

# Film Shots

&

# Visual Semiotics

## Terminology & Approaches



# The Power of Film

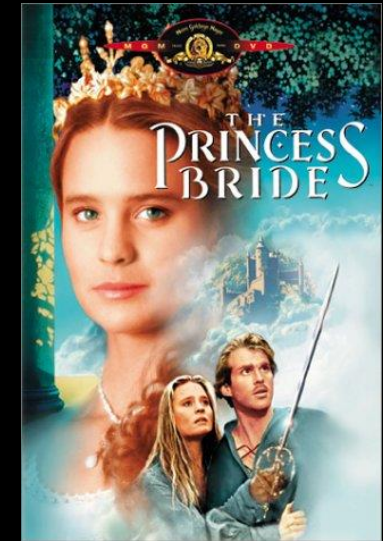
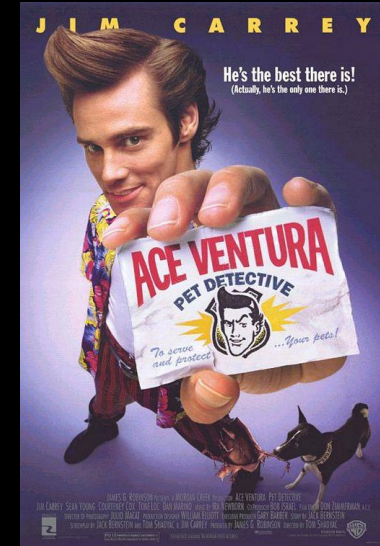
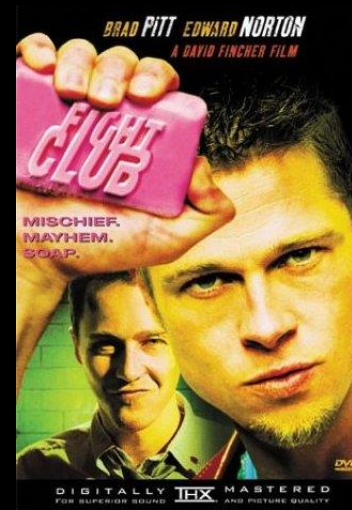
The “**POWER**” is connected to our “**HUMANITY**” in specific ways:

- 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

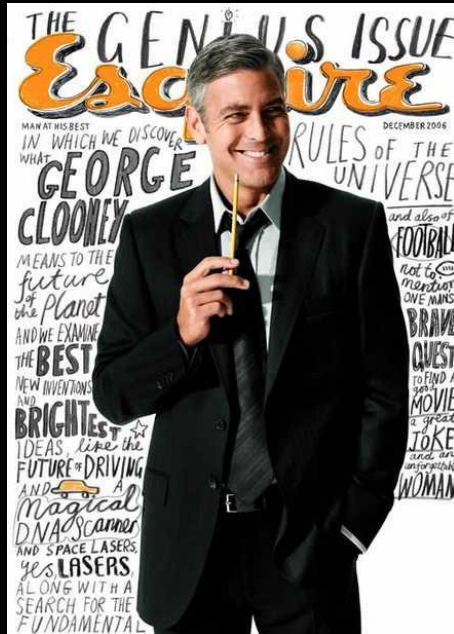
- **Demographic Power:** Movies have a larger mass appeal than most other artistic media. Cross-Cultural.
- Movies appeal to us at unconscious psychological levels. (Freud)
- We have a very BASIC “natural literacy” for understanding movies. (Noel Carroll)
- Movies **AMPLIFY/ACCENTUATE** reality through **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)



# Se-mi-ot-ics

- **Semiotics** = the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation.
- **Semiotics** (also called *semiotic studies*) is the study of **meaning-making**, the study of sign process (*semiosis*) and meaningful communication.
- **Film semiotics** = *Film Language* and **composition**

# VISUAL Composition

The Arrangement of objects within a FRAME

## Considerations:

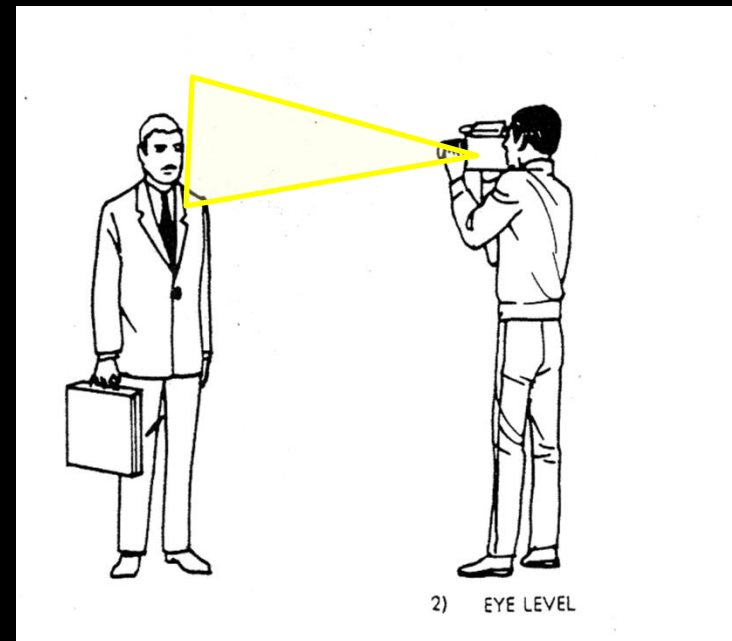
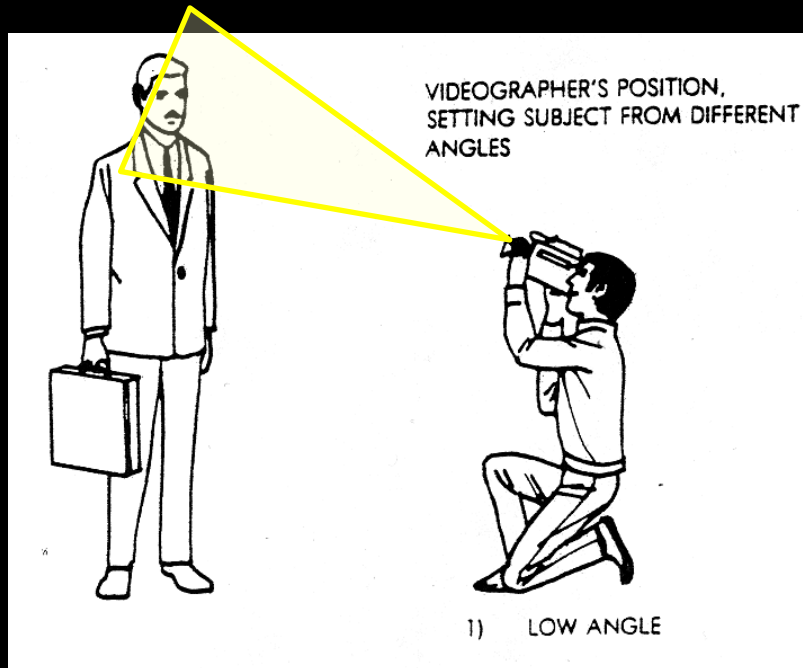
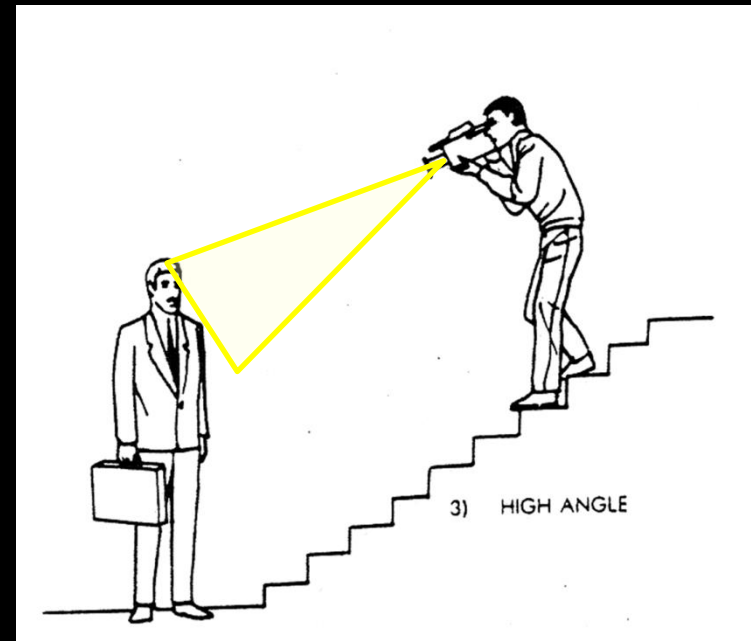
- ➡ Rule of Thirds
- ➡ Sight lines
- ➡ Size/Proximity
- ➡ Placements
  - ➡ Foreground
  - ➡ Middle Ground
  - ➡ Background
  - ➡ Focus/Depth of Field



# Camera Position

Relative to the subject

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





# Establishing Shots (ES)

Establishing shots (usually wide or long shots) are important for the development of a film and each new scene. The following aspects/elements are connected to establishing shots.

1. **WHERE AM I? Time and Space/Place/Setting** → Establishing shots set the place. Enough visual information needs to be provided to establish approximately **where** we are situated.

2. **WHAT TIME IS IT? →** Establishing shots set the TIME. That includes HISTORICAL TIME, SEASONAL time, WEEK, Day/Night time.

3. **HO DO I FEEL? → Visual Style/Texture/Tone/MOOD-** Establishing shots set the tone and mood for the project. Considerations here might include the scene's overall visual feel in terms of color vs. black and white; film grain, scratches, titles, lighting, time of day, weather (rain, clouds, sun) etc.

**Pacing/Speed--** The duration of the establishing shot can also set the overall pacing of the project.





**FORMULA SHOTS** → Establishing shots are frequently **FORMULAIC**. They are **easily RECOGNIZABLE** (QUICKLY). They include recognizable cityscapes, landscapes, building shots, streets, bridges, airports, farm fields, mountains which set the stage quickly.









# The Wide Angle Shot (WA)

- **Larger Perspective Shot** → A long/wide shot generally frames an "overview" of a visual scene. A **GROUP SHOT**.
- Once you can **see a person's entire body** you are generally into the realm of a wide shot.
- **About PLACE** → long/wide shots are about **PLACE**. They psychologically situate a viewer in a place and represent a general mood associated about that place.
- **Overview but lack of DETAIL intimacy** → The WA shot provides an overview but rarely the intimacy. It generally doesn't give you enough **DETAIL** about people. You can't see enough of a person's face and **FACIAL FEATURES**. You are perceptually **outside** the realm of conversational space.



Jim Broadbent (Prof Slughorn) & Emma Watson (Hermione Granger): Harry Potter

# The Wide ANGLE SHOT for MOVEMENT & ACTION SEQUENCES





# Medium Shot (MS)

- **Head and Torso** → A medium shot generally frames the entire head and 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. Most of your footage of people will be shot in MS.
- **Side by side** → Because of the horizontal frame of a video camera, you will be able to fit 2 people side by side **AKA 2-shot Framing**



Robert Downey Jr: *Iron Man*



Christian Bale: *Dark Knight*



Karen Allen:  
*Raiders of the Lost Arc*



# Medium Shots

(different angles and perspectives)



Daniel Day Lewis: *There Will Be Blood*



Kerri Russell: *Waitress*



Ryan Gosling: *La La Land*

# Over the Shoulder Shot (MEDIUM OSS)

- **Shoulder/Head** → As the name implies, the over-the-shoulder-shot is generally of a person, but includes a portion (shoulder and head) of the person with whom he/she is speaking.
- **Conversation shots** → Over the shoulder shots are frequently used as "conversation" shots between two or more people. They are used extensively in TV productions (crime, dramas, sitcoms, courtroom, period pieces).
- **Relationship** → Over the shoulder shots establish are about relationships and interactions between two people.



Rainn Wilson + Ellen Page: *Juno*



Philip Seymour Hoffman + Laura Linney:  
*The Savages*



# 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.
- **Insert Shots/Reaction**--Close-ups work really well as insert or reaction shots or other kinds of illustrative shots to add texture and detail to your story.



Bruce Willis: *Die Hard*



Ed Norton: *Incredible Hulk*



Heath Ledger: *The Dark Knight*



# Extreme Close-up (ECU)

- Intense Emotion
- Quick Reaction
- Subtle Response



Anthony Hopkins: Silence of the Lambs



MOVIECLIPS.COM

Janet Leigh: Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock)



Woody/Tom Hanks: Toy Story

# Extreme Close-up (ECU)



Abigail Breslin: *Little Miss Sunshine*

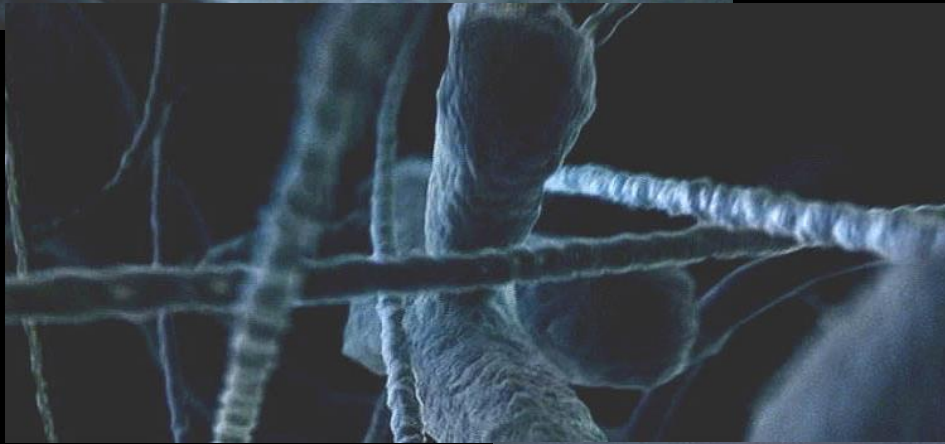
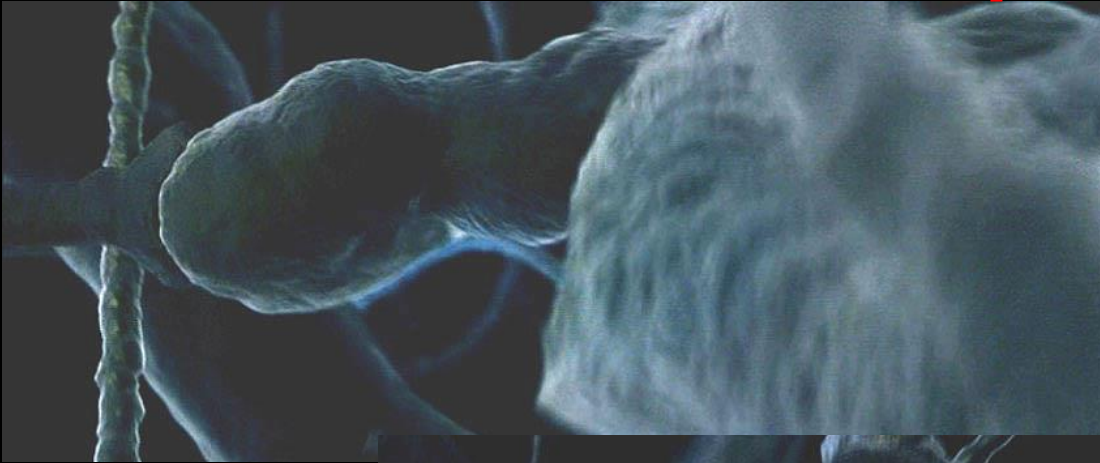


Daniel Radcliffe : *Harry Potter*



# Macro Extreme Close-up

[Brad Pitt: Fight Club Intro \(Dir David Fincher\)](#)





# Point of View Shots (POV)

- **Two/three shot Sequence--** The POV shot is actually a 2 shot sequence. It involves a set shot of a person doing something or looking at something and then a second shot of whatever it is that they are looking at.
- **Empathetic Viewpoint--** You are suddenly "becoming" the person and thereby actually seeing through their eyes.
- **Detail--** POV shots imply detail. They're intended to force you to look with some detail at a visual seen. Often POV shots are used when a main character is staring at a scene, trying to make sense of what is going on.
- **Optical Devices--** Binoculars, Telescope, Camera, Window, serve as good tools for POVs



**Shot 1:** Jimmy Stewart: Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*



**Shot 2:** Followed by what Jimmy Stewart sees through his rear window

# Point of View Shots (POV)

- **Empathetic Viewpoint**—You are suddenly "becoming" the person and thereby actually seeing through their eyes.



Luke Wilson: *Royal Tennenbaums*  
(Wes Anderson)

