Stylized Moments
Turning Film Style Into Meaning
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Glossary

Acknowledgement

This book is dedicated to my many film students and Teaching Assistants over the years
who have helped me clarify my approach to film style, and to Alan Spiegel, my film
professor at the University of Buffalo, who taught me how to look at film in this new way
and who first introduced to me the concept of the “stylized moment
Preface

Turning Film Style Into Meaning

I began studying films in an unassuming way, I suppose, at an early age as an avid viewer of the New York area WOR-TV’s “Million Dollar Movie.” In the 1960s the station would play and replay a single film five nights a week (mostly RKO releases—the station’s owner), providing me a pre-VHS/DVD/Online opportunity to inexpensively view a film repeatedly at home. Some titles were “classics” like Gone With The Wind and Citizen Kane, while others were boyhood favorites such as the Japanese monster movie King Kong vs. Godzilla. What I most absorbed from this repeated viewing practice, beyond an unschooled taste for some of the principles in Walter Benjamin’s “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” was a sense of the unstoppable, predictable unfolding of time in films (commercial interruptions became part of that flow), an inevitable, ritual-like clockwork whose dramatic principles I later came to identify and admire in the work of Samuel Beckett. And I never lost my WOR-TV inspired pleasure for putting popular films right up there alongside the classics. In fact to establish this populist principle of going against the grain of University art film/foreign film studies, I begin each semester of my online film class with a serious stylistic study of Harold Ramis’ 1980 cult comedy classic Caddyshack, which I take up in Chapter Two.

Viewing a film repeatedly, like reading and rereading any text, is a prime technique I recommend to all my literature students and film students alike. Repeated viewings aid in successfully identifying stylized moments and grasping a particular nuance in a film; and now with frame-by-frame advance even closer scrutiny is possible. Cueing an entire film or section via fast-forward and rewind may also reveal certain
previously undetected visual patterns such as graphic matches established over a period of time in separate scenes. Other defamiliarizing techniques such as turning down the audio may open unexpected, fruitful passageways into meaningful aspects of a film. This book is about how to concretely discover meaning in film by logically decoding the simple, but often invisible, stylistic choices made by directors, directors of photography, set designers, costumers, soundtrack composers, actors, and the rest of the creative collaborators of cinema.

There are several fine film textbooks on the market—some of them quite good, for example, at rehearsing the history of narrative cinema from magic lanterns to CGI, or at providing descriptions of film’s various genres like the Western and Film Noir, some even include sample student essays, but none stress the importance of style as I do here, nor do they provide insight into the meaning of films by delivering workable strategies and detailed analyses of a number of popular films. In the first chapter I explore many of the stylistic conventions of modern cinema, what to call them, how to describe them, what they usually mean, and how then to apply that knowledge as an interpretive tool. I demonstrate in the remaining chapters close readings of over a dozen films—mostly titles I have taught in my Literature & Film Style course during the past decade or so. It is my hope for those who read this book, as it is each semester a goal for my students, that you will learn this language of film along with several interpretive strategies and hence, all films (and TV shows, music videos, filmed commercials) will begin to talk to you in a more meaningful way, and in turn, your responses (but not out loud in the movie theater!) will be clearer and more persuasive as well.

Pundits of the post-MTV/Internet generation(s) are fond of claiming how a new visual
acuity in young people is replacing the literary-based knowledge systems of yore, often citing the massive hours spent in front of TV and computer monitors rather than between the pages of books. Recent research contained in “Common Sense Census: Media Use By Tweens and Teens” concludes 8-18 year olds spend an average of 9 non-school hours engaged with digital technology such as games, streaming video and music (https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/the-common-sense-census-media-use-by-tweens-and-teens 10/2015).

My argument does not contend nor dismiss this pervasive practice of illiteracy (Cf. NEA’s June 2004 Report Reading At Risk http://arts.endow.gov/pub/ReadingAtRisk.pdf) nor does it deny the possibility of an emerging new knowledge paradigm templated for the digital future. What I have found, however, is that so many of us remain “babes in the woods” when it comes to acknowledging and articulately responding to a more visual way of knowing. In fact, it is my contention that as a human enterprise, we have yet to quite recover from the astounding invention of the photograph over 150 years ago. Anthropological reports abound documenting the aboriginal tribal suspicion over having one’s picture taken, based on the belief that part of one’s soul or spirit is also taken when “captured” on film: “There was never a photograph taken or a likeness made from first hand witness of Crazy Horse;” so claims Mari Sandoz in the 1942 biography, Crazy Horse the Strange Man of the Oglala. The great Oglala Sioux warrior allegedly resisted being photographed as defense from “shadow catching” or soul stealing. In his illuminating and challenging book, Camera Lucida (1980), Roland Barthes calls photography “unclassifiable,” a “disturbance to civilization” and a “wound.” This last characterization bears witness to the inherent violence in the “aiming,” “shooting” and
“taking” of photographs and movies. In fact early cameras were often mounted on the stocks of modified rifles.

Fig. 1 Sands and Hunter Gun camera, 1885

Eastman Gun camera, 1915-1920

The pioneering photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004) once remarked: “I adore shooting photographs. It's like being a hunter.” In his introduction to a rare interview (7/6/00) granted to Charlie Rose of PBS, Rose described Cartier-Bresson as both a “sharpshooter” and as a “marksman;” both interlocutor and subject use such weaponry metaphors throughout the interview. This violence of looking, gazing, photographing, and filming, as well as its penetrative phallic logic are thematized by several films, most notably Hitchcock’s Rear Window (1954), David Lynch’s Blue Velvet (1986), and as a sort of progressive antidote, Sam Mendes’ American Beauty (1999).

The photograph is certainly the paterfamilias of modern narrative cinema, its matriarch the dramatic stage. This family romance of representational media extends back, of course, to ancestors Painting and Poetry, Chemistry and Mechanized Technology, and forward to their digital Great-Grand children. A big part of film’s uncanny power over us, and one must include recorded sound, is undoubtedly due to the spectacular realism it can capture, what Barthes calls photography’s “ethnological knowledge,” and the resultant cognitive illusion of life-like movement achieved by the
technology of the movie camera and projector. As rehearsed in Martin Scorsese’s recent love letter to early cinema (and excellent condensed history of film origins), *Hugo* (2011), when the Lumière brothers first publically screened *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1896), some audience members ducked their heads while others ran from the screen hysterically.

![Image](image.jpg)

*Fig. 2 L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat (Auguste & Louis Lumière)*

With our sophisticated, jaded cinematic palate notwithstanding, at times even we still duck from oncoming objects or involuntarily cry out warnings to on-screen actors. Cinema not only does a seemingly picture-perfect job of capturing reality, it also has the power to change it. There remains the undigested impact of this technology’s ability to manipulate and contaminate said reality. The **Heisenberg Principle** explains precisely this phenomenon of the observer and her instruments intervening in and affecting the perception and analysis of the data. With the advent of photography and then moving images, the reality it so brilliantly records, or better, mimics necessarily must incorporate that technology’s simulacra experience into our everyday impression of the real. For example, a few years ago then current ESPN Sunday Night Baseball analyst and Hall of Famer Joe Morgan remarked that a replay on his new in-the-booth High Definition monitor “looked better than the real thing” that he had just witnessed on the field of play.
Steve Hollander, the owner of the Connecticut beer distributor who witnessed his disgruntled employee’s murderous rampage resulting in eight dead and two wounded, told the Associated Press (8/3/10): “I was on the phone with 911 and then I saw him running outside of my office window, shooting his gun, carrying his lunch box, which must have had his weapons in it. It doesn’t seem real to me now, it seems like I’m watching a movie.” Ten years or so ago my young daughter, carrying in her head the contents of her prodigious DVD collection, upon spotting a horse in its corral as we drove by it one day, asked: “Is that horse real?” In all fairness to her not-entirely-corrupted youthful imagination, the countryside is populated with life-like, life-size yard statues of horses, deer, geese, and other assorted not-real wildlife. Nonetheless, there is no returning to a pre-recorded, that is, non-recorded experience of the world. We have been delivered to a “simulacrum we can’t come back from.” Visual media’s contamination of our perception of the world is perhaps best expressed, if a trifle exaggerated, by Video Backpacker, the character from Richard Linklater’s 1991 debut film Slacker who is surrounded by TV monitors while wearing one on his back. He complains that a stabbing he actually witnessed didn’t look real enough:

To me, my thing is, a video image is much more powerful and useful than an actual event. Like back when I used to go out, when I was last out, I was walking down the street and this guy, that came barreling out of a bar, fell right in front of me, and he had a knife right in his back, landed right on the ground and ... Well, I have no reference to it now. I can't put it on pause. I can't put it on slo-mo and see all the little details. And the blood, it was all-wrong. It didn't look like blood. The hue was off. I couldn't adjust the hue. I was seeing it for real, but it just wasn't right. And I didn't even see the knife impact on the body. I missed that part.

This book grants: 1) the ubiquity of the moving image, 2) visually induced ideological juices that course through our brains and veins, and the 3) ramifications for an engaged
and responsible citizenry. The grander goal of this book is to serve as a step toward better reading our “movied” selves as well as our movies.
Chapter 1-Interpreting a Film

In order to justify my insistence on describing and decoding film style as the preeminent approach towards unlocking meaning in movies, let me begin by distinguishing film from its narrative sibling, literature. Most students, who as young children discussed fairy-tales read to them by adults and practiced analyzing stories in literature classes from elementary school on up to college, are at varying degrees adept at analyzing characters, their conflicts and transformations, plot, foreshadowing and other like elements of stories, plays and novels. So much is ignored and lost, however, when these traditional interpretive approaches are applied to analyzing films as they so often are. Even most film critics are content summarizing and critiquing the effectiveness of the story with only occasional and all too general fleeting references to cinematic style. With this approach one might just as well be discussing a piece of literature. On the other hand, all of us are quite adept as amateur dream interpreters and dreams are an apt correlative to movies.

Dream Logic

When we awake with a fairly vivid dream fresh in our memory, or are regaled by someone else’s dream narrative, we often launch head on into an analysis of the latent meaning of the dream’s manifest content. Without hesitation, and usually without trained expertise, we apply common principles of psychology and insights about gender, myth and popular culture, while we make claims relating to biographical knowledge of the dreamer as well. The vivid quality of many dreams is often attributable to both the realistic nature of them and their cinematic quality. Dreams are movies of the mind. Early on in its development, Hollywood fell in love with psychology, Freudian analysis
in particular, and given cinema’s dreamlike status, it is rather easy to see why. Hitchcock’s Freudian legacy is evident in many of his titles: *Psycho, Vertigo, Frenzy, Stage Fright, Shadow of a Doubt*. His 1945 film *Spellbound* took the extraordinary steps of hiring as co-writer and psychiatric advisor, May E. Romm M.D and as dream sequence designer, surrealist Salvador Dali. Just as we translate Freud’s monumental publication on dreams *Die Traumdeutung* (1900) as *The Interpretation of Dreams*, so this book centers directly on the art of interpretation or hermeneutics. So named from Hermes, the Greek messenger and herald to the Gods, *hermeneutics* is the science of interpretation. This search for meaning in texts originated as Biblical exegesis and soon branched out to legal, philosophical and literary hermeneutics, marked by a concern with the relation between interpretive subject and text. As this book demonstrates throughout, the metaphors film style employs, like the ones populating our dreams, are simple and commonplace—often to the point of being clichéd. Of all of the films that most consistently and fluently speak the stylized language of cinema to which this book is devoted, it is those directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

It should come as no surprise that Alfred Hitchcock began his film career as an Art Director and a composer of storyboards, a practice he continued throughout his life in film. A *storyboard* is a collection of hand-drawn images composed prior to shooting that depicts and directs what each shot in the film should look like.
Film Conventions & Metaphors: Stylized Moments

What is endemic to film, clearly, is its visual aspect above all, but certainly soundtrack, costuming, set design, acting, and several other elements all contribute to the meaning of the story the film tells. The only authentic way to interpret a film, and its story, is to attend to its style. Although the old Hollywood studio system is gone—most independent filmmakers operating today seek distribution of their films by one of the large film corporations such as Universal or Disney—it is still useful to discuss the modern American film industry in terms of “Hollywood,” because Hollywood’s institutional history and the language it developed continue to wield enormous power and influence over everyone making and consuming films today.

The age-old wisdom about Hollywood style is that it strives to be invisible. In fact, John J. Flynn, the creator of the 2004 PBS study of cinema’s production designers—those responsible for the overall look of a film and its visual language—entitled his documentary Masters of Production: The Hidden Art of Hollywood (emphasis added). Unlike so-called “foreign films” (which usually means selected “art” films not produced in North America that self-consciously use stylized camera movement, lighting, and
sound), most American films try to stick to a rather neutral or more functional use of these tools. As President of The Art Directors Guild, Jackson Degovia, states in *The Hidden Art*, films work “because they look real, they don’t make you stop and think.” But there are several significant exceptions and it is those films and those directors about which I want us to stop and think.

**Style vs. Function**

Among its other useful lessons, deconstructive thought has taught us not only to be skeptical of the seeming transparency of binary distinctions, but also to interrogate the power differential and complicity that operates between each member. Even traditional argumentative logic warns us against the either/or fallacy. Distinguishing between function and style, therefore, on a more radical, theoretical level may seem uncritical, or worse, imprecise. When attempting to determine, for example, if an edit, camera movement or lighting choice is stylized and therefore carries specific meaning, or is merely functional and therefore carries no additional meaning, one is susceptible to the maximal argument that mere function does not exist—that all shots and edits and lighting are stylized because meaning is brimming everywhere in this artificial construct we call movies. Granting this last extremely theoretical claim as valid, but in the end less than helpful when trying to unpack a film’s meaning via an analysis of its “stylized moments,” a common sense separation of style from function is warranted.

One of the best ways to make this distinction and develop a grasp of the concept behind the “stylized moment” is to begin by describing it by what it is not. In order to do so, let’s examine the typical shot/reverse shot as exclusively functional. A **shot/reverse shot** consists of a series of connected over-the-shoulder shots or one-shot close-ups of
each speaker pointed approximately 180-degrees opposite of each other and used to portray a conversation between two characters. In *Maltese Falcon* (Huston 1941) for example, once Miss Wonderly (Mary Astor) is introduced to Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart) and takes a seat opposite him in his office, John Huston’s editing begins a series of shots/reverse shots, with the camera over Spade’s shoulder centering on Miss Wonderly and respectively the camera over Miss Wonderly’s shoulder centering on Sam Spade, along with occasional close-ups of each character as they speak, and on occasion a master shot, in this case, a two shot. A **master shot** is camera coverage of all items within a scene.

![Fig. 2 The master 2 shot shot reverse shot](image)

Huston’s choice regarding camera placement here is utterly conventional and rather transparent in this scene until its stylized conclusion discussed in the next section. It is true on a theoretical level that this sequence is highly artificial in that it is not a documentary two-shot of the two conversationalists speaking à la Cinéma vérité. **Cinéma vérité**, sometimes called observational cinema, records “reality” from the non-intrusive perspective of a “fly in the wall.” Additionally artificial is that with each Huston edit to the next shot, the camera over the other character’s shoulder has been **sutured** out, that is, removed. Within the conventions of Hollywood style, however, this is the most efficient and widespread way to film a conversation. The shot/reverse shot **functions** to
effortlessly and transparently convey dialogue between two characters and carries no grander symbols or meaning.

**Shadows of Doubt**

Within Huston’s shot/reverse shots, however, a perfect example of stylized costuming and lighting can be detected. Several of the close-ups of Miss Wonderly reveal a fashionable hat upon her head courtesy of Costume Designer Orry-Kelly. Huston (no Lighting Designer is credited) places a key light above Miss Wonderly’s head in order to cast a deep shadow across the top half of her face. A **key light** is the main source of illumination for a shot, often supported by **fill lights**, which help fill unwanted shadow created by the key light. It is unclear whether the small hat is the sole caster of this shadow, or if Huston adds an additional object between the light source and Mary Astor’s face in order to insure the legibility of the stylized shadow.

![Costume (hat) and key light combine to cast a stylized shadow](image)

The metaphorical significance of this choice, like so many stylized moments once they are found, is simple: Miss Wonderly is hiding something. She is a shadowy character, a femme fatale, and later an assassin, not to be trusted. Her eyes dart from side to side; she
is “shifty-eyed.” Even her name reveals someone who is mysterious and uncertain—to be wondered at, and in fact we learn Wonderly is an alias she soon changes to Miss LeBlanc, or the blank cipher, who “in truth” is actually named Brigid O'Shaughnessy. Like Edmund Spenser’s duplicitous character Duessa who is contrasted with the one true Una in his *Faerie Queene*, this vain and heartless woman of many names plots from the shadows. The *femme fatale* is film noir’s stereotypical fatal woman to whom the male hero is attracted, and who he must resist and defeat. There is a way in which the dynamic of the hard-boiled male fighting to resist the femme fatale is similar to the Arthurian Romances whereby the hero must slay the dragon, as in Beowulf vying against Grendel’s mother. This gendering of the dragon is continued in Disney’s treatment of *Sleeping Beauty* (Geronimi, 1959) where the beautiful but evil Queen Fairy, Maleficent, is coded as evil by her name and her dark hair color in contrast with the Princess Aurora who is named “after the dawn, for she filled their lives with sunshine.” Maleficent even announces as she attempts to destroy Aurora that “She is indeed most wondrous fair, gold of sunshine in her hair.”
Fig. 4 “She is indeed most wondrous fair, gold of sunshine in her hair. Lips that shame the red, red rose.”

The most remarkable moment occurs when the evil woman battles Prince Phillip, revealing her true nature as she transforms into a monstrous dragon.
There is a similar transformation in John Musker’s and Ron Clements’ *The Little Mermaid* (Musker & Clements 1989) as they take a page from Ted Sears and the earlier Sleeping Beauty story team at Disney, reworking Hans Christian Andersen’s sea witch into Ursula the Witch of the sea. Ursula snares Ariel in her Mephistophelian devilish bargain, stealing her voice (soul), and near the film’s end this femme fatale too transforms into a monstrous and inky-dark dragon lady of the sea. She is vanquished by Eric the vampire killer, who steers the wooden stake of the shipwreck he pilots directly into the heart of Ursula.
These noirish femme fatales, or “dragon ladies” (cf. Martha in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Ch. 9) go by several revealing names, including the “vamp,” as in vampire and “black widow spider.” The vampire O'Shaughnessy consistently attempts to suck the vital force from Spade, as in this impassioned plea delivered in her striped robe with her victim inside her web-like Venetian blind scarred hotel room: “Be generous Mr. Spade. You’re brave. You’re strong. You can spare me some of that courage and strength surely.” The stripes in which femme fatales are often dressed (cf. Alicia Huberman in *Notorious*, Chapter Five, and Lula in *Dutchman*, Chapter Ten) signal part of their mystique, their inscrutability: Are they black (evil) or white (good)? By displaying both black and white they pose a problem for the hero. Immediately following the O'Shaughnessy the vamp’s assassination of Archer, the phone rings in Spade’s apartment and a single long take holds Spade’s night table with the open window behind it. Coupled with the eerie falcon music and the gently swaying sheer curtain, the mise en scène is right out of a Dracula film from Universal. A term originally from the theater,
**mise en scène** (from the Fr. “placement on stage”) describes the arrangement of people, props and backdrops taken as a whole, often captured in a master shot. As Bram Stoker tells it, his victim must welcome in the vampire, and so Lucy Westenra opens her window to the Count.

![Image](image-url)

Fig. 7 “You can spare me some of that courage and strength surely;” the vampire must be welcomed in by his victim

From the depths of the shadows the spider awaits to deliver to her mate his fate. Similar shadow language is employed in *Mildred Pierce* (Curtiz 1945), but this time with a twist.

Through circumstantial evidence in the narrative and an unmistakable, stylized Miss Wonderly-like femme fatale shadow, the film *Mildred Pierce* coaxes the audience to suspect Mildred (Joan Crawford) as the murderer of Monte Beragon (Zachary Scott). In all of the interrogation scenes and even in many of the flashbacks, Mildred is shot with a deep shadow across her forehead and eyes. Whether one should credit the creation and execution of this shadow to cinematographer Ernest Haller, Art Director Anton Grot, Special Effects person Willard Van Enger, Director Michael Curtiz, one or more of the scriptwriters (among them James M. Cain and William Faulkner) or all or some of the above, without a production notebook it is difficult to know. This shadow is unlike Miss Wonderly’s, however, which at least allegedly is cast by her hat. Mildred’s shadow
actually and improbably follows her. It seems more like make-up than lighting, as if the shadow were painted across her face: Mildred is indeed a marked woman. It is not until very near the end of the film when Mildred’s spoiled daughter Veda (Ann Blyth) is forced to admit she killed Beragon, and not until Mildred finally realizes she can no longer suffer and bear the guilt for her daughter, that we witness the disappearance of the shadow in the detective’s office. Much is made of light and dark in this film noir. For example, a soon-to-be-enlightened Mildred walks out of deep shadow into the light as she catches her daughter and her second husband conspiratorially in embrace. Mildred even wears her “Veda Disease” shadow in the love scene with Monty as they both sit by the fireside in the Beragon beach house.

A first time viewer of the film, aware of such noir shadows, who spots the mark here logically sees it as an indication of Mildred’s murderous intent toward Monte. When taken into the context of the entire film, a stronger interpretation argues that Mildred’s shadow is present because she is pursuing the wealthy Monte Beragon only to please Veda’s snobbery. When Inspector Peterson (Moroni Olsen) finally raises the blinds of his office window and sunshine pours in, we realize that the shadow Mildred has carried
most of the movie has not been the indictment of a murderous marked woman as we have been led to believe, but the burden of an overbearing “vicious brat,” her daughter. It has been this “Veda disease,” a blinding by overbearing motherly love that has overshadowed her adult life and now it has been lifted. As Mildred leaves the Hall of Justice she meets her first love and husband, Bert (Bruce Bennett), under an archway brightly lit by the rising sun of a new day, suggesting a heartfelt reconciliation and future remarriage.

Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock each closely studied the expressive use of light and shadow to create meaning, particularly in the films of German Expressionist F.W. Murnau. **German Expressionists** from the turn of the last century through the 1930s deliberately sought to stylize shadows, sets, camera angles, editing, and camera movement to create meaning visually. It comes as no surprise given its director’s admitted influences that *Citizen Kane* (1941), considered one of the best films ever, should contain this kind of stylized shadow moment along with several others. At a telling point as burgeoning newspaper publisher Kane (Orson Welles) moves between his two comrades to a nearby desk in order to sign his “Declaration of Principles,” he moves into a deep shadow which prevents the audience from clearly seeing his face. Kane will soon betray these principles by publishing false favorable reviews of his latest wife’s opera performance. The shadow into which Kane rises foreshadows his future breaking of the promise stated by his published honesty manifesto. Kane’s “disease,” as argued by the film throughout, and depicted here by the shadow into which he hides, is his lifelong desire to be loved, both by his chums Leland (Joseph Cotten) and Bernstein (Everett Sloane), and later, by his second wife Susan (Dorothy Comingore) who is the motivation of his duplicity.
Fig. 9 Why does Kane step into shadow when signing his Declaration of Principles?

One might further argue that a graphic match is established between the perpetually in shadow reporter Thompson (William Alland) who is charged at the beginning of the film by the newsreel team to find out who is Charles Foster Kane, and Kane in this scene, who struggles to forge an identity he will later abandon.

Returning to *Maltese Falcon*, there is an intriguing stylized graphic match between Wonderly’s shadowed face and that of Detective Lieutenant Dundy (Barton MacLane) that begs interpretation.

**A Match Made In Hell**

A **graphic match** consists of two or more shots linked by similar visual elements. The significance of this stylistic choice visually links the meaning of the two objects—they are a pair of parallel signifiers contributing meaning to each other. Sitting in Spade’s apartment late one night interrogating Spade about the death of Spade’s partner (Archer), Dundy is filmed sitting in a chair next to a lamp whose shade projects a Wonderly-like shadow halfway down Dundy’s face. The Lieutenant has thus far appeared as the taciturn “bad cop” to Spade’s old police force buddy, “good cop” Tom
Polhaus (Ward Bond). The Lieutenant is about to foolishly accuse Spade of murder. Dundy clearly envies Spade as the lone detective and ladies man. During the conversation, Spade, with a typical macho, hard-boiled insult refers to Lieutenant Dundy as Polhaus’ “boyfriend.” The shadow here on Dundy’s face performs an indictment similar to the one directed toward Wonderly. The great fear and challenge to the film noir male is to somehow resist the snare, the trap, the web of the black widow spider who makes love with and then decapitates her lover. The narrative trajectory of *Maltese Falcon* is concerned with Spade’s dance around the femme fatale flame—getting close enough to be warmed by the impassioned fire, but not too close to be burned. The closest Spade gets to professing love to O'Shaughnessy is the line he delivers shortly before announcing she’s taking the fall: “maybe you love me and maybe I love you.” Deflecting emotion is the key motivation for hardboiled language and demeanor. It is less “sissified” to call a heart a “pump” or a woman a “dame” as does Spade. A guy could get killed letting his guard down, leading rather with his emotions—witness the fate of Miles Archer who spies O’Shaughnessy in a dark alley and follows her in with his gun packed away, licking his chops. Dundy, like the femme fatale, is out to get Spade and is not to be trusted.

Fig. 10  The shadow here on Dundy’s face performs an indictment similar to that of Wonderly.
Symbolically linking the content of analogous images within a film via the graphic match is one of cinema’s most pervasive stylistic practices.

Early on in John Ford’s *Stagecoach* (1939) a film Orson Welles allegedly watched 40 times before making *Citizen Kane*, the Calvary Scout (Yakima Canutt) assures the telegraph operator not to fear the collaborating Cheyenne Indian Scout (Chief John Big Tree) standing in his office, stating: “They [the Cheyenne] hate the Apaches worse than we do.” As we hear that line we see an insert shot close-up that is held for several seconds of the Indian scowling wordlessly. Like most stylized moments, this first half of the graphic match sticks out like a sore thumb. An **insert shot** is often a medium or close-up shot that clarifies detail and punctuates meaning from a previous master shot. Several minutes and scenes later in the film we are introduced to a distinguished looking bank officer named Henry Gatewood (Berton Churchill) who, after self-righteously pronouncing “What’s good for the banks is good for the country,” is then placed for a few seconds in a near identical insert close-up, like the Indian Scout, wordless and scowling. Again, after being hen-pecked by his wife with the threat that the members of the Ladies’ Law and Justice League are coming over for lunch, we see the same Cheyenne Indian Scout insert stylized close-up of Gatewood. Gatewood then proceeds to stuff $50,000 in his black bag and heads out on the stagecoach with his embezzled funds. The graphic match logic is undeniable. A relation between the Indian who is betraying his “red”-skinned brethren is established visually with the banker who is betraying his depositors, not to mention his abandoned wife.
The San Francisco-based, alternative industrial hip-hop band Consolidated stylistically use a telling graphic match in their video for the politically progressive song “Unity of Oppression” (*Friendly Fascism* 1991).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGZlcHzPwxQ

In an attempt to point out the hypocritical blindness of most Americans who routinely consume pork that is inhumanely produced and processed at corporate hog factories, but who cherish and pamper their household pets, they sing “I just don’t understand how you can love one” as we simultaneously see a medium close-up of an adorable black Labrador turn her head from right to left, then hear the line “and have hatred for another” as we witness another medium close-up a hog of the same size in overcrowded conditions turn her head from right to left.
The effect of the graphic dog/hog match with its pinpointing of cultural relativism is undeniably powerful. While these two examples of graphic matches under discussion may serve similar political agendas—the Consolidated video’s match delivers a progressive indictment of corporate hog farming and our cultural relativism, and Ford’s match deals a populist slap at greedy bankers—it would be incorrect to deduce that the graphic match skews ideologically exclusively to the “left”. The graphic match, like all aesthetic devices, carries no ideologically charge. The device is neutral, awaiting a context. The now infamous October 2002 filmed political advertisement sponsored by Republican Representative Saxby Chambliss’ Senate campaign matched Max Cleland’s picture with that of both Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden in order to discredit Senator Cleland’s preference for the Democratic version of the Homeland Security Act Cleland helped author, rather than the Republican one President Bush sought. Many political observers on both sides of the aisle point to the clout of the ad in explaining the once popular Cleland’s stunning defeat.

The activist website “Moveon.org, Democracy in America” in 2003 invited the freelance creation of TV ads critical of George W. Bush and one submitted begins with stills of Adolph Hitler and his voice-over speaking in German. The legend or text on the screen reads: "We have taken new measures to protect our homeland ... I believe I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator ... God told me to strike at al-Qaida and I struck them ... and then He instructed me to strike at Saddam, which I did." The text purports to be a translation of Hitler’s speech but clearly transforms after “Almighty Creator” into unattributable Bushspeak. In the ad, we are presented with five stills of Hitler followed by three of George W. Bush each connected by a brief lap
dissolve. A **lap dissolve** is an editing technique whereby one image is gradually substituted by another image that immediately follows, the two overlapping for a brief moment before the second image is alone on the screen and the first image has disappeared. A lap dissolve often confers the passing of time while forging a strong connection between the two momentarily co-existing images.

The anti-Bush TV ad begins by showing a choker close-up of Hitler in profile with a bright angelic-like key light illuminating his face, next is a zoom-out of him on stage, followed by a sepia tinted medium close-up of the Dictator in profile gesturing with his hand. The camera tilts up on the next photo of Hitler standing in a crowd of soldiers, and ends with a shot of Hitler with an emphatic hand raised which is immediately followed with a graphic match of Bush with his hand up hailing an audience, then a medium close-up of Bush at a news conference snarling with his hands raised, then the President bathed in a golden glow of light looking upward and clenching his hand into a fist. The sequence ends with a lap dissolve to a black screen filled with large white letters, which ask, "Sound familiar?" as Hitler’s audience laughs. The ad was never publicly aired and was eventually removed from the Moveon.org website.
There is an associative logic at work here; often it is “guilt by association,” whether wielded by the “left” or the “right.” A series of rather rapid dissolves on the same subject, sometimes together with a zoom in or out, creates a hallucinatory effect.

Shortly after Thelma (Geena Davis) says to her partner Louise (Susan Sarandon) “something’s, like, crossed over in me,” Ridley Scott (Thelma & Louise 1991) presents to us a series of stylized lap dissolves of the two women while Louise drives the Thunderbird convertible through the Arizona night. First Marianne Faithful’s voice fades in singing the song “The Ballad of Lucy Jordan” (S. Silverstein) about suburban middle-aged women whose dreams have been dashed. Then a close-up of Louise’s face is replaced via lap dissolve and matched by one of Thelma’s face, a lap dissolve back to Louise follows as a smile grows on her face and then a final dissolve separated briefly by
blackness shows Louise now at the wheel and smiling. By this point in the film Thelma has grown out of her little girl naiveté and with her commandeering of the convenience store robbery has overtaken the mother-in-charge role previously occupied by Louise.

Now both women are on a much more equal footing and their mutual affection and camaraderie is figured graphically by this stylized sequence. Clearly part of the efficacy of graphic matching depends on the connectedness of the two images, and particularly in the hog/dog, Hitler/Bush, and Thelma/Louise examples, upon contiguity. Two things are contiguous when they are adjacent, when they touch each other, when one immediately follows the other, as in another stylized moment found in film, the sonic faux raccord.

**False Echoes & Sound Transitions**

From the French, literally “false echo,” *faux raccord* describes a moment when sound from the scene we are about to see echoes back into the scene we are watching. We hear the upcoming scene’s sound “bleed” back causing a discrepancy with the image we are witnessing, and as with all stylized moments, we are challenged to make sense of it. (Robert Alter unearths instances “akin to cinematic faux raccord” in the art of Biblical narrative as well, namely Judges 5.28.) In one of the rare scenes in *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese 1976) where Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) is absent, we watch a tender slow dance to the song "Hold Me Close" (Bernard Herrmann/Music, Keith Addis/Lyrics) between the young runaway/prostitute, Iris (Jody Foster) and her pimp, Sport (Harvey Keitel).

Suddenly we hear loud gunshots as the couple continues to dance and then Scorsese edits in footage of the source of the sounds: Travis Bickle shooting at a paper-human target inside a firing range.
Travis desires to separate the young prostitute from her pimp and the use of this *faux raccord* foreshadows his doing so through handgun violence, despite the apparent happiness and affection between the couple. This stylized sequence can be cited to support the argument that Iris is content, cared for, and does not wish to be "rescued" by Travis, thus undercutting the vigilante taxi driver’s "heroism" and sympathetic persona.

Film sound is best described according to its source: any "natural" sound source that originates from within the scene including foley effects and automatic dialogue replacement (ADR also known as looping, dubbing) unless used as a voice over is called diegetic; sound from outside of the scene, such as the soundtrack score or other sound effects is called non-diegetic. **Foley effects** are any sound sources added to a film in post-production, usually necessitated by the director’s and sound technicians’ inability to place microphones close enough to the sound source for the desired sound, or by a desire to somehow treat the soundtrack in a stylized way. If the attempt is to make Foley effects sound natural then they should be considered diegetic. Jack Foley (1891-1967) is credited as the most successful and sought after practitioner of these effects, subsequently lending his name to the art. The echoing forward of the sound of bullets at first acts like a non-diegetic interruption of the slow dance, and even after their firing range source is
revealed, memory of the violent interruption remains and resonates. A similar *faux raccord* is deployed by Ridley Scott in *Blade Runner* (1982).

Acoustic piano notes, which seem a part of the non-diegetic soundtrack of Vangelis, are heard over the end of the "homecoming" scene between J. F. Sebastian (William Sanderson) and Pris (Daryl Hanna). However, with the edit to a slow right-to-left pan of the search-lighted city exterior and seamless entrance into Deckard’s apartment is complete, the camera tilts down past the family photographs on the piano (as the synthesized Vangelis soundtrack orchestrates those notes) to discover we have been hearing the diegetic piano playing of Deckard (Harrison Ford). In a film centered on the question of what it is to be human, the contrast between synthesized and “natural” acoustic music becomes charged with meaning. Specific questions about whether Deckard is a replicant (robot) or a human occur throughout the film, even more so in the Director’s Cut and the Phillip Dick novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) upon which the film is based. (A **Director’s Cut** is a version of the film typically released after the studio’s theatrical release that contains footage and sequencing the director wished to be included, but for various reasons usually at the urging of the distributor, agreed to remove.) At the moment of the *faux raccord* we move from Sebastian’s apartment of artificial beings to the seemingly authentic black and white family photos and old-fashioned acoustic piano of Deckard’s apartment, suggesting for the time being that Deckard is human. Even the right to left pan confers confirmation of something we already knew or suspected. All horizontal movement of the camera is called a **pan**. Because in the West we read from left to right, a **pan** (from panorama), or horizontal movement of the camera from left to right often confers revelation of the
unknown, whereas a right to left pan communicates corroboration of what we already know, as if rereading, or going back over. A pan from right to left, as in this part of the *Blade Runner* scene, confirms information and conclusions we already have about Deckard’s humanity.

In the opening title sequence of *Caddyshack* (Ramis 1980) we hear the lush, full-bodied voice and instrumentation of Kenny Loggins’ "I’m Alright" non-diegetic soundtrack playing over images of the Bushwood Country Club golf course, the gopher, and the first establishing shot of the lawn-less, low-income Noonan residence. Often an establishing shot is the first image of a film or scene presented to “establish” a specific place and/or time. When Ramis then edits to the interior of the crowded house “I’m Alright” continues, but it has been transferred to Danny’s AM radio (diegetic) in his bedroom. The sound’s previous lush quality is transformed into the flat, tinny, non-dynamic AM sound. Once Danny (Michael O’Keefe) "escapes" from the house and the “college fund” bickering via the fire escape and is outside, the music continues, returning as lush non-diegetic soundtrack. Loggins’ song and lyrics clearly articulates Danny’s interior thoughts; it is his theme song as it is the film’s. When we are inside the Noonan house we discover Danny listening to his song, but it is compressed, squeezed. This stylized sequence can be cited to support the argument that the impoverished sound reflects his impoverished situation during this summer between high school and college and the prospect that he might end up "working in a lumberyard all his life." Not until he gets free of the tinny sound and the crowded house, and enters the lush sound away from the house and on his own, with his desires (indicated by the point of view shot/reaction shot of him bicycling past the mansions on the "right side of the tracks") will he be free.
In the much-anticipated Indian attack in John Ford’s *Stagecoach* (1939), with Bert Glennon’s camera providing a close-up of Lucy Mallory (Louise Platt) praying for deliverance from the attacking Apaches, in the mix of the scored soundtrack we hear a non-diegetic bugle playing. To our surprise, Lucy Mallory hears it and asks herself (and the others): "Do you hear it? Do you hear it? It’s the bugle! They’re blowing the charge!"

Lucy looks distracted and scared out of her mind so we think she is hearing things. We then discover the transition from non-diegetic to diegetic bugle sound as Ford edits to the Cavalry entering the scene, bugle and all, to rescue the day. By opening the film with two riders approaching the fort with a bugler playing outside, Ford sets up the connection between the Cavalry and the horn. The audience has already been fed audio clues with the embedding of Stephen Foster’s "I Dream of Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" (uncredited) combined with close-ups of Lucy Mallory and her "secret illness" which is later revealed as pregnancy (Dallas [Claire Trevor]: "It’s a little girl!"). Mrs. Mallory’s praying is doubly rewarded here—1) An (off-camera) apache gunshot kills Hatfield (John Carradine) before he can "mercy kill" her in order to prevent a worst fate (!) at the hands of the Apaches (an interesting irony in that she is saved by the "savages" from the southern gentleman gambler), and 2) the Cavalry shows up. Lucy Mallory, previously depicted as a snob, now emerges as a pure soul and good woman who eventually almost overcomes her prejudice regarding Dallas, the "Whore with a Heart of Gold."
Cranes & Chokers & Breaks

There is a spectacular stylized crane shot at the crucial moment in Hitchcock’s *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) when young Charlie (Teresa Wright) finally learns the truth about her beloved, but murderous Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotten). A crane shot is achieved by a camera mounted on a mechanism adapted from farm and building construction machinery known as a crane, which can extend vertically several feet to several stories. Helicopter or other air flight-mounted cameras can accomplish "super-
crane” effects as well. In general an ascending crane shot away from an object, person, or scene are almost always stylized expressing to viewers a sense of effortless, privileged superiority, escape, or alienation. It often serves as closure or poignant commentary inviting contemplation at the ends of films. A descending crane shot toward an object, person, or scene is rather rarely stylized as it usually confers to viewers a functional emphasis of increasing observation and interest accompanied, on occasion, by a certain detachment. As is the case with all stylized techniques and devices, their significance is always dependent on the context within which it is used. Due to the expense, the use of crane shots often requires a big budget.

In the library reading room young Charlie has been scouring a newspaper article that will eventually indict her Uncle who, the previous evening, had prevented her from reading the incriminating piece with the diversion of tearing up the newspaper to make paper dolls, and later that evening forcibly prevented her by violently twisting her wrist. Hitchcock edits from a choker close-up (extreme close-up from the neck to top of the head or closer, functionally conferring intensity of emotion, etc.,) of young Charlie’s face to a close-up of her hands centered over the Santa Rosa newspaper removing the ring Uncle Charlie gave her. The film then is cut to her point of view showing an extreme close-up insert shot of the ring as she rotates it in order to read the inscription, comparing the initials on it, "B.M.," (allegedly an inside Hitchcock toilet humor joke), to those of a recent victim of the “Merry Widow Murderer” listed in the article. She comes to the grisly realization that she is wearing the ring of a woman her Uncle recently killed! We are returned to the previous close-up of her hands. As she clasps the ring in her right hand and is
exiting the reading room deep in thought or in a daze, the camera begins to pull or zoom back while simultaneously ascending up a great distance via a crane-mounted camera as Dimitri Tiomkin’s soundtrack begins its bittersweet, slightly tragic melody. As young Charlie’s exit is nearly complete there is a lap dissolve to Uncle Charlie’s recurring footage of gentlemen and ladies waltzing and Tiomkin’s score changes to Franz Lehar’s "Merry Widow Waltz." This brief scene lap dissolves to Uncle Charlie strolling on the sidewalk in front of his niece’s family home scrutinizing the morning newspaper presumably for additional incriminating information as Charlie’s young siblings run past him on either side. The result of the zooming out and ascending crane shot shows young Charlie’s image getting smaller and smaller as the "forbidden knowledge" of her beloved uncle’s true identity sinks in. The effect of this scene depicts the formerly naive girl gaining knowledge and participates in classic Western Culture’s iconography and ideology of "falling from grace," as did Adam and Eve in Genesis. **The argument of this montage first connects niece with uncle with the recurring waltzing couples footage.** Young Charlie and Uncle Charles not only share a name; they share so much more. Prior to her discovery in the library, when she claims accepting the ring would “spoil things,” she explains, “Because we're not just an uncle and a niece. It's something else. I know you. I know that you don't tell people a lot of things. I don't either. I have a feeling that inside you somewhere, there's something nobody knows about.” After her epiphany in the reading room, it is as if she has access to his recurring waltzing montage. The scene **ends with Young Charlie’s siblings literally crossing the murderer’s path—an indication of how their older sister will eventually cross him.**
A similar effect to Hitchcock’s “falling from grace” shot of young Charlie is found in Don Taylor’s BBC film of Sophocles’ *Oedipus* (1984).

At the crucial moment of *anagnoris*, Aristotle’s word for recognition, when Oedipus (Michael Pennington) has received from the Theban Messenger/Shepherd (Gerard Murphy) the final incriminating detail about his birth, his identity, and therefore, his
crimes against his Father, his Mother-Wife, and siblings-offspring, Don Taylor’s choker close-up of Oedipus is replaced by an elevated long shot achieved by a camera on a crane. All at once Oedipus looks small and vulnerable; he has gained the knowledge he has been searching for the entire play, and precisely at that crucial moment he is visually depicted as tiny, having fallen. The camera on the crane then proceeds to descend down and in on him into another close-up. Although the movement of Taylor’s camera toward his subject is in the opposite direction of Hitchcock’s movement away from his subject, it can be argued a similar effect is achieved with the initial edit to the elevated long shot. At the moment of painful recognition we see characters “fall.” The experience of being denied the close-up of Oedipus we have become accustomed to in this very tense scene, jars and shakes us.

Fig. 18 Choker close up is replaced by camera on crane long shot that descends down and in on Oedipus into another close-up.
The familiar becomes defamiliarized by this effect, what Bertolt Brecht called the “alienation effect” (Ger., *verfremdungseffekt*). Defamiliarization (Rus., *ostranenie* остранение, literally “making strange”) is a technique, borrowed from the Russian Formalists, which Brecht hoped would force audiences to see things anew by breaking the so-called “fourth wall”. In the theater the **fourth wall** is that invisible line between actors and audience. Everything that happens behind that imaginary line is virtually real for the duration of the performance. It is the social convention we all accept as explained by Coleridge’s dictum: “the willing suspension of disbelief.” In traditional proscenium arch theatrical productions, that line is never to be crossed in order to maintain the illusion that what happens behind it, on stage, is “real.” Out of a fear of breaking this “fictive reality,” one of the cardinal rules of stage acting prohibits the actor from looking directly into the eyes of the audience members, and film acting continues that tradition by forbidding direct eye contact with the camera. Rules are made to be broken at times, and certainly this rule is negated when a stage actor delivers a **“dramatic aside,”** a character’s inner thoughts voiced out loud by the character for the audience to hear, but not the other characters on stage. Sometimes asides are voiced by characters who also meet the eyes of the audience. A particular bond is established between any character who shares such intimacy with the audience. To the query by his loutish Uncle and new Stepfather Claudius, Hamlet sarcastically replies: “[Aside] A little more than kin, and less than kind.” The aside serves a double function of announcing with Hamlet’s first line in the play his alienation from the court’s phoniness and intrigue, and it forges a bond of
sympathy between the struggling adolescent and the audience. Comedic characters in film will break the rule and look directly into the camera when the film’s realist premise has already been thrown into doubt by other impossibilities and ridiculous occurrences. Both the dancing gopher and the hapless assistant groundskeeper, Carl Spackler (Bill Murray) of Caddyshack look directly into the camera, which connects them as lowest “members of the food chain.” The gopher and the “doofus” are so subterranean, however, they come out the other side and are afforded a certain privilege: Carl unwittingly saves the day for Danny by vibrating the ball into the cup via plastic explosives intended to exterminate the gopher, improbably allowing him to win the $80,000 match while the gopher remains indestructible. Ferris Bueller (Matthew Broderick) often addresses the camera directly when he delivers his occasional diary entry-like comments on the action in Ferris Bueller’s Day Off (Hughes 1986) as does the Narrator (Ed Norton) and Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) in Fight Club (Fincher 1999). By purposefully breaking the fourth wall, an artwork immediately calls attention to itself as an artwork, and by doing so invites a meta-contemplation of itself by the audience and a distance, an alienation from the audience expecting realism. Brecht’s experience of audiences captivated in trance-like enthrallment at Nazi rallies made him realize the power of the theatrical spectacle and its potential danger. In Volker Schlondorff’s film of Death of a Salesman (1985), he and his cinematographer Michael Ballhaus break the fourth wall with a stylized crane shot.

In the early scene in their bedroom filmed as a long shot, the besieged salesman, Willy Loman (Dustin Hoffman), complains to his wife Linda (Kate Reid) about how cramped and caged he feels: “The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and
bricks.” The exterior mid-angle shot that Schlondorff edits to of the couple internally framed by the small bedroom window serves multiple functions: it depicts graphically Willy’s claustrophobia, and the paint-peeling exterior wood of the walls that surround the window helps establish the realism of the set. With its slow zoom or push-in the audience also is encouraged to look closer via a voyeuristic perspective of this bellowing neighbor as he continues to rage: “They should have arrested the builder for cutting those [two elm trees] down. They massacred the neighborhood.” Schlondorf returns us to the interior long shot as Willy reminisces about the fragrant flowers of old Brooklyn. Soon he is bickering with Linda again. Significantly, on the line: “The competition is maddening! Smell the stink from that apartment house! And another one on the side,” an attentive audience discovers that the camera responsible for the long shot is also mounted on a crane as it begins to rise up over Willy to not only significantly dwarf him, but to reveal that the seemingly realistic house of Loman is in fact a series of stage flats with no ceiling. We are watching a filmed play! The realist illusion has been disrupted because the fourth wall has been broken. The result is a detached or alienated contemplation of Willy’s sad predicament as it pushes us away, at least temporarily, from identifying too closely with the play’s main character in true Brechtian fashion. If one has been paying attention, or on a re-viewing of the film, these meta-theatrical flats and the gaps between them are in fact available to the eye from the beginning of the scene.
After a scripted pause, we are back inside witnessing a medium close-up of Willy, the corporate whipping boy, as he asks: “How can they whip cheese?” Following the stirring crane shot ascending above the non-existent ceiling, this medium shot of Willy also jars us back into the realist feel of a traditional narrative film. With its several cinema-like flashbacks of “The Inside of His Head” (Miller’s working title for the play), *Death of a Salesman* works quite well, in Schlondorff’s case at least, as a filmed play—a claim that cannot usually be made. Something similarly Brechtian and spectacular happens at the very end of Sidney Lumet’s American Film Theatre production of Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* (1962).

As the morphine-addled matriarch Mary (Katharine Hepburn) retreats more deeply into her past, rehearsing in the final speech of the play the events that led up to her leaving the convent and her disastrous marriage to James Tyrone, Lumet and cinematographer Boris Kaufman place the camera on a crane and shoot the final scene as
a four shot, i.e., Mary sitting at the table surrounded by her husband James (Ralph Richardson) and her two sons, Edmund (Dean Stockwell) and Jamie (Jason Robards), the latter in shadow and whose back is to the audience. Placing Jamie in such an alienated and alienating position marks his unique outsider position in the family as the one member who is even deprived of any pipe dream memory of accomplishment upon which he might rest. We will analyze Hitchcock’s placement of characters with their backs to the camera in forthcoming chapters. Tyrone Senior can hark back to his glorious acting days opposite Edwin Booth, Mary grasps at both her potential as a concert pianist and as a devout follower of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Edmund drunkenly recites prototypically American transcendental poetry from his square-rigger days, but all Jamie can claim is his non-serious Christian act of charity toward the prostitute, fat Violet.

Fig. 20 Lumet and cinematographer Boris Kaufman place the camera on a crane for the final four shot

When Mary launches into her story of the vision she had at Lourdes of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the camera begins to simultaneously pull back ever so slowly as it subtly elevates to the point that very near the end of the speech, the image has been
reduced to postage stamp size, flanked by occasional lighthouse beams illuminating the windows on three sides of the room (we gaze from the advantage of the invisible fourth wall which has not been broken yet.) It also appears that sound technicians Kenn Collins, James Shields, and Mark Wortreich add an echo effect to Mary’s voice, but that effect may be a aural figment produced by the extreme, yet gradually receding of the image. The camera almost comes to rest, delivering a last-row, “nose-bleed” in an immense Broadway theater seat perspective, when suddenly the audience is surprised by an edit to a shocking choker close-up filling the entire screen of Mary’s tranquilized mask of a face with her line: “That was in the winter of senior year. Then in the spring something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time.”
Fig. 21 The camera begins to simultaneously pull back ever so slowly as it subtly elevates. The audience is surprised by a shocking choker close-up of Mary’s tranquilized mask.

Wordless choker close-up reaction shots follow in steady succession of James, Jamie, Edmund, then back to Mary, then back to the extreme elevated postage stamp perspective as Andre Previn’s piano music associated with Mary’s concert days resumes along with the fog horn, then fade to black. Fading to black in this instance is the cinematic equivalent to the bringing down of the curtain on stage.
Fig. 22 Wordless choker close-up reaction shots follow in steady succession of James, Jamie, Edmund/Return to the postage stamp perspective

Throughout the film (and play), Mary serves as a kind of spectacle for both her husband and sons as well as for the audience as we witness her flights into unreality in this final tableau.

Fig. 23 Mary serves as a kind of spectacle for both her husband and sons as well as for the audience

A **tableau** or **tableau vivant** (Fr., “living picture”) is at first a stage term for actors frozen and wordless on stage posed for a kind of painterly contemplation by the audience which later becomes a stylistic signature of former storyboard artist Alfred Hitchcock and
former stage director Orson Welles. Hitchcock began his work on Vertigo armed only with a series of such pictures: the cemetery, the redwoods, the Spanish mission, etc. British directors Peter Greenaway and Derek Jarman continue the tableau tradition, to name but two. This scene’s final tableau depicts perfectly the ironic, hypocritical Tyrone family dynamic of the alcoholic, defeatist males condescendingly gazing upon and self-righteously pitying the painful performance of the sky-high morphine drama queen. As the camera slowly zooms out, elevates, and continues to reduce the size of this tableau, the audience is encouraged, via defamiliarization, to stop and think about this family dynamic at the heart of O’Neill’s play. Soon we become accustomed to and lulled in escapist Tyrone fashion by this constant pulling away, and that is when we are startled back to “reality” with the choker close-up of Mary. Audience members are put back in a seat at the table like one of her family members, simultaneously mesmerized and contemptuous. The Brechtian design of these stylized choices is to encourage and aid the audience in self-awareness as well as contemplation of the meta-theatrical event and the knowledge it contributes to our reading of the work as a whole. Martin Scorsese and cinematographer Michael Ballhaus in Gangs of New York (2002) bookend their film with a stylized series of lap dissolves that delivers a similar invitation to contemplation.

Montage, Tilts & Patterns

Taken together these lap dissolve sequences form a montage. Montage (Fr., “mounting together, assembling”), or the cutting, splicing, and editing together of several shots, pioneered at the beginning of the 20th Century by Russians Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, is the filmmaker’s way of pasting together images to form an argument of sorts. After the Gangs of New York’s first great battle between the opposing gangs of the
Priest (Liam Neeson) and Bill the Butcher (Daniel Day-Lewis), from a medium shot of battle survivors and Bill the Butcher outlawing the Dead Rabbits, the camera pans to the left and tilts down slightly to a medium close-up of the Priest confirming his death. A tilt is a vertical movement of the camera and, depending on the speed of the tilt and from whose perspective we are seeing it, can give the impression of hope, inquisitiveness, or dread (tilt up), or meekness, melancholy, or at times, a search for hidden meaning (tilt down). The same camera that began with Bill and moved to a close-up of the Priest then begins to both zoom out and elevate on its crane as it reveals the aftermath triangle of melted, bloody snow and dead bodies strewn about New York’s Five Points, the heart of the gang activity and of the film, as Howard Shore’s dramatic and tragic, non-diegetic score (“Brooklyn Heights”) begins to build. With a lap dissolve to a perspective several thousand feet away while maintaining the same zooming out and elevation, we next see the battleground with its identifying triangle surrounded by myriad streets and buildings. A third lap dissolve presents us with a view of the entire island of Manhattan as seen from several miles up in the air as the legend “New York City 1846” appears over the map-like image. There is a kind of historicizing cartographer’s effect here as we are taken out of the personal romance and family dramas and are encouraged to gaze upon the whole scene as a piece of history replete with map. The twin World Trade Towers purposefully appear in the final skyline tableau though the film was released after their annihilation on September 11th 2001. The presence of the since vanished towers is unmistakable and serves as an historical reminder of the attacks by a new gang in town, the al-Qa’ida terror network, who unlike Bill the Butcher’s Native Americans or the Dead Rabbits, follows no rules of war nor engagement.
Bookends: An opening montage of ever-retreating lap dissolves conveys an historical perspective
Fig. 24 Bookends: An opening montage of ever-retreating lap dissolves conveys an historical perspective/A closing montage from the gravesite depicts the passing of time as the NYC skyline grows

The economy of stylized choices operates in a kind of abundance/scarcity mode. At times there is a wealth of similar stylized choices, which form a global image pattern, an iconic schema detectable globally across the entire film. Such is the case with the consistent use of slow lap dissolves in Francis Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), which serve to mimic and underscore the vampire’s ability to effortlessly cross borders, for example, between life and death, between Transylvania and London, and across homo- and heterosexual object choices. Then there are the choices that are singular occurrences, like the slow zoom out interrupted by a choker close-up in *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*. Because it is a rare, singular event, it catches the eye, as do image patterns, and demands interpretation, as do nearly all stylized moments.

**Singular Moments, Mis-Takes & Jumps**

John Ford gives his *Stagecoach* audience a spectacular and unique introduction to John Wayne’s unclear character, The Ringo Kid; no other character is afforded the privilege of this stylized gesture. As the stagecoach begins its pilgrimage to Lordsburg,
its heroic theme music is interrupted by a single gunshot that rings out and briefly jars the camera shooting its progress. Ford dramatically ceases the non-diegetic score and cuts to an image of the accompanying cavalry crossing a river to the sound of the horses’ hooves splashing in the water, and then back to the stagecoach as it approaches the camera head on with its team of horses whinnying. The source of the gunshot is yet unclear. Since everyone is on Apache alert, Apaches attacking either the stagecoach or US soldiers is a reasonable first impression, however the next cut is to a long shot of Ringo swinging his rifle in the air, calling out, “Hold it!” revealing the cowboy either hijacking or flagging down the coach for a ride. The sound of the gunshot is a *faux raccord* and has the effect of tangentially connecting the recent jail breaker Ringo to the renegade Indians. As the camera taking the long shot of Ringo unsteadily and occasionally out of focus zooms into a choker close-up of the Kid, we hear the voice of the driver Buck (Andy Devine) seemingly narrate and direct the stylized zoom when he exclaims: “Whoa. Steady, ho, ho!” The following medium two shot of both Buck and shotgun-riding Marshal Curly Wilcox (George Bancroft) reveals Buck’s enthusiasm at encountering his friend: “Hey look it’s Ringo!” and the Marshal’s ambivalence as he both points his shotgun at Ringo while welcoming him with a smile: “Yeah. Hello Kid.” No other character receives such fluid and choreographed camera treatment. This privilege is part of John Ford’s starmaker machinery as he rescues John Wayne from the near obscurity of the “B-Movies” in which he had been toiling prior to this film, and makes him a star. A *B-Movie* was a low-budget, second-tiered shorter film made with relatively unknown actors and packaged (until the 1960s) with a cartoon, a newsreel, a serial installment, and of course the “A-Movie” feature film.
This entire sequence from the *faux-raccord* gunshot to the exchange between Ringo, Buck and Curly establishes uncertainty about the identity and character of Ringo. As suggested earlier in the discussion of the *Death of a Salesman* zooming lens effect, a **zoom in** (as well as **push in**, **dolly in**, **track** or **truck in**) often confers an invitation to look closer at a character or object. The opposite movement of zooming out, like the ascending crane shot discussed earlier, produces a feeling of escape, alienation, abandonment. A **zoom** is achieved by a lens or lenses whose focal length can be increased thereby magnifying the size of the subject—zoom in, or decreased thereby minimizing the size of the subject—zoom out. Such an invitation to closer scrutiny is certain in *Citizen Kane*’s (1941) opening montage of lap dissolving zooms in as we get closer to the dying Charles Foster Kane, ending in a choker close-up of his mouth uttering that famous last word “Rosebud” that will set the entire investigative narrative in motion. Sam Mendes explains that *American Beauty*’s (1999) overall “push in” patterning reflects the film’s spiritual exhortation (and marketing slogan) to “look
closer.” Here John Ford presents to his audience the Ringo Kid as a puzzling contradiction, whose character develops slowly, and like the prostitute Dallas and whiskey drunken Doc Boone, gets rehabilitated over the course of the film. Ringo proves himself a gentleman, Dallas a loving maternal nurse and suitable spouse, and Boone a competent practitioner when in need. Ford twice repeats this puzzle at film’s end when 1) Luke Plummer (Tom Tyler) enters the saloon after the gun battle encouraging the audience to believe he has slain Ringo, until he collapses dead, and 2) Doc Boone and Curly let on that Ringo is headed back to jail, then with pebbles skedaddle the horses and carriage Ringo sits on toward the sunrise, his ranch and a waiting Dallas. The question of whether it is intentional or mistaken when the focus of the camera goes out of and then back into focus as it zooms in on Ringo is undeterminable and therefore moot.

Anglo-American “New Critics” of the 1950s, such as Wimsatt and Beardsly, argued against the “intentional fallacy” which expressed the belief that knowing an artist’s intention guaranteed the accuracy of a critic’s interpretation. D. H. Lawrence in his book Studies in Classic American Literature issues a similar warning: “Never trust the teller, trust the tale.” Stopping short of embracing the entire New Critical enterprise that restricts analysis solely to the “film itself,” this book affords much more weight to what is up there on the screen, and that means incorporating a “mistake,” such as reading an “unintentionally” unsteady zoom as reflecting the audiences’ attempt to fix a steady focus on a puzzling character like Ringo. Then again, there are unreconstructable mis-takes like the nearly undetectable one that occurs later in Stagecoach.

As the coach and team of horses make its final stretch through Apache territory toward Lordsburg, Ringo and the rest attempt to ford a deep river, throwing unnecessary
weight like Ringo’s saddle over the side. To increase the realism and drama, a camera is placed atop the stagecoach over the shoulders of Buck and Curly in order to provide an “eyewitness” account of the dangerous crossing, but the results are disastrous. Ford alternates between shots from the eyewitness camera and long takes of the river, coach, horses and men as they descend barely afloat into the river. The first indication something is wrong comes when the shadow of the trees on the backs of Buck and Curly begins moving with the coach! After another cut to the long take of the crossing, Ford returns to the eyewitness shot and the reason for the moving tree shadow is revealed. Attentive audience members can see the telltale black shadow of Ford’s eyewitness camera has become as legible as Mickey Mouse ears on the driver’s back because it has been inexpertly camouflaged by branches that shake as they move along with the coach to which they are affixed.

Fig 26  Ford’s eyewitness camera becomes as legible as Mickey Mouse ears on Buck’s back
Once detected it is an unmistakable mistake. Trusting the tale not the teller like D.H. Lawrence advised, what is one to do with the insertion (intentional or not) of an impossible 20th Century technological eyesore in a 19th Century realist setting? Here is a moment when interpretation must stop; it cannot convincingly incorporate such a glaring blooper. Its occurrence has the Brechtian potential of breaking the fourth wall like Schlondorff does in *Death of a Salesman*, but this clearly unintentional meta-cinematic irruption serves no viable purpose. Perhaps Ford allowed the mistake to remain because in the days before video tape, disc players, individual ownership of copies of films and before the wide-spread opportunity to pore over every frame existed, he believed no one would be the wiser. The consistent result of polling the 100 students in my film class each semester suggests Ford had a safe bet: on a first time viewing no one catches the camera shadow mistake. Curiously enough, one of the legends surrounding Orson Welles’ preparation for making *Citizen Kane* is that he watched *Stagecoach* forty times and chose John Ford’s cinematographer Gregg Toland, as opposed to Bert Glennon of *Stagecoach*—one wonders if Welles ever saw the camera shadow. A singular but purposeful breaking of the fourth wall in David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* (1986) serves a function that becomes a particularly intriguing and essential element for any interpretation of that film.

Just as Frank Booth’s (Dennis Hopper) entourage prepares to leave the clubhouse of the heavily made-up, effeminate drug dealer Ben (Dean Stockwell) to resume Jeffrey Beaumont’s (Kyle MacLachlan) unwilling “joy ride,” David Lynch affords his bad man and guests a special, singular privilege. Internally framed by the two lime green curtains
hung between the sitting room and the living room, surrounded by his followers on his right side and Ben on his left, and as Angelo Badalamenti’s ominous score of lower register strings sound we witness a slow push-in on Frank. Ben shuts off the auto mechanic work light he had used as a combination spotlight/mock microphone for his lip-synching performance of Roy Orbison’s “In Dreams” as the long shot of Frank moves in to become a medium close-up by the end of the trajectory of the push-in. During the push-in Frank quietly declares his catch phrase: “Now it’s dark.” The pace of the camera movement quickens as Frank steps up into the frame to loudly proclaim: “Let’s f**k!” and at the culmination of the medium close-up he delivers the menacing line, “I'll f**k anything that moves!” followed by his maniacal laugh. Then the unthinkable or unbelievable stylized moment occurs: Booth and company disappear from the frame via a kind of jump cut although Frank’s laughter continues in a reverse faux raccord and the living room backdrop remains the same. Why? A jump cut is an artificial interruption of a chronological sequence via missing footage that necessarily breaks the fourth wall and calls attention to the fact that one is watching a film because it disrupts the continuity of either time or space or both. An image unexpectedly appears or, as in this case, disappears, due to unexplained missing footage that jerks the audience out of the habitual reality the film has constructed thus far. The audience is left staring at the dimly lit, now empty room, save one notable exception. The life-sized inflatable female sex doll, fully dressed up with pearls around her neck, and a painting of a nude above her head, remains seated on the couch. Why?
“She” has been visible via long shots throughout the scene at Ben’s. A beginning of an answer to these two questions has something to do with the film’s theatricality both in how it is made, and in what it says about the theatrical nature of the film’s main character, Frank Booth. The thematizing of this theatricality is announced at the very beginning of the title sequence, which is projected over the image of an undulating blue velvet curtain. In a fuller reading of the film in the Blue Velvet chapter, connections are
made, among many others, between Ben’s lip-synching, Frank’s homicidal artistry with his death tableau left in Dorothy Vallens’ (Isabella Rossellini) apartment, his camera-less movie making, the theatrical basis of masochism, and Jeffrey’s search for the proper role model in adulthood. A jump cut is used to help portray a certain theatricality in another madman: Travis Bickle.

The most outrageous of all stylistic flourishes in Taxi Driver, a film marked by several of them, occurs very near the middle of the film, its turning point, when Travis addresses his image in the mirror, first feigning a confrontation with an absent combatee ("Are you talkin' to me?"), but then presenting himself to himself and to the audience. He momentarily steps outside his "character" as Travis Bickle to direct and narrate himself, delivering lines a la James Cagney: "Listen you f**kers, you screwheads. Here's a man who would not take it anymore . . . Here is someone who stood up. Here is . . ." Here we are presented with the scene taken twice and are challenged to make sense of it. The second take is inserted with a jump cut. What such a stylistic device expresses depends of course on its context. It is the only jump cut in the film, the only acknowledged double take and must therefore express something contextually specific to this scene in this film rather than something as general as French New Wave filmmaker Jean Luc Godard's defamiliarized mimesis via his famous jump cutting. Coming as it does near the middle of the film, this jump-cut double take in front of the mirror has a mise-en-abyme effect. In this instance mise-en-abyme indicates the graphic abyss one encounters when gazing into mirrors in front of and behind the gazer. At this moment it is as if the film is folding in on itself, reflecting upon itself, and at its center is a vortex of lost footage (the jump-cut) accompanied by an uncanny doubling (the double-take). Here is Travis as assistant director, taking his cue directly from the silhouette
watching, Svengali-like Scorsese who encouraged him to ponder the power of handgun violence to soothe a broken heart. Palantine, Wizard, Charlie T., Sport, various newspapers, magazines, paperbacks, TV, slasher and porn films, all conspire to shape the ex-marine into a vigilante killer. Travis rises here at the true center of the film to a height of reflection in this stylized self-presentation. His created, almost cinematic, identity began in his diary, the site of self-aestheticization; it is from these pages that he draws the film's noir-like narration.

The push-ups, sit-ups, chin-ups reprise his marine basic training and serve as physical preparation for the role. Here is method acting *par excellence* a la De Niro. Because effectively doubled in this scene, Bickle's identity is clearly in crisis and is brilliantly thematized by the split in Bernard Herrmann’s non-deigetic soundtrack as discussed in detail in that chapter.

This first chapter has examined an array of film concepts and terms, their definitions and their individual applications when discovered in various films. Many more concepts, terms and applications remain, and the chapters to follow build upon this process to provide interpretive strategies which analyze entire films by means of identifying, defining, and explaining their stylized moments, and then applying those insights toward an interpretation of each film as a whole. What we do in analyzing these moments is we articulate and interpret *choices* that are made by the artists who created the film. The logic operating in this book states that interpreters can produce a convincing reading of a film by targeting for analysis particular moments where the director has gently or not so gently nudged the audience with stylized cinematic gestures that, when decoded, unlock significance. After these moments have been identified and analyzed in isolation, the interpretive results are integrated into the film’s entire system of signs in order to reach conclusions with
extraordinary explanatory power about the film as a whole. The basic premise by which this approach operates is known as structuralism, a linguistic and anthropological procedure of understanding social phenomena as part of a system of signs whose meaning resides in their interrelationships. This structuralist approach to film claims that each stylized moment carries meaning based on the generally accepted conventions of mainstream moviemaking language and that, like beginning with the imbedded code of a tiny sample of DNA, the entire organism, or film, can be convincingly and thoroughly explicated.