

SIX

THE SHOT: MISE-EN-SCENE

Of all the techniques of cinema, *mise-en-scene* is the one with which we are most familiar. After seeing a film, we may not recall the cutting or the camera movements, the dissolves or offscreen sound. But we do remember the costumes in *Gone with the Wind* or the bleak, chilly lighting in Charles Foster Kane's *Xanadu*. We retain vivid memories of the rainy, gloomy streets in *The Big Sleep* or the cozy family home in *Meet Me in St. Louis*. We recall Harpo Marx clambering over Edgar Kennedy's peanut wagon (*Duck Soup*) and Katharine Hepburn defiantly splintering Cary Grant's golf clubs (*The Philadelphia Story*). In short, many of our most sharply etched memories of the cinema turn out to center on *mise-en-scene*.

WHAT IS MISE-EN-SCENE?

In the original French, *mise-en-scene* (pronounced "meez-ahn-sen") means "staging an action," and it was first applied to the practice of directing plays. Film scholars, extending the term to film direction, use the term to signify the director's control over what appears in the film frame. As you would expect from the term's theatrical origins, *mise-en-scene* includes those aspects of film that overlap with the art of the theater: setting, lighting, costume, and the behavior of the figures. In controlling the *mise-en-scene*, the director *stages the event* for the camera.

As we've seen in Chapter 2, staging an event to be filmed is characteristic of fictional films, so our examples will be drawn largely from films of this type. Staging also appears to some extent in documentary, with vivid examples including *The Thin Blue Line* (Color Plate 1). Animated and abstract films may control mise-en-scene to a degree impossible with live performers shot in real time—as is seen not only in drawn or puppet animation but also in computer graphics.

Mise-en-scene usually involves some planning, but the filmmaker may be open to unplanned events as well. An actor may add a line on the set, or an unexpected change in lighting may enhance a dramatic effect. While filming a cavalry procession through Monument Valley for *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, John Ford took advantage of an approaching lightning storm to create a dramatic backdrop for the action. The storm remains part of the film's mise-en-scene even though Ford neither planned it nor controlled it; it was a lucky accident that he decided to incorporate into his story. Jean Renoir, Robert Altman, and other directors have allowed their actors to improvise their performances, making the films' mise-en-scene more spontaneous and unpredictable.

REALISM

Before we analyze mise-en-scene in detail, one preconception must be brought to light. Just as viewers often remember this or that bit of mise-en-scene from a film, so viewers often judge mise-en-scene by standards of realism. A car may seem to be realistic for the period the film depicts, or a gesture may not seem realistic because “real people don't act that way.”

Realism as a standard of value, however, raises several problems. Notions of realism vary across cultures, through time, and even among individuals. Marlon Brando's acclaimed “realist” performance in the 1954 film *On the Waterfront* looks stylized today. American critics of the 1910s praised William S. Hart's Westerns for being realistic, but equally enthusiastic French critics of the 1920s considered the same films to be as artificial as a medieval epic. Moreover, realism has become one of the most problematic issues in the philosophy of art. (See Notes and Queries for examples.) Most important, to insist rigidly on realism for all films can blind us to the vast range of mise-en-scene possibilities.

Look, for instance, at the frame from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Fig. 6.1). The jagged rooftops and slanted chimneys certainly do not accord with our conception of normal reality. Yet to condemn the film for lacking realism would be inappropriate, because the film uses stylization to present a madman's fantasy. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* borrows conventions of Expressionist painting and theater and then assigns them the function of suggesting the madman's delusion.

It is better, then, to examine the *functions* of mise-en-scene than to dismiss this or that element that happens not to match our conception of realism. The filmmaker may use *any* system of mise-en-scene, and we should



Fig. 6.1

analyze its function in the total film—how mise-en-scene is motivated, how it varies or develops, how it works in relation to narrative and nonnarrative forms.

THE POWER OF MISE-EN-SCENE

To confine the cinema to some notion of realism would indeed impoverish mise-en-scene. This technique has the power to transcend normal conceptions of reality, as we can see from a glance at the cinema's first master of the technique, Georges Méliès. Méliès's mise-en-scene enabled him to create a totally imaginary world on film.

A caricaturist and magician, Méliès became fascinated by the Lumière brothers' demonstration of their short films in 1895. (For more on the Lumières, see pp. 226–227 and 443–444.) After building a camera based on an English projector, Méliès began filming unstaged street scenes and moments of passing daily life. One day, the story goes, he was filming at the Place de l'Opéra and his camera jammed as a bus was passing. After some tinkering, he was able to resume filming, but by this time the bus had gone and a hearse was passing in front of his lens. When Méliès screened the film, he discovered something unexpected: a moving bus seemed to transform itself instantly into a hearse. The anecdote may be apocryphal, but it at least illustrates Méliès's recognition of the magical powers of mise-en-scene. He would devote most of his efforts to cinematic conjuring.

But to do so would require preparation, since Méliès could not count on lucky accidents like the bus-hearse transformation. He would have to plan and stage action for the camera. Drawing on his experience in theater, Méliès built one of the first film studios—a small, crammed affair bristling with theatrical machinery, balconies, trapdoors, and sliding backdrops. He sketched shots beforehand and designed sets and costumes. Figures 6.2 and 6.3 illustrate the correspondence between his detailed drawings and the finished shots. As if this were not enough, Méliès starred in his own films (often in several roles per film). His desire to create magical effects led Méliès to control every aspect of his films' mise-en-scene.



Fig. 6.2

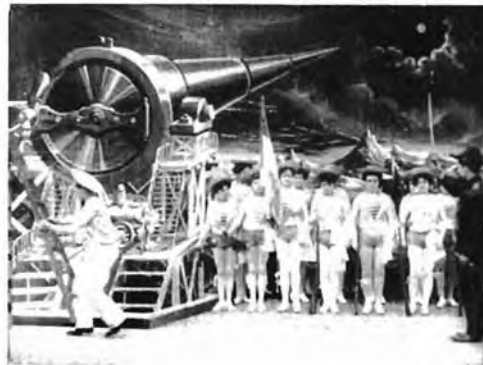


Fig. 6.3

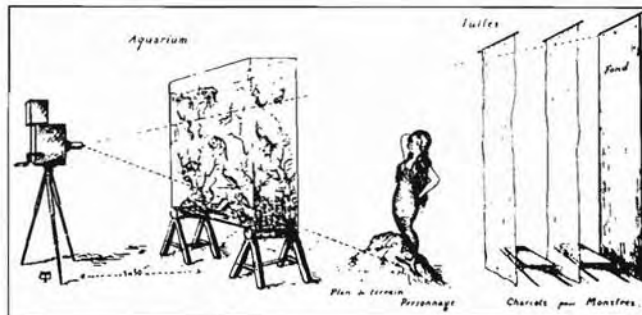


Fig. 6.4



Fig. 6.5

Such control was necessary to create the fantasy world he envisioned. Only in a studio could Méliès produce *The Mermaid*, in which an undersea world is created out of an actress in costume, a fish tank placed in front of the camera, some sets, and “carts for monsters” (see Fig. 6.4). He could also surround himself (playing an astronomer) with a gigantic array of cartoonish cut-outs like the telescope, globe, and blackboard in *La Lune à un mètre* (Fig. 6.5).

Méliès’s “Star-Film” studio made hundreds of short fantasy and trick films based on such a control over every element in the frame, and the first master of mise-en-scene demonstrated the great range of technical possibilities it offers. The legacy of Méliès’s magic is a delightfully unreal world wholly obedient to the whims of the imagination.

ASPECTS OF MISE-EN-SCENE

What possibilities for selection and control does mise-en-scene offer the filmmaker? We can mark out four general areas and indicate some potential uses of each.

■ SETTING

Since the earliest days of cinema, critics and audiences have understood that setting plays a more active role in cinema than in most theatrical styles. André Bazin writes:

The human being is all-important in the theatre. The drama on the screen can exist without actors. A banging door, a leaf in the wind, waves beating on the shore can heighten the dramatic effect. Some film masterpieces use man only as an accessory, like an extra, or in counterpoint to nature, which is the true leading character.

Cinema setting, then, can come to the forefront; it need not be only a container for human events but can dynamically enter the narrative action. (See Color Plates 33, 42, 62, and 63 for examples of settings without characters.)

The filmmaker may control setting in many ways. One way is to select an already existing locale in which to stage the action, a practice stretching back to the earliest films. Louis Lumière shot his short comedy *L'Arroseur arrosé* ("The Waterer Watered," Fig. 6.6) in a garden, and Victor Sjöström filmed *The Outlaw and His Wife* in the splendor of the Swedish countryside (Fig. 6.7). At the close of World War II, Roberto Rossellini shot *Germany Year Zero* in the rubble of Berlin (Fig. 6.8). Today filmmakers often go "on location" to shoot.

On the other hand, the filmmaker may choose to construct the setting. Méliès understood the increased control yielded by shooting in a studio, and many filmmakers followed his lead. In France, Germany, and especially the United States, the possibility of creating a wholly artificial world on film led to the development of several approaches to constructing setting. Some directors have emphasized historical authenticity. For example, Erich von Stroheim prided himself on meticulous research into details of locale, as the shot from *Greed* (1924) illustrates (Fig. 6.9). *All the President's Men* (1976) took a similar tack, seeking to duplicate the *Washington Post* office on a sound stage by reproducing every detail of the original newsroom (Fig. 6.10). Even waste paper from the actual office was scattered around the set. We should remember, however, that realism in settings is partly a matter of viewing conventions. What strikes us as realistic today might seem highly stylized to future audiences.



Fig. 6.6



Fig. 6.7



Fig. 6.8



Fig. 6.9



Fig. 6.10



Fig. 6.12



Fig. 6.13



Fig. 6.14

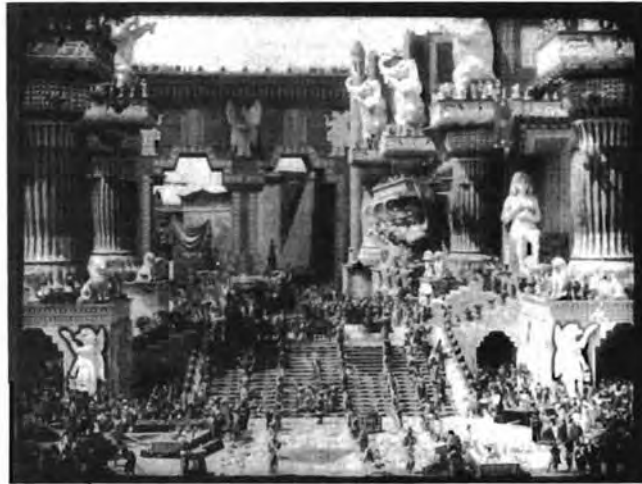


Fig. 6.11

Other films have been less committed to historical verisimilitude. Though D. W. Griffith studied the various historical periods presented in *Intolerance*, his Babylon—part Assyrian, part Egyptian, part American—constitutes a personal image of that city (Fig. 6.11). Similarly, in *Ivan the Terrible* Sergei Eisenstein freely stylized the decor of the czar's palace to harmonize with the lighting, costume, and figure movement, so that characters crawl through doorways that resemble mouseholes and stand frozen before allegorical murals.

Setting can overwhelm the actors, as in the confetti-festooned shot from Josef von Sternberg's *Underworld* (Fig. 6.12), or it can be reduced to zero, as in Godard's *Le Gai savoir* (Fig. 6.13) and Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (Fig. 6.14). Settings need not possess realistic-looking buildings, as witness the contorted streets and convulsively twisted architecture of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (a film heavily influenced by German Expressionist art).

The overall design of a setting can significantly shape how we understand story action. In Louis Feuillade's silent crime serial *The Vampires*, a criminal gang has killed a courier on his way to a bank. The gang's confederate, Irma Vep, is also a bank employee, and just as she tells her superior that the courier has vanished, an imposter, in beard and bowler hat, strolls in behind them (Fig. 6.15). They turn away from us in surprise as he comes forward (Fig. 6.16). Working in a period when cutting to closer shots was rare in a French film, Feuillade draws our attention to the man by putting him in the center of the shot. The office set enhances his importance by framing him neatly in the doorway.

So far our examples have been taken from black-and-white films, but color can also be an important component of settings. Robert Bresson's *L'Argent* creates parallels among its various settings—home, school, and prison—by the recurrence of drab green backgrounds and cold blue props and costumes (Color Plates 6–8). By contrast, Jacques Tati's *Play Time* displays sharply changing color schemes. In the first portion of *Play Time*,



Fig. 6.15



Fig. 6.16



Fig. 6.17

the settings and costumes are mostly gray, brown, and black—cold, steely colors. Later in the film, however, beginning in the restaurant scene, the settings start to sport cheery reds, pinks, and greens. This change in the settings' colors supports a narrative development which shows an inhuman city landscape that is transformed by vitality and spontaneity.

A full-size setting need not always be built. To save money or to create fantasy effects, the filmmakers may build miniature settings, and these too have the range of possibilities we have discussed for normal sets. (See Fig. 1.18 for an example of a miniature set.) Parts of settings may also be done as paintings which are then photographed to combine with full-size objects. Since this process involves cinematography, we look at it in the next chapter.

In manipulating a shot's setting, the filmmaker may create *props*—another term borrowed from theatrical *mise-en-scène*. When an object in the setting is motivated to operate actively within the ongoing action, we can call it a “prop.” Films teem with examples: the snowstorm paperweight that shatters at the beginning of *Citizen Kane*, the little girl's balloon in *M*, the cactus rose in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, Cesare's coffin in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Luis Buñuel's films teem with the surrealistic use of props, as when a blind man uses a dove to cure a woman's illness (Fig. 6.17, from *Los Olvidados*).

In the course of a narrative, a prop may become a motif. The shower curtain in *Psycho* is at first an innocuous part of the setting, but when the killer enters the bathroom the curtain screens her (?) from our sight. Later, after the murder, Norman Bates uses the curtain to wrap up the victim's body. In *The Crime of M. Lange* a poster outside Batala's publishing house advertises its new dime-novel series “Javert” (Fig. 6.18), but after the tyrannical Batala has left the company, Lange and his associates pull the poster down to reveal the window and room that have for so long been blocked from sunlight (Figs. 6.19, 6.20).

When the filmmaker uses color to create parallels among elements of setting, a color motif may become associated with several props. Souleymane Cissé's *Finye (The Wind)* begins with a woman carrying an orange calabash as the wind rustles through weeds (Color Plate 9). Later, in a fantasy sequence, a boy carries water in an orange-brown bowl to the main male and female characters. Still later, the vengeful grandfather prepares to stalk his



Fig. 6.18



Fig. 6.19



Fig. 6.20



Fig. 6.21



Fig. 6.22



Fig. 6.23

grandson's persecutor by dressing in orange and making magic before a fire (Color Plate 10). At the film's end, the little boy passes his bowl to someone offscreen—possibly the couple seen earlier (Color Plate 11). The recurrent color creates a cluster of nature motifs around the drama. Later in this chapter we shall examine in more detail how elements of setting can weave through a film to form motifs within the narrative.

■ COSTUME AND MAKE-UP

Like setting, costume can have specific functions in the total film, and the range of possibilities is huge. Erich von Stroheim, for instance, was as passionately committed to authenticity of dress as of setting, and he was said to have created underwear that would instill the proper mood in his actors even though it was never to be seen in the film. In Griffith's *Musketeers of Pig Alley* Lillian Gish appears in a faded and threadbare dress, which summarizes the poverty in which her character lives.

On the other hand, costumes may be quite stylized, calling attention to their purely graphic qualities. In *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* the somnambulist Cesare wears a jet-black leotard, whereas the woman he abducts wears a white nightgown. Throughout *Ivan the Terrible* costumes are carefully orchestrated with one another in their colors, their textures, and even their movements. One shot of Ivan and his adversary gives their robes a plastic sweep and dynamism (Fig. 6.21). In *Freak Orlando*, Ulrike Ottinger (herself a costume designer) boldly uses costumes to display the spectrum's primary colors in maximum intensity (Color Plate 12).

Like settings, costume may furnish props for the film's ongoing narrative system. The film director Guido in Fellini's *8½* persistently uses his sunglasses to shield himself from the world. To think of Dracula is to think of how his billowing cape enwraps him, unfolds, and closes decisively around a victim. In cinema any portion of a costume may become a prop: a pair of spectacles (*Potemkin*), shoes (*Strangers on a Train*, *The Wizard of Oz*), a cross pendant (*Ivan the Terrible*), a jacket (*Le Million*). When Hildy Johnson, in *His Girl Friday*, switches from her role of aspiring housewife to that of reporter, her stylish hat with its low-dipping brim is replaced by a "masculine" hat with its brim pushed up, journalist-style (Figs. 6.22, 6.23). In Roberto Rossellini's *Rise to Power of Louis XIV* the King wants to keep his nobles indebted to him, so he creates outlandish, expensive fashions in dress (Color Plate 13).

Film genres make extensive use of costume props—the frontier six-gun, the gangster's automatic pistol, the dancer's top hat and cane. Every major film comedian has turned a specific costume into a panoply of props: Chaplin's cane and derby, Fields's cigar and top hat, Laurel and Hardy's derbies and too-tight suits, Harpo Marx's capacious pockets.

As we have already seen in *L'Argent* and *Play Time* (p. 174), costume is often coordinated with setting. Since the filmmaker usually wants to emphasize the human figures, setting may provide a more or less neutral background, while costume helps pick out the characters. Color design is partic-

ularly important here. The *Freak Orlando* costumes (Color Plate 12) stand out boldly against the neutral gray background of an artificial lake. In the climactic skirmish of *The Night of the Shooting Stars*, luminous wheat fields set off the hard black-and-blue costumes of the fascists and the peasants (Color Plate 14). The director may instead choose to match the color values of setting and costume more closely. One shot in Fellini's *Casanova* (Color Plate 15) creates a color gradation that runs from bright red costumes to paler red walls, the whole composition set off by a small white accent in the distance. This "bleeding" of the costume into the setting is carried to a kind of limit in the prison scene of *THX 1138*, in which George Lucas strips both locale and clothing to stark white on white (Color Plate 16).

Ken Russell's *Women in Love* affords a clear example of how costume and setting can coordinate and contribute to a film's overall narrative progression. The opening scenes portray the characters' shallow middle-class life by means of highly saturated primary and complementary colors in costume and setting (Color Plate 17). In the middle portions of the film, as the characters discover love on a country estate, pale pastels predominate (Color Plate 18). The last section of *Women in Love* takes place around the Matterhorn, and the characters' ardor has cooled. Now the colors have become even paler, dominated by pure black and white (Color Plate 19). By integrating itself with setting, costume may function to reinforce the film's narrative and thematic patterns.

All these points about costume apply equally to a closely related area of mise-en-scene, the actors' make-up. Make-up was originally necessary because actors' faces would not register well on early film stocks. And, up to the present, it has been used in various ways to enhance the appearance of actors on the screen. Over the course of film history, a wide range of possibilities has emerged. Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* was famous for its complete avoidance of make-up (Fig. 6.14). This film relied on close-ups and tiny facial changes to create an intense religious drama. On the other hand, Nikolai Cherkasov did not look particularly like Eisenstein's conception of Czar Ivan IV, so he wore a wig and false beard, nose, and eyebrows for *Ivan the Terrible*. Changing actors to look like historical personages has been one common function of make-up.

Make-up can aim at complete realism. When Laurence Olivier blackened his skin and hair to make a film of *Othello*, he strove to be as convincing a Moor as possible. Women often wear make-up that looks like the ordinary street cosmetics currently in fashion, and most men's make-up is designed to look as if they were not wearing any. Yet it is equally possible to use make-up in nonrealistic ways. Bizarre make-up plays a major role in the conventions of the horror genre. In *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Fig. 6.24), the actors' faces are heavily painted with unshaded areas of light and dark colors, and this fits in with a similar treatment of the other aspects of mise-en-scene in that film.

In recent years the craft of make-up has developed in response to the popularity of horror and science-fiction genres. Rubber and plasticene compounds create bumps, bulges, extra organs, and layers of artificial skin in



Fig. 6.24



Fig. 6.25



Fig. 6.26



Fig. 6.27



Fig. 6.28

such films as David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (Fig. 6.25) and Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands*. In such contexts, make-up, like costume, becomes important in creating character traits or motivating plot action.

■ LIGHTING

Much of the impact of an image comes from its manipulation of lighting. In cinema, lighting is more than just illumination that permits us to see the action. Lighter and darker areas within the frame help create the overall composition of each shot and thus guide our attention to certain objects and actions. A brightly illuminated patch may draw our eye to a key gesture, while a shadow may conceal a detail or build up suspense about what may be present. Lighting can also articulate textures: the soft curve of a face, the rough grain of a piece of wood, the delicate tracery of a spider's web, the sheen of glass, the sparkle of a faceted gem.

Lighting shapes objects by creating highlights and shadows. A highlight is a patch of relative brightness on a surface. The man's face in Figure 6.26 (from Cecil B. De Mille's *The Cheat*) and the edge of the fingers in Figure 6.27 (from Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket*) display highlights. Highlights provide important cues to the texture of the surface. If the surface is smooth, like glass or chrome, the highlights tend to gleam or sparkle; a rougher surface, like a coarse stone facing, yields more diffuse highlights.

There are two basic types of shadows, each of which is important in film composition: *attached* shadows, or *shading*, and *cast* shadows. An attached shadow occurs when light fails to illuminate part of an object because of the object's shape or surface features. If a person faces a candle in a darkened room, patches of the face and body will fall into darkness. This phenomenon is shading, or attached shadow. But the candle also projects a shadow on the wall behind. This is a cast shadow, because the body blocks out the light. The shadows in Figure 6.26, for example, are cast shadows, made by bars between the actor and the light source. But, in Figure 6.27 the small dark patches on the hand are attached shadows, for they are caused by the three-dimensional curves and ridges of the hand itself.

As these examples suggest, highlights and shadows help create our sense of a scene's space. In Figure 6.26, a few shadows imply an entire prison cell. Animated films can utilize the same cues to one degree or another. In Color Plate 20, from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, human and cartoon figures display both cast shadows and attached shadows, or shading.

Lighting also shapes a shot's overall composition. One shot from John Huston's *Asphalt Jungle* welds the gang members into a unit by the pool of light cast by a hanging lamp (Fig. 6.28). At the same time, it sets up a scale of importance, emphasizing the protagonist by making him the most frontal and clearly lit figure.

Lighting also affects our sense of the shape and texture of the objects depicted. If a ball is lit straight from the front, it will appear round. If the same ball is lit from the side, we will see it as a half-circle. Hollis Frampton's short film *Lemon* consists primarily of light moving around a lemon, and the shifting shadows create dramatically changing patterns of yellow and black. This film almost seems designed to prove the truth of a remark made by Josef



Plate 1 *The Thin Blue Line*



Plate 2 *Frank Film*

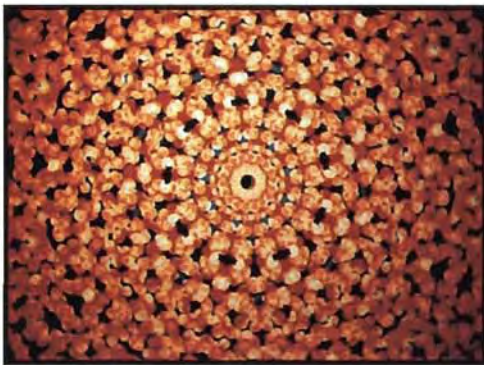


Plate 3 *Lapis*



Plate 5 *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*



Plate 4 *Fist Fight*



Plate 6 *L'Argent*



Plate 7 *L'Argent*



Plate 8 *L'Argent*



Plate 9 *Finye (The Wind)*



Plate 10 *Finye (The Wind)*



Plate 11 *Finye (The Wind)*



Plate 12 *Freak Orlando*



Plate 13 *The Rise to Power of Louis XIV*



Plate 14 *The Night of the Shooting Stars*



Plate 15 *Casanova*



Plate 16 *THX 1138*



Plate 17 *Women in Love*



Plate 18 *Women in Love*



Plate 19 *Women in Love*



Plate 20 *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*



Plate 21 *La Chinoise*



Plate 22 *La Chinoise*



Plate 23 *The Purple Rose of Cairo*



Plate 24 *The Purple Rose of Cairo*



Plate 26 *The Green Room*



Plate 28 *Ivan the Terrible*



Plate 30 *Larks on a String*



Plate 25 *El Sur*



Plate 27 *Written on the Wind*



Plate 29 *Ivan the Terrible*



Plate 31 *Yol*



Plate 32 *A*



Plate 33 *The Draughtsman's Contract*



Plate 34 *A Better Tomorrow III*



Plate 35 *Aliens*



Plate 36 *Life on a String*



Plate 37 *Sambizanga*



Plate 38 *One Froggy Evening*



Plate 39 *Bambi*



Plate 40 *The Wall*



Plate 41 *An Autumn Afternoon*

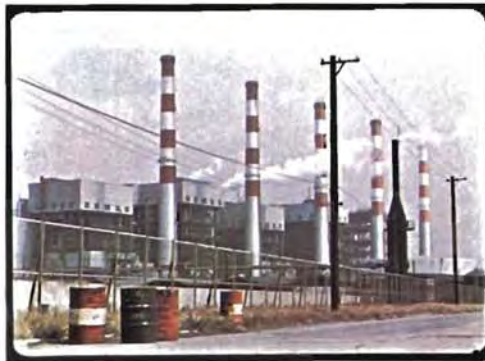


Plate 42 *An Autumn Afternoon*



Plate 43 *Lancelot du Lac*



Plate 44 *Meet Me in St. Louis*



Plate 45 *Meet Me in St. Louis*



Plate 46 *Stalker*



Plate 47 *Rainbow Dance*



Plate 48 *The Wrath of the Gods*



Plate 49 *Cenerella*



Plate 50 *Viva la Muerte!*



Plate 51 *Daisies*



Plate 52 *Innocence Unprotected*



Plate 53 *Kasba*



Plate 54 *Kasba*



Plate 55 *Last Tango in Paris*



Plate 56 *Last Tango in Paris*



Plate 57 *Vertigo*



Plate 58 *Parsifal*



Plate 59 *Rumble Fish*



Plate 60 *Paris, Texas*



Plate 61 *Paris, Texas*



Plate 62 *Ohayu*



Plate 63 *Ohayu*



Fig. 6.29



Fig. 6.30



Fig. 6.31

von Sternberg, one of the cinema's masters of film lighting: "The proper use of light can embellish and dramatize every object."

For our purposes, we can isolate four major features of film lighting: its *quality*, *direction*, *source*, and *color*.

Lighting *quality* refers to the relative intensity of the illumination. "Hard" lighting creates clearly defined shadows, whereas "soft" lighting creates a diffused illumination. In nature, the noonday sun creates hard light, while an overcast sky creates soft light. The terms are relative, and many lighting situations will fall in between the extremes, but we can in practice easily recognize the differences.

Hard lighting creates bold shadows and crisp textures and edges. In Figure 6.29, from Satyajit Ray's *Aparajito*, Apu's mother and the globe she holds are emphasized by the hard lighting. In Figure 6.30, from the same film, softer lighting blurs contours and textures and makes for more diffusion and gentler contrasts between light and shade.

The *direction* of lighting in a shot refers to the path of light from its source or sources to the object lit. "Every light," wrote von Sternberg, "has a point where it is brightest and a point toward which it wanders to lose itself completely. . . . The journey of rays from that central core to the outposts of blackness is the adventure and drama of light." For convenience we can distinguish among frontal lighting, sidelighting, backlighting, underlighting, and top lighting.

Frontal lighting can be recognized by its tendency to eliminate shadows. In Color Plate 21, a shot from Godard's *La Chinoise*, the result of such frontal lighting is a fairly flat-looking image.

In *Touch of Evil*, Welles uses a hard *sidelight* (also called a *crosslight*) to sculpt the character's features. Note the sharp shadows cast by nose, cheekbones, and lips, as well as the long shadows cast on the left wall (Fig. 6.31).

Backlighting, as the name suggests, comes from behind the subject filmed. It can be positioned at many angles: high above the figure, at various angles off to the side, pointing straight at the camera, or from below. Used with no other sources of light, backlighting tends to create silhouettes, as in Figure 6.32, a frame from Welles's *Citizen Kane*. Combined with more frontal sources of light, the technique can create an unobtrusively illuminated contour. In Figure 6.33, from *Wings*, a narrow line of light makes each actor's



Fig. 6.32



Fig. 6.33



Fig. 6.34



Fig. 6.35



Fig. 6.36

body stand out from the background. This use of backlighting is called *edge lighting* or *rim lighting*.

Underlighting suggests that the light comes from below the subject. In Figure 6.34 (from Ivan Mosjoukin's *Le Brasier ardent*), the underlighting suggests an offscreen fire. Since underlighting tends to distort features, it is often used to create dramatic horror effects, but it may also simply indicate a realistic light source, such as a fireplace. As usual, a particular technique can function differently according to context.

Top lighting is exemplified by Figure 6.35, from von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express*. Here the spotlight shines down from almost directly above Marlene Dietrich's face. Von Sternberg frequently used such a high frontal light to bring out the line of his star's cheekbones. (Our earlier example from *Asphalt Jungle* in Figure 6.28 provides a less glamorous instance of top lighting.)

Lighting can also be characterized by its *source*. In making a documentary, the filmmaker may be obliged to shoot with the light available in the actual surroundings. Most fictional films, however, use extra light sources to obtain greater control of the image's look. In most fictional films, the table lamps and street lights you see in the mise-en-scene are not the principal sources of illumination for the filming. Such visible sources of light, however, will serve to motivate the lighting decisions made in production. The filmmaker will usually strive to create a lighting design that is consistent with the sources in the setting. In Figure 6.36, from *The Miracle Worker*, the window in the rear and the lantern in the right foreground are purportedly the sources of illumination, but you can see the many studio lights used in this shot reflected as tiny white dots in the glass lantern.



Fig. 6.37

Directors and cinematographers manipulating the lighting of the scene will start from the assumption that any subject normally requires two light sources: a *key light* and a *fill light*. The key light is the primary source, providing the dominant illumination and casting the strongest shadows. A fill is a less intense illumination which "fills in," softening or eliminating shadows cast by the key light. By combining key and fill, and by adding other sources, lighting can be controlled quite exactly.

The key lighting source may be aimed at the subject from any angle, as our examples of lighting direction have indicated. Color Plate 28, from *Ivan*

the Terrible, shows underlighting as the key source, while a softer and dimmer fill falls on the setting behind the figure.

Figure 6.37 shows a frame from Abel Gance's *La Roue*. The bold backlighting is complemented by a key light from the left side. This casts attached shadows on the left side of the actress's face, notably by the nose and eye. The fill light comes from the right, thus ensuring that this side of her face will not appear completely dark, as does part of the face in Figure 6.31.

Figure 6.38 shows a shot from *Bezhin Meadow*, in which Eisenstein uses a number of light sources and directions. The key light falling on the figures comes from the left side, but it is hard on the face of the old woman in the foreground and softened on the face of the man because a fill light comes in from the right. This fill light falls on the woman's forehead and nose.

Classical Hollywood filmmaking developed the custom of using at least three light sources per shot: key light, fill light, and backlight. Figure 6.39 shows the most basic arrangement of these lights on a single figure. The backlight comes from behind and above the figure, the key light comes diagonally from the front, and a fill light comes from a position near the camera. The key will usually be closer to the figure or brighter than the fill. Typically, each major character in a scene will have his or her own key, fill, and backlight. If another actor is added (as in the dotted figure in Figure 6.39), the key light for one can be altered slightly to form the backlight for the other and vice versa, with a fill light on either side of the camera.

In Figure 6.40, the Bette Davis character in *Jezebel* is the most important figure, and the three-point lighting centers attention on her. A bright backlight from the rear upper right highlights her hair and edge-lights her left arm. The key light is off left, making her right arm brightly illuminated. A fill light comes from just to the right of the camera. It is less bright than the key. This balanced lighting creates mild shading, modeling Davis's face to suggest volume rather than flatness. (Note the slight shadow cast by her nose.) Davis's backlight and key light serve to illuminate the woman behind her at the right, but less prominently. Other fill lights, called *background* or *set lighting*, fall on the setting and on the crowd at the left rear.

Three-point lighting emerged during the studio era of Hollywood filmmaking, and it is still widely used. In Color Plate 23, from Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo*, the two figures are modeled by a strong key light from the left side, a fill light from off right of the camera, and a trace of edge lighting to pick out their clothes. The office behind the couple is lit more dimly and softly, as is typical with background light.

You may have already noticed that this "three-point" lighting system demands that the lamps be rearranged virtually every time the camera shifts to a new framing of the scene. This is, in fact, the case. In spite of the great cost involved, most Hollywood films will have a different lighting arrangement for each camera position. Such variations in the light sources do not conform to reality, but they do enable filmmakers to create clear compositions for each shot.

Three-point lighting was particularly well-suited for the *high-key lighting* used in classical Hollywood cinema and other filmmaking traditions.



Fig. 6.38

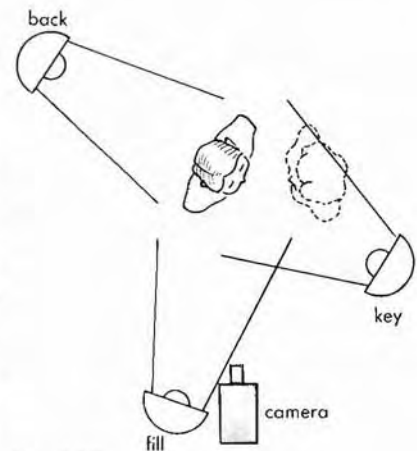


Fig. 6.39



Fig. 6.40



Fig. 6.41



Fig. 6.42



Fig. 6.43



Fig. 6.44

High-key lighting refers to an overall lighting design which uses fill and backlight to create low contrast between brighter and darker areas. Usually, the light quality is soft, making shadow areas fairly transparent. The frames from *Jezebel* (Fig. 6.40) and from *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (Color Plate 23) exemplify high-key lighting. Hollywood directors and cinematographers have relied on this for comedies, adventure films, and most dramas.

High-key lighting is not used simply to render a brightly lit situation, such as a dazzling ballroom or a sunny afternoon. High-key lighting is an overall approach to illumination that can suggest different lighting conditions or times of day. Consider, for example, two frames from *Back to the Future*. The first shot (Fig. 6.41) uses high-key illumination matched to daylight and a brightly lit malt shop. The second frame (Fig. 6.42) is from a scene set in a room at night, but it still uses the high-key approach, as can be seen from the lighting's softness, its low contrast, and its detail in shadow areas.

Low-key illumination creates stronger contrasts and sharper, darker shadows. Often the lighting is hard, and fill light is lessened or eliminated altogether. The effect is of *chiaroscuro*, or extremely dark and light regions within the image. An example is Figure 6.43, from Andrzej Wajda's *Kanal*. Here, the fill light and background light are significantly less intense than in high-key technique. As a result, shadow areas on the left third of the screen remain hard and opaque. In Figure 6.44, a low-key shot from Welles's *Touch of Evil*, the key light is hard and comes from the side. Welles eliminates both fill and background illumination, creating very sharp shadows and a dark void around the characters.

As our examples indicate, low-key lighting has usually been applied to somber or mysterious scenes. It was common in horror films of the 1930s and *films noirs* ("dark films") of the 1940s and 1950s. The low-key approach was revived in the 1980s in such films as *Blade Runner* and *Rumble Fish*. In *El Sur* (Color Plate 25) Hector Erice's low-key lighting yields dramatic *chiaroscuro* effects that portray the adult world as a child imagines it, full of mystery and danger.

When the actors move, the director must decide whether to alter the lighting. There are advantages to maintaining a constant lighting, even if this is not particularly realistic. At the end of Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria*, the heroine moves diagonally toward us, accompanied by a band of singing young people. As she walks, lighting on her face does not change, enabling us to

notice slight changes in her expression (Figs. 6.45, 6.46). Alternatively, the filmmaker may have his or her figures move through patches of light and shadow. The swordfight in *Rashomon* is intensified by the contrast between the ferocious combat and the cheerfully dappled lighting pouring into the glade (Fig. 6.47).

Like any technique, lighting can become a motif in the course of a film. Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo* presents a woman torn between a brutal, abusive marriage and her fantasy of a movie hero (who steps down from the screen to meet her). Scenes with her fictional hero are presented in moderately high-key, using the three-point system we have just mentioned (Color Plate 23). But scenes with her husband at her home are given the harsh, hard-edged treatment characteristic of low-key technique (Color Plate 24).

We tend to think of film lighting as limited to two colors—the white of sunlight or the soft yellow of incandescent interior lamps. In practice, filmmakers who choose to control lighting typically work with as purely white a light as they can. By use of filters placed in front of the light source, the filmmaker can color the onscreen illumination in any fashion. There may be a realistic source in the scene to motivate the hue of the light. For example, cinematographers often use filters to suggest the orange tint of candlelight, as in François Truffaut's *The Green Room* (Color Plate 26). In Douglas Sirk's *Written on the Wind*, purplish-blue lighting is motivated as the color of night (Color Plate 27). But colored light can also be unrealistic in its motivation. Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible, Part 2*, uses a blue light suddenly cast on an actor, nondiegetically, to suggest the character's terror and uncertainty (see Color Plates 28 and 29). Such a shift in stylistic function—using colored light to perform a function usually confined to acting—is all the more effective because it is so unexpected.

We are used to ignoring the illumination of our everyday surroundings, so film lighting is also easy to take for granted. Yet the look of a shot is centrally controlled by light quality, direction, source, and color. The filmmaker can manipulate and combine these factors to shape the viewer's experience in a great many ways. No component of mise-en-scene is more important than “the drama and adventure of light.”

■ FIGURE EXPRESSION AND MOVEMENT

The director may also control the behavior of various figures in the mise-en-scene. Here the word “figures” covers a wide range of possibilities, since the figure may represent a person but could also be an animal (Lassie, the donkey Balthasar, Donald Duck), a robot (R2D2 and C3PO in the *Star Wars* series), an object (as in *Ballet mécanique*'s choreography of bottles, straw hats, and kitchen utensils), or even a pure shape (as in *Ballet mécanique*'s circles and triangles). Mise-en-scene allows such figures to express feelings and thoughts; it can also dynamize them to create various kinetic patterns.

In Figure 6.48 (from *Seven Samurai*) the samurai have won the battle with the bandits. Virtually the only movement in the frame is the driving rain, but the slouching postures of the men leaning on their spears express their tense weariness. By contrast, in *White Heat* explosive movement and



Fig. 6.45



Fig. 6.46



Fig. 6.47



Fig. 6.48



Fig. 6.49

ferocious facial expression present an image of psychotic rage. In Figure 6.49 Cody Jarrett (James Cagney), after learning of his mother's death, bursts up from the prison mess table.

In cinema, facial expression and movement are not restricted to human figures. As mentioned in Chapter 2, by means of animation, drawings or three-dimensional objects can be endowed with highly dynamic movement. For example, in science-fiction and fantasy films, monsters and robots may be given expressions and gestures through the technique of *stop-action* (also called "stop-motion"). Typically a small-scale model is made with articulated parts. In filming, it is posed as desired, and a frame or two is shot. Then the figure is adjusted slightly and another frame or two is exposed, and so on. The result on screen is a continuous, if sometimes jerky, movement. The horrendous onslaught of ED-209, the crimefighting robot in *Robocop*, was created by means of a twelve-inch miniature filmed in stop-action (Fig. 6.50). (A full-scale but unmoving model was also built for long shots.) Stop-action can also be used for more abstract and unrealistic purposes, as in the clay animation in one portion of Jan Švankmajer's *Dimensions of Dialogue* (Fig. 6.51).



Fig. 6.50

The filmmaker can stage action without three-dimensional figures or objects. Cel animation presents us with drawings of Aladdin or Daffy Duck. Filmmakers may also blend photographed action with animated mise-en-scene. Highly detailed computer-generated animation made it possible for James Cameron to create the outrageous metamorphoses of the cyborg in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. (See Notes and Queries for more on computer-generated mise-en-scene.)



Fig. 6.51

Acting and actuality. Although abstract shapes and animated figures can become important in the mise-en-scene, the most intuitively familiar cases of figure expression and movement are actors playing roles. Like other aspects of mise-en-scene, the performance is created in order to be filmed. An actor's performance consists of visual elements (appearance, gestures, facial expressions) and sound (voice, effects). At times, of course, an actor may contribute only visual aspects, as in the silent period of film history. Similarly, an actor's performance may sometimes exist only on the sound track of the film; in *A Letter to Three Wives*, Celeste Holm's character, Addie Ross, speaks a narration over the images but never appears on the screen.

Acting is often approached as a question of realism. While some broad conception of realistic behavior is probably indispensable as a first step to understanding acting, we cannot stop there. It is not always fruitful to judge an actor's performance by what would be likely behavior in the world outside the movie theater, and this is for several reasons.

For one thing, conceptions of realistic acting have changed over film history. Today we may think that the performances of Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise in *Rain Man* or those given by Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis in *Thelma and Louise* are reasonably close to people's real-life behavior. Yet in the early 1950s, the New York Actors Studio style, as exemplified by Marlon Brando's performances in *On the Waterfront* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, was also thought to be extremely realistic. Fine though we may still

find Brando's work in these films, it seems deliberate, heightened, and quite unrealistic. The same might be said of the performances, by professional and amateur actors alike, in post-World War II Italian neorealist films, which were hailed when they first appeared as almost documentary depictions of Italian life but many of which now seem to us to contain polished performances suitable to Hollywood films. (In fact, one of the main neorealist actors, Anna Magnani, went to Hollywood and won an Oscar there.) Already major naturalistic performances of the 1970s, such as Robert DeNiro's protagonist in *Taxi Driver*, are coming to seem quite stylized. Who can say what the acting in *Rain Man*, *Thelma and Louise*, and other recent films will look like in a few decades?

Changing views of realism are not the only reason to be wary of this as a concept for analyzing acting. Often when people call a performance "unrealistic," they are evaluating it as bad. But not all films try to achieve realism. Since the performance an actor creates is part of the overall mise-en-scene, films contain a wide variety of acting styles. Instead of assuming that acting must be realistic, we should try to understand what kind of acting style the film is aiming at. If the functions of acting in the film are best served by a nonrealistic performance, that is the kind that the skillful actor will strive to present. Obvious examples of nonrealistic acting style occur constantly in *The Wizard of Oz*, for fantasy purposes. (How would a "realistic" Wicked Witch behave?) Moreover, "realistic" performance will always be only one option in film acting. In mass-production filmmaking such as Hollywood, India, Hong Kong, and other traditions, overblown performances are a crucial source of the audience's pleasure. Typically viewers do not expect narrowly realistic acting from Jim Carrey or from martial arts stars like Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan.

Finally, when we watch any fictional film, we are to some degree aware that the performances on the screen are the results of the actors' skills and decisions. When we use the phrase "larger than life" to describe an effective performance, we seem to be tacitly acknowledging the actor's deliberate craft. In analyzing a particular film, it is usually necessary to go beyond assumptions about realism and consider the functions and purposes which the actor's craft serves.

Acting: Functions and motivation. In 1985 a considerable controversy arose in Hollywood because Steve Martin was not nominated for an Academy Award for his acting in *All of Me*. In that film, Martin portrays a man whose body is suddenly inhabited on the right side by the soul of a woman who has just died. Martin used sudden changes of voice, along with acrobatic pantomime, to suggest a "split" body. His performance is not realistic in the narrow sense, since the situation he portrays could not exist in the real world. Yet in the context of this fantasy-comedy, Martin's acting is not only virtuosic but completely appropriate.

In a film like *All of Me*, a more muted and superficially "realistic" performance would clearly be inappropriate to the context established by the genre, the film's narrative, and the overall mise-en-scene. This suggests that in order to determine the acting's functions, we need to determine overall



Fig. 6.52



Fig. 6.53



Fig. 6.54



Fig. 6.55

formal factors, such as narrative causality and genre conventions. In addition, if we want also to evaluate the actors' performances, we might set forth this criterion: If the actor looks and behaves in a manner *appropriate* to his or her character's *function* in the context of the film, the actor has given a good performance—whether or not he or she looks or behaves as a real person would.

As a first approximation, we can consider performance styles along two dimensions. The performance will be more or less *individualized*, and it will be more or less *stylized*. Often we have both in mind when we think of a "realistic" performance: It will create a unique character, and it will not seem too exaggerated or too underplayed. Yet less individualized and more stylized performances may also be appropriate to the context of a particular film's mise-en-scene.

Although we often think of good acting as creating highly individualized roles, many filmmaking traditions emphasize the creation of broader, more anonymous *types*. Classical Hollywood narrative was built upon ideologically stereotyped roles: the Irish cop on the beat, the black servant, the Jewish pawnbroker, the wisecracking waitress or showgirl. Through "typecasting," actors were selected and directed to conform to type. Often, however, skillful performers gave these conventions a freshness and vividness.

In the Soviet cinema of the 1920s, several directors used a similar principle, called *typage*. Here the actor was expected to portray a typical representative of a social class or historical movement. The opening of Eisenstein's *Strike* presents the cartoonish cliché of the top-hatted capitalist (Fig. 6.52), who will in the course of the film be contrasted with the earnest, resolute workers (Fig. 6.53).

Whether more or less "typed," the performance can also be located on a continuum of stylization. A long tradition of film acting strives for a resemblance to what is thought of as realistic behavior. This is often motivated by appealing to the character's psychological states. The introspective performances of Woody Allen and Diane Keaton in *Annie Hall* (Fig. 6.54), built around vague gestures and small changes of expression, suit a film about characters trying to define and articulate their feelings. More intense and explicit emotions dominate *Winchester 73*, in which James Stewart plays a man driven by a desire for revenge. Stewart's mild manner sometimes erupts into explosions of anger revealing him as on the brink of psychosis (Fig. 6.55).

Psychological motivation is less important in a film like *Trouble in Paradise*, a sophisticated comedy of manners in which the main concern is with more stereotypical characters in a comic situation. In Figure 6.56 two women competing for the same man pretend to be friendly. Their exaggerated smiles and polite gestures are amusing because we know that each is trying to deceive the other. Again, the performances are perfectly appropriate to the genre, narrative, and overall style of the film.

Comedy does not provide the only motivation for greater stylization. *Ivan the Terrible* is a film that heightens every element—music, costume, setting—to create a larger-than-life portrait of its hero. Nikolai Cherkasov's broad, abrupt gestures fit in perfectly with all of these other elements to create an overall unity of composition (Fig. 6.57).

Some films may combine different degrees of stylization. *Amadeus* contrasts a grotesque, giggling performance by Tom Hulce as Mozart with the reserved playing of Murray Abraham's suave Salieri. Here the acting sharpens the contrast between the older composer's decorous, boring music and the young man's irrepressible but offensive genius.

Films like *Caligari*, *Ivan the Terrible*, and *Amadeus* create stylized performances through extroversion and exaggeration. The director can also explore the possibilities of very muted performances. Compared to normal practice, highly restrained acting can seem quite stylized. Robert Bresson is noted for such restrained performances. Using nonprofessional actors and drilling them in the details of the characters' physical actions, Bresson makes his actors quite inexpressive by conventional standards. Although these performances often upset our expectations, we soon realize that such restraint focuses our attention on tiny gestures.

Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet go even further in this direction. Their *Not Reconciled* and *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* also utilize nonactors, and these players often speak their lines in a rather wooden fashion or simply have no lines at all. Straub and Huillet films invite us to consider the actors not as psychological beings but as reciters of written dialogue. We thus become actively aware of our own conventional expectations about film acting, and perhaps those expectations are broadened a bit.

Acting in the context of other techniques. By examining how an actor's performance functions in the context of the overall film, we can also notice how acting cooperates with other film techniques. For instance, the actor is always a graphic element in the film, but some films underline this fact. In *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, Conrad Veidt's dancelike portrayal of the somnambulist Cesare makes him blend in with the graphic elements of the setting. His body echoes the tilted tree trunks, his arms and hands their branches and leaves (Fig. 6.58). As we shall see in our examination of the history of film styles, the graphic design of this scene in *Caligari* typifies the systematic distortion characteristic of German Expressionism.

In *Breathless*, director Jean-Luc Godard juxtaposes Jean Seberg's face with a print of a Renoir painting (Fig. 6.59). We might think that Seberg is giving a wooden performance, for she simply poses in the frame and turns her head. Indeed, her acting in the entire film may seem flat and inexpressive. Yet her face and general demeanor are visually appropriate for her role, a rather mysterious American woman unfathomable to her Parisian boyfriend.

The context of a performance may also be shaped by the technique of film editing. Sometimes film acting is denigrated because its practitioners do not have to sustain a performance. In the theater, the actor must be able to give a single, often lengthy presentation of a character. But a film, because it is shot over a period of time, breaks that performance up into bits. This can work to the filmmaker's advantage, since these bits can be selected and combined to build up a performance in ways that could never be accomplished on the stage. Most simply, if a scene has been filmed in several shots, with alternate takes of each shot, the editor may select the best gestures and expressions and create a composite performance better than any one sus-



Fig. 6.56



Fig. 6.57



Fig. 6.58



Fig. 6.59

tained performance could be. Through the addition of sound and the combination with other shots, the performance can be built up still further. The director may simply tell an actor to widen his or her eyes and stare offscreen. If the next shot shows a hand with a gun, we are likely to think the actor is depicting fear. As we will see in more detail in Chapter 8, editing plays a key role in shaping a performance.

Camera techniques also create a controlling context for acting. Film acting, as most viewers know, differs from theatrical acting. At first glance, that suggests that cinema always calls for more “underplaying,” since the camera can closely approach the actor. But actually cinema calls for a stronger interplay between restraint and emphasis.

In a theater, we are usually at a considerable distance from the actor on the stage. We certainly can never get as close to the theater actor as the camera can put us in a film. In watching a film, however, we are not necessarily seeing close views of the actor at every moment. The camera can be at *any* distance from the figure. Filmed from very far away, the actor is a dot on the screen—much tinier than an actor on stage seen from the back of the balcony. Filmed from very close, the actor’s tiniest eye movement may be revealed.

Thus the film actor must behave differently than the stage actor does, but not always by being more restrained. Rather, she or he must be able to adjust to each type of camera distance. If the actor is far from the camera, he or she will have to gesture broadly or move around to be seen as acting at all. But, if the camera and actor are inches apart, a twitch of a mouth muscle will come across clearly. In between these extremes, there is a whole range of adjustments to be made.

Basically, a scene can concentrate on either the actor’s facial expression or on pantomimic gestures of the body. Clearly, the closer the actor is to the camera, the more the facial expression will be visible and the more important it will be (although the filmmaker may choose to concentrate on another part of the body, excluding the face and emphasizing gesture). But if the actor is far away from the camera, or turned to conceal the face, his or her gestures become the center of the performance.

Thus both the staging of the action and the camera’s distance from it determine how we will see the actors’ performances. Many shots in Bernardo Bertolucci’s *The Spider’s Stratagem* show the two main characters from a distance, so that their manner of walking, combined with such details as the stiff, upright way in which the heroine holds her parasol, constitute the actors’ performances in the scene (Fig. 6.60). In conversation scenes, however, we see their faces clearly, as in Figure 6.61.

Turning back to some earlier examples, we see that in Figure 6.6, the actors are placed at either side of the garden, far back from the camera. The actors are so distant in Figure 6.11 that we see each one only as part of a moving crowd. Figures 6.20, 6.32, 6.48, 6.57, and 6.58 are all shots in which bodily behavior rather than facial expression forms the basis for the acting. Contrast these with Figures 6.14, 6.22, 6.33, 6.35, 6.37, 6.38, 6.49, 6.53, 6.55, and 6.56, where the faces are close enough for small changes to be visible. A performance typically combines facial expression with bodily ges-



Fig. 6.60



Fig. 6.61

ture, as is evident in Figure 6.61; see also Figures 6.13, 6.31, 6.49, 6.53, 6.54, 6.55, and 6.56. In Figure 6.27, small gestures become crucial.

Such factors of context are particularly important when the performers are not actors, or even human beings. Framing, editing, and other film techniques can make trained animals give appropriate performances. Jonesy, the cat in *Aliens*, seems threatening because his hissing movement has been emphasized by lighting, framing, editing, and the sound track (Fig. 6.62). In animated films, the filmmaker's manipulation must go farther, as in Ladislav Starevich's *Mascot*. There a conversation between a devil and a thief includes subtle facial expressions and gestures, all created through the frame-by-frame manipulation of puppets (Fig. 2.12).

As with every element of a film, acting offers an unlimited range of quite distinct possibilities. It cannot be judged on a universal scale that is separate from the concrete context of the entire film's form.



Fig. 6.62

MISE-EN-SCENE IN SPACE AND TIME

Setting, costume, lighting, and figure expression and movement—these are the components of mise-en-scene. Yet one element seldom appears in isolation. Each usually combines with others to create a specific system in every film. The general formal principles of unity, disunity, similarity, difference, and development will guide us in analyzing how specific elements of mise-en-scene can function together. What are some ways in which mise-en-scene affects our attention? What pulls our eye to a portion of the frame at a given moment?

Most basically, our visual system is attuned to perceiving *change*, both in time and space. Our eyes and brains are better suited for noticing differences than for concentrating on uniform, prolonged stimuli. Thus aspects of mise-en-scene will attract our attention by means of changes in light, shape, movement, and other aspects of the image.

Moreover, looking is purposeful; what we look *at* is guided by our assumptions and expectations about what to look *for*. These, in turn, are based upon our previous experiences of artworks and of the real world. In viewing a film image, we make hypotheses on the basis of many factors.

One general factor is the total organization of the film's form. In a narrative film, characters and their actions offer strong cues. If a shot shows a crowd, we will tend to scan it looking for a character we recognize from earlier scenes. Similarly, sound can become an important factor controlling our attention. As we shall see in Chapter 9, sound can draw attention to areas of the image in various ways. Written language can also shape the viewer's expectations, as when an intertitle cues us what to look for in the next shot. In what follows, we shall concentrate on another source of hypotheses: the elements and patterns in the mise-en-scene itself. Mise-en-scene contains a host of purely spatial and temporal factors to guide our expectations and hence shape our viewing of the image.

■ SPACE

We already know that cinema is involved with different sorts of space. The image projected on a screen is flat, of course, and it displays a composition within a frame, just as a still photograph or a painting would. The arrangement of the mise-en-scene creates the composition of the *screen space*. That two-dimensional composition consists of the organization of shapes, textures, and patterns of light and dark. In most films, though, the composition also represents a *three-dimensional space* in which the action occurs. Since the image projected on the screen is flat, the mise-en-scene must give the audience cues that will enable us to infer the three-dimensionality of the scene. The filmmaker uses mise-en-scene to guide our attention across the screen, shaping our sense of the space that is represented and emphasizing certain parts of it.

In cinema, our vision is attuned to changes of several kinds: *movement*, *color differences*, *balance of distinct components*, and *variations in size*. Our sensitivity to these changes allows the filmmaker to direct our notice across the two-dimensional space of the frame.

Almost invariably, a *moving* item draws our attention more quickly than a static item does. We are sensitive to even the slightest activity within the frame. Normally, for instance, we ignore the movement of scratches and dust on a film. But in David Rimmer's *Watching for the Queen*, in which the first image is an absolutely static photograph (Fig. 6.63), the jumping bits of dust on the film draw our attention.

In Figure 6.64 (from Yasujiro Ozu's *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*), many items compete for our attention. But the moment that a scrap of newspaper flaps, it immediately attracts the eye because it is the only motion in the frame. When several moving elements appear on the screen, as in a ballroom dance, we are likely to shift our attention among them, according to other cues or depending on our expectations about which one is most salient to the narrative action. In Figure 6.65, from John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*, Lincoln is moving much less than the dancers we see in front of him. Yet he is framed centrally; he is the major character; and the dancers pass rapidly through the frame. As a result, we are likely to concentrate on his gestures and facial expressions, however slight they might be compared to the energetic action in the foreground.

The filmmaker, like the painter, can also exploit principles of *color contrast* to shape our sense of screen space. For instance, bright colors set against a more subdued background are likely to draw the eye. Jiří Menzel exploits this principle in *Larks on a String*, where the junkyard setting provides earthy grays and blacks against which the characters' lighter clothes stand out sharply (Color Plate 30).

Another pertinent principle is that when lightness values are equal, "warm" colors in the red-orange-yellow range tend to attract attention, while "cool" colors like purple and green are less prominent. In Yilmaz Güney's *Yol*, for example, the setting and the characters' outfits are already quite warm in hue, but the hot pink vest of the man in the central middle ground helps make him the primary object of attention (Color Plate 31).



Fig. 6.63



Fig. 6.64



Fig. 6.65

Sometimes the filmmaker will treat color design in terms of what painters call a “limited palette.” This involves a few noncontrasting colors, perhaps along with white, browns, grays, and black. An extreme example of a limited palette is Jan Lenica’s animated film *A*, which uses fine-point black and white before enlivening its absurd comedy with the brief appearance of pastel flowers (Color Plate 32).

The limited palette allows the viewer to make finer distinctions of intensity or saturation in the composition. Our earlier example from Fellini’s *Casanova* (Color Plate 15) uses various shades of red. A limited palette drawing on the cooler end of the spectrum is seen in Peter Greenaway’s *The Draughtsman’s Contract* (Color Plate 33).

An extreme use of the “limited palette” principle is sometimes called *monochromatic* color design. Here the filmmaker emphasizes a single color, varied only in purity or lightness. We have already seen an example of monochromatic mise-en-scene in the white-on-white scene of *THX 1138* (Color Plate 16). A more common usage can be found in 1970s and 1980s action films, which often envelop battle sequences in a silver or blue-gray haze. (See Color Plate 34, from Tsui Hark’s *A Better Tomorrow III*). In a monochromatic design, even the slightest fleck of a contrasting color will catch the viewer’s attention. The color design of *Aliens* is dominated by metallic tones, so even a dingy yellow can mark the stilllike loader as an important prop within the narrative (Color Plate 35).

Black-and-white films also rely on our sensitivity to changes in tonalities. The colors of setting, costumes, lighting, and figures register on the film in shades of black, white, and gray. The differences among these provide cues for us as we scan the image. Usually lighter shapes leap to our notice while darker ones recede. Note how in Figure 6.66, from Pudovkin’s *Mother*, your eye concentrates on the man’s face rather than on the darkness surrounding it. The same principle works in Figures 6.31 through 6.38. All things being equal, if several light areas compete in the composition (Figs. 6.54 and 6.59), we will tend to shift our attention back and forth. Dark shapes may become prominent, however, if they are clearly defined and placed against a light background. In Figure 6.58, the actor and the trees draw our eyes instantly because they stand out so starkly from the lighter area.

Compositional *balance* refers to the extent to which the areas of screen space have equally distributed masses and points of interest. Filmmakers often assume that the spectator will concentrate more on the upper half of the frame (probably because in most shots that is where characters’ faces are placed). Thus because of viewers’ prior expectations the upper half needs less “filling up” than the lower.

Since the film shot is composed within a horizontal rectangle, the director usually takes care to balance the left and right halves. The extreme type of such balancing is bilateral symmetry. In the wedding banquet of *Ivan the Terrible*, Eisenstein stages the action symmetrically (Fig. 6.67). A more grandiose example is the battle scene of Chen Kaige’s *Life on a String* (Color Plate 36).

More common than such near-perfect symmetry is a loose balancing of



Fig. 6.66



Fig. 6.67



Fig. 6.68



Fig. 6.69



Fig. 6.70



Fig. 6.71

the shot's left and right regions. The simplest way to achieve compositional balance is to center the frame on the human body. Filmmakers often place a single figure at the center of the frame and minimize distracting elements at the sides, as in Figure 6.68, from *The Rules of the Game*. Many of our earlier illustrations display this sort of balance (for example, Figs. 6.14, 6.35, 6.37, and 6.40). Other shots may balance two or more elements, encouraging our eye to move back and forth as in Figure 6.69, also from *The Rules of the Game*. (For other examples, see Figs. 6.38, 6.56, and 6.59.) The balance can be roughly equal, as in Figure 6.56, or more unequal. In Figure 6.48 we will most likely pick out the two standing men first, since they are at the center, before we notice the crouching villagers at the far left. These examples suggest that compositional balance helps shape our expectations about where significant action will be located on the screen.

Balanced composition is the norm, but unbalanced shots can also strongly govern our sense of screen space. A mild example comes from Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, which emphasizes the father's new job by massing most of the composition on the right (Fig. 6.70). A bolder example comes from Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il Grido* (Fig. 6.71). Instead of balancing the husband and wife, the composition centers the husband. If there were no tree in the frame, the shot would be somewhat weighted to the right side, but the unexpected vertical of the tree trunk makes that side even heavier. In Chapter 8, we will see how editing can balance two relatively unbalanced compositions.

Our vision's effort to monitor differences also affects our sense of on-screen size. Looking at a static shot, we will register the larger shapes first and then discriminate smaller ones. In Figure 6.11, the huge pillars and statues of the Babylon set contribute more to our sense of the overall composition than do either the individual actors or the light and dark patches on the steps near the bottom. In Figure 6.31 we are likely to look first at the actor's face and the paper he holds, rather than at the small white labels on the file drawers—even though the labels are just as bright and in the same centered area of the screen. Nevertheless movement, color, or balance can override size as a compositional cue and can draw our attention quickly to very small areas of the screen. For example, if one of the file-drawer labels suddenly fluttered to the floor, we would almost certainly notice it.

Such compositional qualities do not only guide our attention across the flat screen space. In virtually all films, mise-en-scene functions to suggest a three-dimensional space, abstract or representational, real or fictitious.

The factors in the image which help create such a sense of space are broadly called *depth cues*. There is no real space extending behind the screen, of course, but depth cues prompt us to imagine that space, to construct a three-dimensional world in which the film's action takes place. Again, we develop our understanding of depth cues from our experience of space in the real world and from conventions of space in such arts as painting and theater. In cinema, depth cues are largely provided by lighting, setting, costumes, and figure behavior.

The depth cues suggest that a space has both *volume* and several distinct *planes*. When we speak of an object as having volume, we mean that it is

solid and occupies a three-dimensional area. A film suggests volume by shape, shading, and movement. In Figures 6.59 and 6.72 (the latter from Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*), we do not think of the actors' faces as flat cutouts, like paper dolls. The shapes of those heads and shoulders suggest solid people. The attached shadows on the faces suggest the curves and recesses of the actors' features and give a modeling effect. We assume that if the actor in Figure 6.59 turned her head, we would see a profile. Thus we use our knowledge of objects in the world to discern volume in filmic space.

An abstract film, because it can use shapes that are not everyday objects, can create compositions without a sense of volume. The shapes in Figure 6.73, a frame from Norman McLaren's *Begone, Dull Care*, give us no depth cues for volume—they are unshaded, do not have a recognizable shape, and do not move in such a way as to reveal new views which suggest roundness.

Depth cues also pick out *planes* within the image. Planes are the layers of space occupied by persons or objects. Planes run into depth, from foreground through middle ground to background.

Only a completely blank screen has a single plane. Whenever a shape—even an abstract one—appears, we will perceive it as being in front of a background. In Figure 6.73, the four dark S shapes are actually painted right on the frame surface along with the lighter, textured area. Yet the textured area seems to be behind the four shapes. The space here has only two planes, as in an abstract painting. This example suggests that one of the most basic depth cues is *overlap* of edges. The curling S shapes have edges which overlap the background plane, block our vision of it, and thus seem to be closer to us.

Through overlap a great many planes can be defined. Color Plate 21, from Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise*, displays three distinct planes: the background of fashion cutouts, the woman's face that overlaps that background, and her hand which overlaps her lower face. In the three-point lighting approach, "edge-lighting" accentuates the overlap of planes by emphasizing the contour of the object, thus sharply distinguishing it from the background. (See again Figs. 6.33, 6.38, and 6.40.)

Color differences also create overlapping planes. Because cool or pale colors tend to recede, filmmakers commonly use them for background planes such as setting. Similarly, because warm or saturated colors tend to come forward, such hues are often employed for costumes or other foreground elements. In Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* (Color Plate 37), the heroine's dress has very warm and fairly saturated colors, making it stand out distinctly against the pale background. (See also Color Plates 9, 12, 13, and 35.)

Animated films can achieve brighter and more saturated color than most live-action filming, so depth effects can be correspondingly more vivid. In Chuck Jones's *One Froggy Evening* (Color Plate 38), the luminous yellow of the umbrella and the frog's brilliant green skin make him stand out against the darker red of the curtain and the earth tones of the stage floor. In Color Plate 39, from *Bambi*, spatial layers are defined by contrasting pastels and darker hues: light yellow in the foreground, then pure black and white for the skunk, then milder pastels for the flowers behind him, and finally darker green and black for the backgrounds.



Fig. 6.72



Fig. 6.73

Because of the eye's sensitivity to differences, even quite muted color contrasts can suggest three-dimensional space. In *L'Argent* (Color Plates 6–8) Bresson uses a limited, cool palette and relatively flat lighting. Yet the compositions pick out several planes by means of overlapping slightly different masses of black, tan, and light blue. Our shot from *Casanova* (Color Plate 15) articulates planes by means of slightly differing shades of red. In the *Draughtsman's Contract* example (Color Plate 33), much of our sense of distant space is created by strong black verticals and by horizontal strips of various shades of green. Together these colors define distinct layers in the scene.

Color Plate 22, from *La Chinoise*, suggests another depth-producing factor: the *movement* of the cigarette smoke in the foreground. In cinema, movement is one of the most important depth cues, since it strongly suggests both planes and volumes. Note also the *cast shadow* in the background of Color Plate 22, which is another depth cue.

Aerial perspective, or the hazing of more distant planes, is yet another depth cue. Typically, our visual system assumes that sharper outlines, clearer textures, and purer colors belong to foreground elements. In landscape shots, the blurring and graying of distant planes can be caused by actual atmospheric haze, as in Güney's *The Wall* (Color Plate 40). Even when such haze is a minor factor, our vision typically assigns strong color contrasts to the foreground, as in the *Sambizanga* shot (Color Plate 37). In addition, very often lighting is manipulated in conjunction with lens focus to blur the background planes. In Michael Curtiz's *Charge of the Light Brigade*, for example, aerial perspective is artificially created through diffused lighting of the background and a lack of clear focus (Fig. 6.74).

In Figure 6.75, from Straub and Huillet's *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, the mise-en-scene provides several depth cues: overlap of edges, cast shadows, and *size diminution*. That is, figures and objects farther away from us are seen to get proportionally smaller; the smaller the figure appears, the farther away we believe it to be. This reinforces our sense of there being a deep space with considerable distances between the various planes.

The same illustration dramatically displays *linear perspective*. We will consider perspective relations in more detail in the next chapter, since they derive as much from properties of the camera lens as they do from mise-en-scene. For now, we can simply note that a strong impression of depth emerges when parallel lines converge at a distant vanishing point. Figure 6.75 illustrates *off-center* linear perspective, where the vanishing point is not the geometrical center. Color Plate 33, from *The Draughtsman's Contract*, exemplifies *central* perspective.

In many of the examples already given, you may have noticed that mise-en-scene serves not simply to direct our attention to foreground elements but rather to create a dynamic relation between foreground and background. In Color Plates 21 and 22, for instance, Godard keeps our attention on the whole composition by using prominent backgrounds. In Color Plate 21, the pictures behind the actress's head lead us to scan the various small shapes quickly, while the bright red wall in Color Plate 22 comes forward strongly, making us aware of the background even if we concentrate on the actor's face.



Fig. 6.74



Fig. 6.75

The last two instances both exemplify *shallow-space* compositions. In such shots, the mise-en-scene suggests comparatively little depth, and the closest and most distant planes seem only slightly separated. The opposite tendency is *deep-space* composition, in which a significant distance seems to separate planes. Our earlier example from *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (Fig. 6.75) exemplifies deep-space mise-en-scene. Often a director creates a deep-space composition by making the foreground plane quite large and the background plane quite distant, as Wajda does in several scenes of *Ashes and Diamonds* (Fig. 6.76).

“Shallow” and “deep” mise-en-scene are relative terms. Most compositions present a moderately deep space, falling in between the extremes we have just considered. Sometimes a composition will present a relatively deep space but then control depth cues in order to flatten it. For example, Leos Carax’s shallow space in *Boy Meets Girl* makes his foreground figure seem to blend into the advertisement on the wall behind (Fig. 6.77).

At this point, you might want to return to shots illustrated earlier in this chapter. You will notice that these images use depth cues of overlap, movement, cast shadows, aerial perspective, size diminution, and linear perspective to create distinctive foreground/background relations.

The fact that our vision is sensitive to differences allows filmmakers to guide our understanding of the mise-en-scene. All the cues to story space interact with one another, working to emphasize narrative elements, direct our attention, and set up dynamic relations among areas of screen space. We can see this interaction clearly in two shots from Carl Dreyer’s *Day of Wrath*.

In the first shot, the heroine Anne is standing before a grillwork panel (Fig. 6.78). She is not speaking, but since she is a major character in the film, the narrative already directs us to her. Setting, lighting, costume, and figure expression create pictorial cues that confirm our expectations. The setting yields a screen pattern of horizontal and vertical lines which intersect in the delicate curves of Anne’s face and shoulders. The lighting yields a patch of brightness on the right half of the frame and a patch of darkness on the left, creating pictorial balance. Anne is the meeting point of these two areas. Her face becomes modeled by the relatively strong key lighting from the right, a little top lighting on her hair, and relatively little fill light. Coordinated with the lighting in creating the pattern of light and dark is Anne’s costume—a black dress punctuated by white collar, a black cap edged with white—which again emphasizes her face.

The shot is comparatively shallow, displaying two major planes with little distance between them. The background sets off the more important element, Anne. The rigid geometrical grid in the rear makes Anne’s slightly sad face the most expressive element in the frame, thus encouraging our eye to pause there. In addition, the composition divides the screen space horizontally, with the grid pattern running across the top half and the dark, severe vertical of Anne’s dress dominating the lower half. As is common, the upper zone is the stronger because the character’s head and shoulders occupy it. Anne’s figure is positioned slightly off center, but with her face turned so as to compensate for the vacant area on the right. (Imagine how unbalanced the



Fig. 6.76



Fig. 6.77



Fig. 6.78



Fig. 6.79

shot would look if she were turned to face us squarely and the same amount of space were left empty on the right.) Thus compositional balance reinforces the shot's emphasis on Anne's expression. In all, without using motion, Dreyer has channeled our attention through the lines and shapes, the lights and darks, and the foreground and background relations in the mise-en-scene.

In the second example, Dreyer coaxes our attention into a to-and-fro movement (Fig. 6.79). Again, the plot guides us, since the characters and the cart are crucial narrative elements. Sound helps too, since Martin is at the moment explaining to Anne what the cart is used for. But mise-en-scene also plays a role. Size diminution and cast shadows establish basic foreground/background relations, with Anne and Martin on the front plane and the cart of wood in the background. The space is comparatively deep (though the foreground is not as exaggeratedly close as that in *Ashes and Diamonds*, Fig. 6.76). The prominence of the couple and the cart is reinforced by line, shape, and lighting contrasts. The figures are defined by hard edges and by dark costumes within the predominantly bright setting. Unlike most shots, this puts the human figures in the lower half of the frame, which gives that zone an unusual importance. The composition thus creates a vertical balance, counterweighting the cart with the couple. This encourages us to glance up and down between the two objects of our attention.

Similar processes are at work in color films. In one shot of Yasujiro Ozu's *An Autumn Afternoon* (Color Plate 41), our attention is concentrated on the woman in the center foreground. Here many depth cues are at work. Overlap locates the two figures in two foreground planes, setting them against a series of more distant planes. Aerial perspective makes the tree foliage somewhat out of focus. Movement creates depth when the bride lowers her head. Perspective diminution makes the more distant objects smaller. The figure and the bright silver, red, and gold bridal costume stand out strikingly against the muted, cool colors of the background planes. Moreover, the colors bring back a red-and-silver motif that began in the very first shot of the film (Color Plate 42).

In all these cases, compositional elements and depth cues have functioned to focus our attention on the narrative elements. But this need not always be the case. Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac* uses a limited palette of dark and metallic hues, and warmer colors tend to stand out. In one scene (Color Plate 43), a group of conversing knights is centered and balanced in the foreground planes. Yet a pale purple saddle blanket on a passing horse momentarily draws our eyes *away* from this action. Such a "distracting" use of color becomes a stylistic motif in the film.

■ TIME

So far we have examined some spatial factors that guide our viewing of an image. In addition, both the shot and our viewing of it take place in time.

As we will see in more detail when we consider editing (Chapter 8), the filmmaker decides how long the shot will last on the screen. Within the confines of the shot's duration, the director can control the rhythm of time as it unfolds. Although the issue of rhythm in cinema is enormously complex

and still not well understood, we can say roughly that it involves, at least, a *beat* or pulse, a pace (what musicians call *tempo*), and a pattern of *accents*, or stronger and weaker beats.

We are most familiar with these factors in the filming of dance. When Fred Astaire or Ann Miller performs, the bodily movements obey strongly patterned rhythms. We should recognize, though, that any movement within the *mise-en-scene* may involve the same rhythmic components. Movement on the screen can have a distinctive visual beat, such as the flashing of a neon sign or the steady rocking of a ship. Movement can also have a marked pace, such as the acceleration of a car in a chase scene. And visual movement can create distinctive, accented instants as well.

These factors combine to create a sense of the shot's overall rhythm. In Figure 6.80, from Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, the protagonist simply prepares a meal. This feminist film emphasizes the daily routine of a Belgian housewife, and many of its shots show small movements carried out slowly. Because there are no competing movements on the screen, her gestures create accented moments. Overall, the film's rhythm concentrates attention on minute variations in her habits.

A far busier shot is Figure 6.81, from Busby Berkeley's *42nd Street*. Here we find strongly opposed movements. The central and outer rings of dancers circle in one direction, while the second ring turns in a contrary direction. The dancers also swing strips of shiny cloth back and forth. The result is a partially abstract composition, emphasized by a steady beat, rapid tempo, and strong accents—all appropriate to the shot's placement as part of a musical number.

The dancers in *42nd Street* are synchronized to a considerable degree, but Figure 6.82, from Tati's *Play Time*, contains movements of differing speeds, with different visual accents. Moreover, they occur on different planes and follow contrasting trajectories. These diverse movements accord with Tati's tendency to cram his compositions with gags which compete for our attention.

As we have already seen, we scan any film frame for information. This scanning brings time sharply into play. Only a very short shot forces us to try to take in the image all at once. In most shots we get an initial overall impression that creates formal expectations. These expectations are quickly modified as our eye roams around the frame.

Once again, our scanning of the shot is strongly affected by the presence of movement. A static composition, such as our first shot from *Day of Wrath* (Fig. 6.78), may keep pulling our attention back to a single element (here, Anne's face). By contrast, a composition emphasizing movement becomes more "time-bound" because our glance may be directed from place to place by various speeds, directions, and rhythms of movements. In the second image from *Day of Wrath* (Fig. 6.79) Anne and Martin are turned from us (so that expression and gesture are minimized), and they are standing still. Thus the single movement in the frame—the cart—catches our attention. But when Martin speaks and turns, we look back at the couple, then back at the cart, and so on, in a shuttling, dynamic shift of attention. In such ways *mise-en-scene* can control not only *what* we look at but also *when* we look at it.



Fig. 6.80

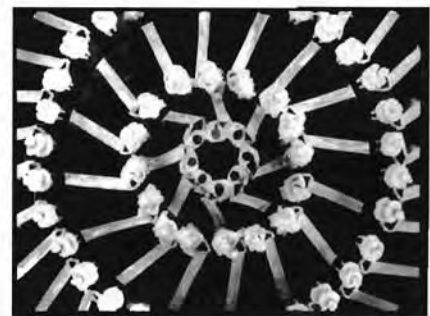


Fig. 6.81



Fig. 6.82

Our time-bound process of scanning involves not only looking to and fro across the screen but also, in a sense, looking “into” its depths. A deep-space composition will often use background events to create expectations about what is about to happen in the foreground. “Composing in depth isn’t simply a matter of pictorial richness,” British director Alexander Mackendrick has remarked. “It has value in the narrative of the action, the pacing of the scene. Within the same frame, the director can organize the action so that preparation for what will happen next is seen in the background of what is happening now.”

In one scene of *La Terra trema*, Luchino Visconti’s deep-space composition prepares us for activity in the left foreground by having women in the family come forward to stare at the picture hanging there (Figs. 6.83, 6.84). Kenji Mizoguchi appeals to a different principle in *Naniwa Elegy*. Here, at the height of the drama, the heroine moves *away* from us, into depth. As she passes through patches of distant darkness, our curiosity about her emotional state intensifies (Figs. 6.85, 6.86).

Another fairly straightforward way to guide the viewer’s attention over time is to adjust *frontality* of figure placement. All other things being equal, the viewer expects that more story information will come from a character’s face than from a character’s back. The viewer’s attention will thus usually pass over figures which are turned away and fasten on figures which are positioned frontally. We have already seen this cue at work in our second still from *Day of Wrath* (Fig. 6.79), as well as in our *Vampires* examples (Figs.



Fig. 6.83



Fig. 6.84



Fig. 6.85



Fig. 6.86



Fig. 6.87



Fig. 6.88



Fig. 6.89



Fig. 6.90



Fig. 6.91

6.15, 6.16, p. 175). In *La Terra trema* (Fig. 6.87), this deep-space composition favors the far background plane by turning the foreground and middleground figures away from the viewer. This shifts our attention to the most frontally positioned characters, even though they are the most distant. In our *Vaniwa Elegy* examples (Figs. 6.85, 6.86), both figures are turned from us, so other cues, such as the centrality and movement, drive our attention to the woman.

The frontality cue can shift the viewer's attention according to what the filmmaker wants to stress. At one point in a conversation in *The Bad and the Beautiful*, our attention is fastened on the studio executive on the right because the other two characters are turned away from us (Fig. 6.88). But when the producer turns to the camera, his centered position and the frontality of his posture emphasize him (Fig. 6.89). A more striking instance occurs in *L'Avventura*, when the characters alternate turning their backs on the camera (Figs. 6.90, 6.91). Like movements through a lighted volume and the filling of empty zones, the frontality cue shows mise-en-scene's indebtedness to theatrical staging.

As a set of techniques, mise-en-scene helps compose the film shot in space and time. Setting, lighting, costume, and figure behavior interact to create patterns of movement, of color and depth, line and shape, light and dark. These patterns define and develop the space of the story world and emphasize salient story information. The director's use of mise-en-scene not only guides our perception from moment to moment but also helps create the overall form of the film.

NARRATIVE FUNCTIONS OF MISE-EN-SCENE: *OUR HOSPITALITY*

Up to now we have looked at the general stylistic possibilities offered by mise-en-scene. Its potential for creating graphic compositions is vital to the abstract film, and can be useful as well to the other types of formal organization. Categorical, rhetorical, and associational films use mise-en-scene to guide our attention, our understanding, and our inferences about what we see. The rest of this chapter considers how mise-en-scene can function in narrative films.

In order to understand story information presented to us in a narrative film, we must perform such activities as comparing locales, identifying characters by their appearances, and noticing salient gestures as the mise-en-scene presents them to us. Many motifs that recur in the course of the plot's unfolding are visual elements of the mise-en-scene, and such motifs can contribute significantly to the fundamental formal principles of the film's overall organization: its unity and its patterns of similarity, difference, and development.

Mise-en-scene contributes to the plot action, of course, because events we see directly constitute the plot. But elements of mise-en-scene can also imply story information. If a detective discovers a corpse, we may imagine the murder. If a woman tells a friend about an important event in her past and shows the friend a picture of her parents, the picture contributes information about earlier story events not dramatized in the film. Similarly, mise-en-scene can help present a more or less restricted narration. This may go to an extreme, as when all the mise-en-scene elements of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* show us the distorted outlook of a madman's subjective vision (see Figs. 6.1 and 6.58). Few films go this far, but many occasionally show us something only one character knows about, thus restricting our knowledge to that character's visual subjectivity—as when we see the words written in a diary or letter, or a view from a window.

Mise-en-scene cues our expectations about narrative events. If we watch someone hide a box of jewelry early in the story, we wait to see if someone will eventually discover it. Such expectations often depend on genre conventions: A bakery full of pies in a slapstick comedy suggests that a sticky fight will break out at some point; a piano tucked away in the corner of a room in a Judy Garland–Mickey Rooney musical will almost certainly be played to accompany a song. But there are no hard-and-fast rules, and a narrative film may also frequently surprise us with unconventional mise-en-scene.

Mise-en-scene functions not only in isolated moments, but in relation to the narrative organization of the entire film. *Our Hospitality*, like most of Buster Keaton's films, exemplifies how mise-en-scene can economically advance the narrative and create a pattern of motifs. Since the film is a comedy, the mise-en-scene also creates gags. *Our Hospitality*, then, exemplifies what we will find in our study of every film technique: An individual element almost always has *several* functions, not just one.

Consider, for example, how the settings function within the plot of *Our Hospitality*. For one thing, they help divide the film into scenes and to contrast those scenes. The film begins with a prologue showing how the feud between the McKays and the Canfields results in the deaths of the young Canfield and the husband of the McKay family. We see the McKays living in a shack and are left in suspense about the fate of the baby, Willie. Willie's mother flees with her son from their southern home to the North (action narrated to us mainly by an intertitle).

The plot skips over several years to begin the main action, with the grown-up Willie living in New York. There are a number of gags concerning early nineteenth-century life in the metropolis, contrasting sharply with the prologue scene. We are led to wonder how this locale will relate to the

southern scenes, and soon Willie receives word that he has inherited his parents' home in the South. A series of amusing short scenes follows as he takes a primitive train back to his birthplace. During these scenes Keaton uses real locales, but by laying out the railroad tracks in different ways, he exploits the landscapes for surprising and unusual comic effects we shall examine shortly.

The rest of the film deals with Willie's movements in and around the southern town. On the day of his arrival he wanders around and gets into a number of comic situations. That night he stays in the Canfield house itself. Finally, an extended chase occurs the next day, moving through the countryside and back to the Canfield house for the settling of the feud. Thus the action depends heavily on shifts of setting that establish Willie's two journeys, as baby and as man, and later his wanderings to escape his enemies' pursuit. The narration is relatively unrestricted once Willie reaches the South, moving between him and members of the Canfield family. We usually know more about where they are than Willie does, and the narrative generates suspense by showing them coming toward the places where Willie is hiding.

Specific settings fulfill distinct narrative functions. The McKay "estate," which Willie envisions as a mansion, turns out to be a tumbledown shack. The McKay house is contrasted with the Canfields' palatial plantation home. In narrative terms the Canfield home gains even more functional importance when the Canfield father forbids his sons to kill Willie on the premises: "Our code of honor forbids us to shoot him while he is a guest in our house." (Once Willie overhears this, he determines *never* to leave.) Ironically the home of Willie's enemies becomes the only safe spot in town, and many scenes are organized around the Canfield brothers' attempts to lure Willie outside. At the end of the film another setting takes on significance: the landscape of meadows, mountains, river banks, rapids, and waterfalls across which the Canfields pursue Willie. Finally, the feud ends back in the Canfield house itself, with Willie now welcomed as the daughter's husband. The pattern of development is clear: from the opening shootout at the McKay house that breaks up Willie's home, to the final scene in the Canfield house with Willie becoming part of a new family. In such ways every setting becomes highly motivated by the narrative's system of causes and effects, parallels and contrasts, and overall development.

The same narrative motivation marks the film's use of costume. Willie is characterized as a city boy through his dandified suit, whereas the southern gentility of the elder Canfield is represented through his white planter's suit. Props become important here: Willie's suitcase and umbrella succinctly summarize his role as visitor and wanderer, and the Canfields' ever-present pistols remind us of their goals of continuing the feud. Note also that a change of costume (Willie's disguising himself as a woman) enables him to escape from the Canfield household. At the end, the putting aside of the various guns by the characters signals the end of the feud.

Like setting, lighting in *Our Hospitality* has both general and specific functions. The film systematically alternates scenes in darkness with scenes in daylight. The feuding in the prologue takes place at night; Willie's trip south and wanderings through the town occur in daylight; that night Willie



Fig. 6.92



Fig. 6.93



Fig. 6.94



Fig. 6.95



Fig. 6.96

comes to dinner at the Canfields' and stays as a guest; next day, the Canfields pursue him; and the film ends that night with the marriage of Willie and the Canfield daughter. More specifically, the bulk of the film is evenly lit in the three-point method. Yet the somber action of the prologue takes place in hard sidelighting. When the elder McKay flings off his hat to douse the lamp, the illumination changes from a soft blend of key, fill, and backlight to a stark key light from the fireplace (see Figs. 6.92 and 6.93). Later, the murder scene is played out in flashes of light—lightning, gunfire—which fitfully punctuate the overall darkness. Because this sporadic lighting hides part of the action from us, it helps build suspense. The gunshots themselves are seen only as flashes in the darkness, and we must wait to learn the outcome—the deaths of both opponents—until the next flash of lightning.

Most economically of all, virtually every bit of the behavior of the figures functions to support and advance the cause-effect chain of the narrative. The way Canfield sips and savors his julep establishes his southern ways; his southern hospitality in turn will not allow him to shoot a guest in his house. Similarly, Willie's every move expresses his diffidence or resourcefulness.

Even more concise is the way the film uses the arrangement of figures and setting in depth to present two narrative events simultaneously. While the engineer drives the locomotive, the other cars pass him on a parallel track (Fig. 6.94). In the same frame we see both cause (the engineer's cheerful ignorance, made visible by frontality) and effect (the runaway disconnected cars). Or, in another shot, the Canfield boys in the foreground make plans to shoot Willie, while in the background Willie overhears them (Fig. 6.95). In yet another shot, while Willie ambles along unsuspectingly in the background, one Canfield waits in the foreground to ambush him (Fig. 6.96). Thanks to depth in the spatial arrangement, Keaton is able to pack together two story events, resulting in a tight narrative construction and in a relatively unrestricted narration. In Figure 6.95, we know what Willie does and we expect that he will probably flee now that he understands the sons' plans. But in Figure 6.96, we are aware, as Willie is not, that danger lurks around the corner; suspense results, as we wonder whether the Canfield boys' ambush will succeed.

All of these devices for narrative economy considerably unify the film, but some other elements of mise-en-scene function as specific motifs. For one thing, there is the repeated squabble between the anonymous husband

and wife. On his way to his “estate,” Willie passes a husband throttling his wife. Willie intervenes to protect her; the wife proceeds to thrash Willie for butting in. On Willie’s way back, he passes the same couple, still fighting, but studiously avoids them. Nevertheless, the wife aims a kick at him as he passes. The mere repetition of the motif strengthens the film’s narrative unity, but it functions thematically, too, as another joke on the contradictions surrounding the idea of hospitality.

Other motifs recur. Willie’s first hat is too tall to wear in a jouncing railway coach. (When it gets crushed, he trades it for the familiar flat Keaton trademark hat.) Willie’s second hat serves to distract the Canfields when Willie coaxes his dog to fetch it. There is also a pronounced water motif in the film. Water as rain conceals from us the murders in the prologue and later saves Willie from leaving the Canfield home after dinner (“It would be the death of anyone to go out on a night like this!”). Water as a river functions significantly in the final chase. And water as a waterfall appears soon after Willie’s arrival in the South; after an explosion demolishes a dam, the water spills over a cliff and creates a waterfall (Fig. 6.97). This waterfall initially protects Willie by hiding him (Figs. 6.98, 6.99) but later threatens both him and the Canfield daughter as they are nearly swept over it (Fig. 6.105).

Two specific motifs of setting powerfully unify the narrative. First there is the recurrence of an embroidered sampler hanging on the Canfield wall: “Love Thy Neighbor.” It appears initially in the prologue of the film, when seeing it motivates Canfield’s attempt to stop the feud. It then plays a significant role in linking the ending back to the beginning. The sampler reappears at the end when Canfield, enraged that Willie has married his daughter, glances at the wall, reads the inscription, and resolves to halt the years of feuding. His change in attitude is motivated by the earlier appearance of the motif.

The film also uses gun racks as a motif. In the prologue each feuder goes to his mantelpiece to get his pistol. Later, when Willie arrives in town, the Canfields hurry to their gun rack and begin to load their pistols. Near the end of the film, when the Canfields return home after failing to find Willie, one of the sons notices that the gun rack is now empty. And in the final shot, when the Canfields accept the marriage and lay down their arms, Willie produces from all over his person a staggering assortment of pistols taken as a precaution from the Canfields’ own supply. Thus mise-en-scene motifs unify the film through their repetition, variation, and development.

Yet *Our Hospitality* is more than a film whose narrative system relates economically to patterns of mise-en-scene. It is a comedy, and one of the funniest. We should not be surprised to find, then, that Keaton uses mise-en-scene for gags. Indeed, so unified is the film that most of the elements that create narrative economy also function to yield comic effects.

The mise-en-scene bristles with many individually comic elements. Settings are exploited for amusement—the ramshackle McKay estate, the Broadway of 1830, the specially cut train tunnel that just fits the old-fashioned train and its smokestack (Fig. 6.100). Costume gags also stand out. Willie’s disguise as a woman is divulged by a gap in the rear of his skirt; later, Willie puts the same costume on a horse to distract the Canfields. Most



Fig. 6.97



Fig. 6.98



Fig. 6.99



Fig. 6.100



Fig. 6.101



Fig. 6.102



Fig. 6.103



Fig. 6.104

strongly, comedy arises from the behavior of the figures. The railroad engineer's high kick unexpectedly swipes off his conductor's hat (Fig. 6.101). (Keaton's father, Joe, played this role, and the gag was one of his famous vaudeville stunts.) The elder Canfield sharpens his carving knife with ferocious energy, just inches from Willie's head. When Willie lands at the bottom of the river, he stands there looking left and right, his hand shading his eyes, before he realizes where he is. Later, Willie scuds down the river, leaping out of the water like a fish and skidding across the rocks.

Perhaps the only aspect of mise-en-scene that competes with the comic brilliance of the figures' behavior is the film's use of deep space for gags. Many of the shots we have already examined function to create comedy as well: The engineer stands firmly oblivious to the separation of train cars from the engine (see Fig. 6.94) just as Willie is unaware that the Canfield boy is lurking murderously in the foreground (see Fig. 6.96).

Even more striking, though, is the deep-space gag that follows the demolition of the dam. The Canfield boys have been searching the town for Willie. In the meantime, Willie sits on a ledge, fishing. As the water bursts from the dam and sweeps over the cliff, it completely engulfs Willie (Fig. 6.98). At that very instant, the Canfield brothers step into the foreground from either side of the frame, still looking for their victim (Fig. 6.99). The water's concealment of Willie reduces him to a neutral background for the movement of the Canfields. This sudden eruption of new action into the scene surprises us, rather than generating suspense, since we were not aware that the Canfield sons were so close by. Here surprise is crucial to the comedy.

However appealing the individual gags are, *Our Hospitality* patterns its comic aspects as strictly as it does its other motifs. The film's journey pattern often arranges a series of gags according to a formal principle of theme and variations. For instance, during the train trip south, a string of gags is based on the idea of people encountering the train. Several people turn out to watch it pass, a tramp rides the rods, and an old man chucks rocks at the engine. Another swift series of gags takes the train tracks themselves as its "theme." The variations include a humped track, a donkey blocking the tracks, curled and rippled tracks, and finally no tracks at all.

But the most complex theme-and-variations series can be seen in the motif of "the fish on the line." Soon after Willie arrives in town, he is angling and hauls up a minuscule fish. Shortly afterward, a huge fish yanks him into the water (Fig. 6.102). Later in the film, through a series of mishaps, Willie becomes tied by a rope to one of the Canfield sons. Many gags arise from this umbilical-cord linkage, especially one that results in Canfield's being pulled into the water as Willie was earlier.

Perhaps the single funniest shot in the film occurs when Willie realizes that since the Canfield boy has fallen off the rocks (Fig. 6.103), so must he (Fig. 6.104). But even after Willie gets free of Canfield, the rope remains tied around his waist. So in the film's climax Willie is dangling from a log over the waterfall like the fish on the end of his fishing pole (Fig. 6.105). Here again, one element fulfills multiple functions. The fish-on-the-line device advances the narrative, becomes a motif unifying the film, and takes its place in a pattern of parallel gags involving variations of Willie on the rope.

In such ways *Our Hospitality* becomes an outstanding example of the integration of cinematic mise-en-scene with narrative form.

SUMMARY

The viewer who wants to study mise-en-scene should look for it systematically. Watch, first of all, for how setting, costume, lighting, and the behavior of the figures present themselves in a given film. As a start, try to trace only one sort of element—say, setting or lighting—through an entire film.

We should also reflect on the patterning of mise-en-scene elements. How do they function? How do they constitute motifs that weave their ways through the film? In addition, we should notice how mise-en-scene is patterned in space and time to attract and guide the viewer's attention through the process of watching the film, and to create suspense or surprise.

Finally, we should try to relate the system of mise-en-scene to the large-scale form of the film. Hard-and-fast prejudices about realism are of less value here than an openness to the great variety of mise-en-scene possibilities. Awareness of those possibilities will better help us to determine the functions of mise-en-scene.

NOTES AND QUERIES

■ ON THE ORIGINS OF MISE-EN-SCENE

As a concept, mise-en-scene reaches back into the nineteenth-century theater. For a historical introduction that is relevant to film, see Oscar G. Brockett and Robert R. Findlay, *Century of Innovation* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973). More specialized are Brooks McNamara, "The Scenography of Popular Entertainment," *The Drama Review* 18, 1 (March 1974): 16–24; and Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). The standard film work remains Nicolas Vardac, *Stage to Screen* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949).

■ ON REALISM IN MISE-EN-SCENE

Many film theorists have seen film as a realistic medium par excellence. For such theorists as Siegfried Kracauer, André Bazin, and V. F. Perkins, cinema's power lies in its ability to present a recognizable reality. The realist theorist thus often values authenticity in costume and setting, "naturalistic" acting, and unstylized lighting. "The primary function of decor," writes V. F. Perkins, "is to provide a believable environment for the action" [*Film as Film* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1972), p. 94]. André Bazin praises the Italian neorealist films of the 1940s for "faithfulness to everyday life in the scenario,



Fig. 6.105

truth to his part in an actor" [*What is Cinema?* vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 25].

Though mise-en-scene is always a product of selection and choice, the realist theorist may value the filmmaker who creates a mise-en-scene that *appears* to be reality. Kracauer suggests that even apparently "unrealistic" song and dance numbers in a musical can seem impromptu [*Theory of Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965)], and Bazin considers a fantasy film such as *The Red Balloon* realistic because here "what is imaginary on the screen has the spatial density of something real" [*What is Cinema?* vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 48].

These theorists, then, set the filmmaker the task of representing some historical, social, or aesthetic reality through the selection and arrangement of mise-en-scene. Though this book postpones the consideration of this problem—it lies more strictly in the domain of film theory—the "realist" controversy is worth your examination. For arguments against a realist theory of mise-en-scene, see Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), and Sergei Eisenstein, "An Unexpected Juncture," in Richard Taylor, ed., *Writings 1922–1934* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 115–122. Christopher Williams, in *Realism and the Cinema* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), reviews many issues in the area.

■ COMPUTER IMAGING AND MISE-EN-SCENE

In recent years, the filmmaker's control of mise-en-scene has been extended by means of computer technology. *Digital* computer animation uses a program that will itself create images. *Analog image synthesis* enables a full blend of live-action footage with computer-generated image transformations. A drawing, photograph, or videotape is scanned with a video camera, which yields an image that can be manipulated by computer. An object can be pulled out of the image and recolored, or even rotated or extended by being plotted through a series of movements. The resulting animation is rescanned onto a high-resolution television monitor, which is then filmed by a 35mm motion-picture camera. A general survey of these processes is offered by Neil Weinstock's *Computer Animation* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1986).

Another technique is *digital compositing*, utilized for the T-1000 cyborg in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Here a grid was painted on the actor's body, and the actor was filmed executing movements. As the film was scanned, the changing grid patterns were translated into a digital code similar to that used on compact discs. Then new actions could be created on the computer frame by frame. For a discussion, see Jody Duncan, "A Once and Future War," *Cinefex* 47 (August 1991): 4–59. Since *Terminator 2*, sophisticated software programs have enabled directors to create "actors" wholly from models which can be scanned into a computer and then animated. The most famous example is the gallimimus herd in *Jurassic Park*. The phases of the imaging process for this film are explained in Jody Duncan, "The Beauty in the Beasts," *Cinefex* 55 (August 1993): 42–95.

The combination of live-action filming with computer animation promises to make possible a fresh range of cinematic effects. Méliès's urge to

dazzle the audience with the magical powers of mise-en-scene continues to bear fruit.

■ PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF MISE-EN-SCENE

On costume, see Elizabeth Lees, *Costume Design in the Movies* (London: BCW, 1976), and Edward Maeder, ed., *Hollywood and History: Costume Design in Film* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987). Léon Barsacq, with careful assistance by Elliott Stein, has produced the best history of setting to date, *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions: A History of Film Design* (New York: New American Library, 1976). Other major studies of decor in the cinema are Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron, *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995), and Beverly Heisner, *Hollywood Art: Art Direction in the Days of the Great Studios* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1990). A special issue of *Film Comment* (May/June 1978) deals with the work of the art director. The memoirs of a major set designer who worked extensively with Jean Renoir have been published: Eugene Lourie's *My Work in Films* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985).

The most commonly discussed type of figure behavior is, as we might expect, acting. A wide-ranging analysis of performance in film is Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979). This book is complemented by Charles Affron, *Star Acting: Gish, Garbo, Davis* (New York: Dutton, 1977), and James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Michael Caine's *Acting in Film: An Actor's Take on Movie Making* (New York: Applause Books, 1990) offers excellent and detailed discussion; see also the accompanying videotape, *Michael Caine on Acting in Film*.

A fine survey of lighting is Kris Malkiewicz, *Film Lighting: Talks with Hollywood's Cinematographers and Gaffers* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1986). (Our quotation from Alexander Mackendrick on p. 198 comes from this book, p. 16.) John Alton's *Painting with Light* (New York: Macmillan, 1949) and Gerald Millerson's *Technique of Lighting for Television and Motion Pictures* (New York: Hastings House, 1972) are useful older discussions, with emphasis on classical Hollywood practices.

One of the cinema's masters of lighting, Josef von Sternberg, has much to say on the subject in his entertaining autobiography, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* (New York: Macmillan, 1965). Raoul Coutard discusses a different approach to lighting in "Light of Day," in Toby Mussmann, ed., *Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 232–239. Hollywood cinematographers recall their lighting experiments in Malkiewicz, mentioned above, and in Charles Higham, *Hollywood Cameramen* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970).

■ DEPTH

Art historians have long studied how a two-dimensional image can be made to suggest a deep space. A comprehensive introductory survey is William V.

Dunning, *Changing Images of Pictorial Space: A History of Spatial Illusion in Painting* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991). Dunning's history of Western painting emphasizes the manipulation of five techniques we have considered in this chapter: linear perspective, shading, the separation of planes, atmospheric perspective, and "color perspective."

Though film directors have of course manipulated the image's depth and flatness since the beginning of cinema, critical understanding of these spatial qualities did not emerge until the 1940s. It was then that André Bazin called attention to the fact that certain directors staged their shots in unusually deep space. Bazin singled out F. W. Murnau (for *Nosferatu* and *Sunrise*), Orson Welles (for *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*), William Wyler (for *The Little Foxes* and *The Best Years of Our Lives*), and Jean Renoir (for practically all of his 1930s work). Today we would add Kenji Mizoguchi (for *Osaka Elegy*, *Sisters of Gion*, and others) and even Sergei Eisenstein (for *Old and New*, *Ivan the Terrible*, and the unreleased *Bezhin Meadow*). By offering us depth and flatness as analytical categories, Bazin increased our understanding of mise-en-scene. (See "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," in *What is Cinema?* vol. 1.) Interestingly, Sergei Eisenstein, who is often contrasted with Bazin, explicitly discussed principles of deep-space staging in the 1930s, as recorded by his faithful pupil, Vladimir Nizhny, in *Lessons with Eisenstein* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1962). Eisenstein asked his class to stage a murder scene in a single shot and without camera movement; the result was a startling use of extreme depth and dynamic movement toward the spectator. For a discussion, see David Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), chaps. 4 and 6. A general discussion of deep space and deep focus is Charles Henry Harpole, *Gradients of Depth in the Cinema Image* (New York: Arno, 1978).

■ COLOR DESIGN

Two clear and readable discussions of color aesthetics in general are Luigina De Grandis, *Theory and Use of Color*, trans. John Gilbert (New York: Abrams, 1986), and Paul Zelanski and Mary Pat Fisher, *Colour for Designers and Artists* (London: Herbert Press, 1989).

Filmmakers have long considered color to be an important aspect of mise-en-scene, capable of furnishing motifs that will develop across the film. Believing that color evokes definite emotions, Rouben Mamoulian claimed that the director must develop "a complete chromatic plan for the film" ["Color and Light in Films," *Film Culture* 21 (Summer 1960): 68–79.] Carl Dreyer agreed, stressing the necessity for the director to plan the color scheme to flow smoothly, "which creates the effect of persons and objects being in constant motion and causes the colors to glide from one place to another in changing rhythms, creating new and surprising effects when they collide with other colors or melt into them" ["Color Film and Colored Films," *Dreyer in Double Reflection* (New York: Dutton, 1973), pp. 168–173].

For Stan Brakhage, cinema must break down our normal sense of color, as "closed-eye visions" produce purely subjective tonalities: "I am stating my given ability, prize of all above pursuing, to transform the light sculpted

shapes of an almost dark-blackened room to the rainbow-hued patterns of light without any scientific paraphernalia" [*Metaphors on Vision* (New York: Film Culture, 1963)]. The filmmaker who theorized most extensively about color was Sergei Eisenstein. See especially "Color and Meaning," in *The Film Sense* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947), pp. 113–153.

For general discussion of the aesthetics of film color, see Raymond Durgnat, "Colours and Contrasts," *Films and Filming* 15, 2 (November 1968): 58–62; and William Johnson, "Coming to Terms with Color," *Film Quarterly* 20, 1 (Fall 1966): 2–22. Two essays on Jean-Luc Godard exemplify how the analyst can examine a film's color system: Paul Sharits, "Red, Blue, Godard," *Film Quarterly* 19, 4 (Summer 1966): 24–29; and Edward Branigan, "The Articulation of Color in a Filmic System," *Wide Angle* 1, 3 (1976): 20–31. The latter contains an excellent bibliography.

■ FRAME COMPOSITION AND THE VIEWER'S EYE

The film shot is in a sense like the painter's canvas: It must be filled up, and the spectator must be cued to notice certain things (and not to notice others). For this reason, composition in film owes much to principles developed in the graphic arts. A good basic study of composition is Donald L. Weismann, *The Visual Arts as Human Experience* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), which has many interesting things to say about depth as well. More elaborate discussions are to be found in Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), and his *The Power of the Center: A Study of Composition in the Visual Arts*, 2d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Maureen Turim's "Symmetry/Asymmetry and Visual Fascination," *Wide Angle* 4, 3 (1980): 38–47 applies such principles to film.

André Bazin suggested that shots staged in depth and shot in deep focus give the viewer's eye greater freedom than do flatter, shallower shots: The viewer's eye can roam across the screen. [See Bazin, *Orson Welles* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).] Noël Burch takes issue: "All the elements in any given film image are perceived as equal in importance" (*Theory of Film Practice*, p. 34). Psychological research on pictorial perception suggests, however, that viewers do indeed scan images according to specific cues. A good review of the subject, with bibliography, may be found in Julian Hochberg, "The Representation of Things and People," in E. H. Combrich et al., *Art, Perception, and Reality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), pp. 47–94. In cinema, static visual cues for "when to look where" are reinforced or undermined by movement of figures or of camera, by sound track and editing, and by the overall form of the film. The psychological research is outlined in Robert L. Solso, *Cognition and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 129–156.