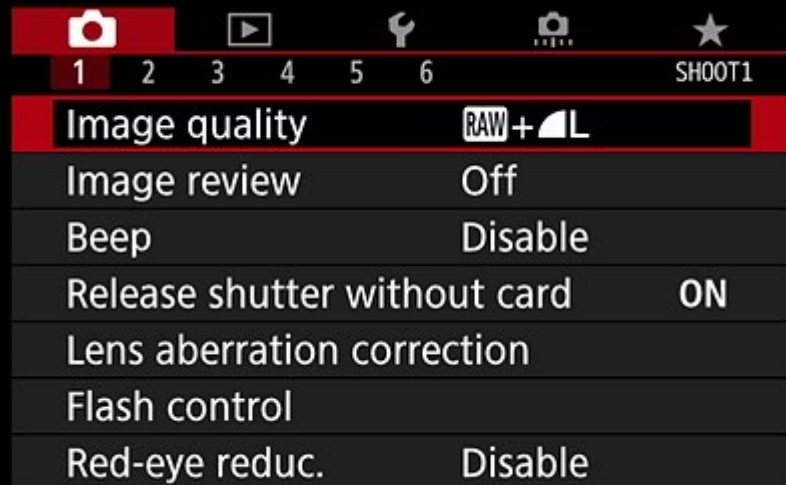
MS – Archival “camcorder” footage ~ 1995



Today... LOTS to cover

1. Canon 80D Camera **Controls** & **Menus**
2. Aesthetic & Artistic **SET PIECES/SEQUENCES**
3. Documentary Story **ARGUMENTS & Perspectives**
4. **Doc Story Structures**
5. **FILM LANGUAGE** and Story Board Abbreviations
6. **Cinematic Semiotics and Shots**

Canon 80D Menus



The Power of Film

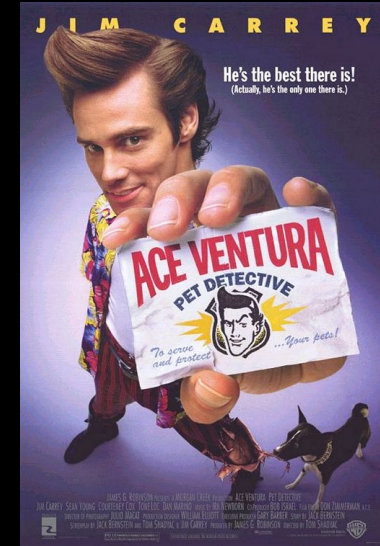
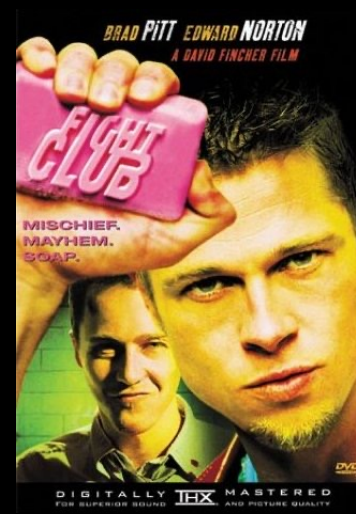
The “**POWER**” is connected to our “**HUMANITY**” in specific ways:

- AS HUMANS, we are **hard-wired for storytelling** as a social/cultural bond.
- We are biologically **Eye/ear-CENTRIC**.
- According to M, The more **realistic** (verisimilitude) a story is the more impactful.
 - This power is **unique to film** (TV and video as well)
 - “Film connects to the **human psyche** in a deep way.” Stanley Cavell
 - The mind seems to step into another sphere of engagement as the images on the screen flood into our receptive consciousness.
 - Altered state of consciousness is enthralling and irresistible.
- **The mind-movie problem** = how a 2 dimensional moving image hooks our consciousness.
- Our minds and movies are suited to one another.
 - Sacred form of Art?



Individual Power of Film

- **Demographic Power:** Movies have a larger mass appeal than most other artistic media. Cross-Cultural.
- Movies appeal to us at unconscious psychological levels. (Freud)
- We have a very BASIC “natural literacy” for understanding movies. (Noel Carroll)
- Movies **AMPLIFY/ACCENTUATE** reality through **HEIGHTENED** stories via powerful images, special FX, audio, dialogue, music.
- Offers us “fiction” (a better more entertaining world). We want to be fooled?!
- Movies are **NOT** mirrors of reality.
- Movies support/reinforce the prevailing **social**/ideological viewpoints in society.



The Film Industry as Media/Cultural EPICENTER of American Society

1. **Economic** Center of Entertainment Industry \$9-12 Billion/year in USA alone
2. **Cultural** Epi-Center (Names, People, places, and events)
3. **Narrative/Philosophical Center**— (IMPORTANT Shared Stories, Common Mythologies)
4. **Educational** Center
5. **Political** Power (Nationally and Globally)

