

Film Techniques



Part 2: shots and angles

basic camera shots

basic shots are defined by the relationship of
the size of a person to the 4x3 frame



CU - close up



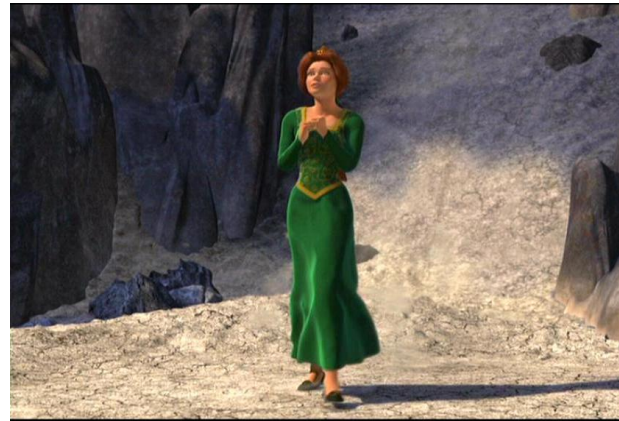
MCU -
medium close up



MS - mid shot



MLS -
medium long shot



LS - long shot



ELS -
extra long shot

close up / CU

a detailed view of a person or object – only the head, which fills the frame



a publicity shot for the Russian film *Burnt by the Sun* (1994).



and one of Audrey Hepburn in *Charade* (1964)

a CU helps to create a sense of intimacy, and helps the viewer to identify with the character.



Olivia Hussey as Juliet in
Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1966)

Too many close ups takes the character out of context, which can be disorientating and claustrophobic.

They need to be mixed with a variety of other shots.

Close ups in wide screen films can be problematical, because there is so much screen to fill.

Kenneth Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993) was filmed in 1.85.1



Emma Thompson as Beatrice

The Fellowship of the Ring was filmed in anamorphic wide screen (2.35:1); the shallow depth of field helps to keep it intimate.



Orlando Bloom as Legolas

as was *Finding Neverland* (2004), with Kate Winslet and Freddie Highmore. Here there is less sense of intimacy, though more with Kate who is shot in shallow focus than Freddie who is not.



Directors have resorted to various stratagems to enable them to use CU effectively in a widescreen format, to regain the intimacy of the 4x3 CU.

- using shallow focus to blur the rest of the frame.



Ralph Fiennes in *The Constant Gardener*

- darkening the rest of the frame.



Rory Culkin, in *Mean Creek* (2004)

- masking part of the frame with curtains.



Terence Howard in *Crash* (2004)

or architecture



Don Cheadle, in *Crash*

or both



Chris Cooper in *American Beauty*

- framing the character with other figures:



Denzel Washington in *Remember the Titans*



Michael Sheen in *The Queen* (2006)



Thora Birch is framed by Kevin Spacey on one side and the verticals of the stove on the other, in *American Beauty*.



and here by Wes Bentley's out of focus shoulder

- filling the background with interesting stuff



The wonderful Charles Durning as Governor 'Pappy' O'Daniel
in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

- or nothing at all



Chris Thomas King as Tommy Johnson in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

big close up / BCU

less common in widescreen format, though still sometimes used.



Rachel Weisz in *The Constant Gardener*

It is often used for sinister effect

Jon Voight in *Holes*
(2003)



Ian McKellen in
Richard III (1995)

or to show threatening or bullying behaviour, as in this shot from *Strictly Ballroom* (1992)



or for more subjective effects:

the 13-year-old Jamal has finally found Latika after six years;
as he watches her dance, she is reflected in his eye.



Tanay Hemant Chheda in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008)



Vanessa Redgrave makes a powerful impact in her scenes at the end of *Atonement*, when she seems to speak directly to the cinema audience.



BCU helps to show the distress of Chris McCandless
(Emile Hirsch) in *Into the Wild* (2007)



and it emphasises the glamour of Nicole Kidman's Satine in
Moulin Rouge (2001)

Widescreen filming is more adaptive for **TWO** shots, whether CU or MCU/MS.



CU TWO of young Jacksons as hobbit children



Theatre patrons in *Finding Neverland*



MCU TWO from *The Pianist*, with Adrian Brody and Emilia Fox



even man and dog

Johnny Depp and his 'bear' Porthos in *Finding Neverland*

CU TWO shots created an intimacy in older films, as in this publicity shot for *Charade* with Cary Grant and Audrey Hepburn.



which is more difficult to achieve in widescreen filming



William Hurt and Marcia Gaye Harden in *Into the Wild*

This is often solved by over the shoulder shots



Emily Mortimer and Paul Schneider in *Lars and the Real Girl*

Over-shoulder shots are a staple of dialogue filming; shot/reverse shot gives both speaker's POV.



Adrien Brody and Emilia Fox in *The Pianist*

An over-shoulder shot also gives the viewer's POV.



BCU TWO: Dev Patel and Freida Pinto in *Slumdog Millionaire*

medium close up and mid shot / MCU and MS

It is often difficult to differentiate between the two: MCU is usually head and shoulders;



MS includes more of the body but not all of it.



Kenneth Branagh as Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*



The scarecrow effectively and amusingly fills a gap in this MS TWO of Sam (Sean Astin) and Frodo (Elijah Wood) from *Fellowship of the Ring*.



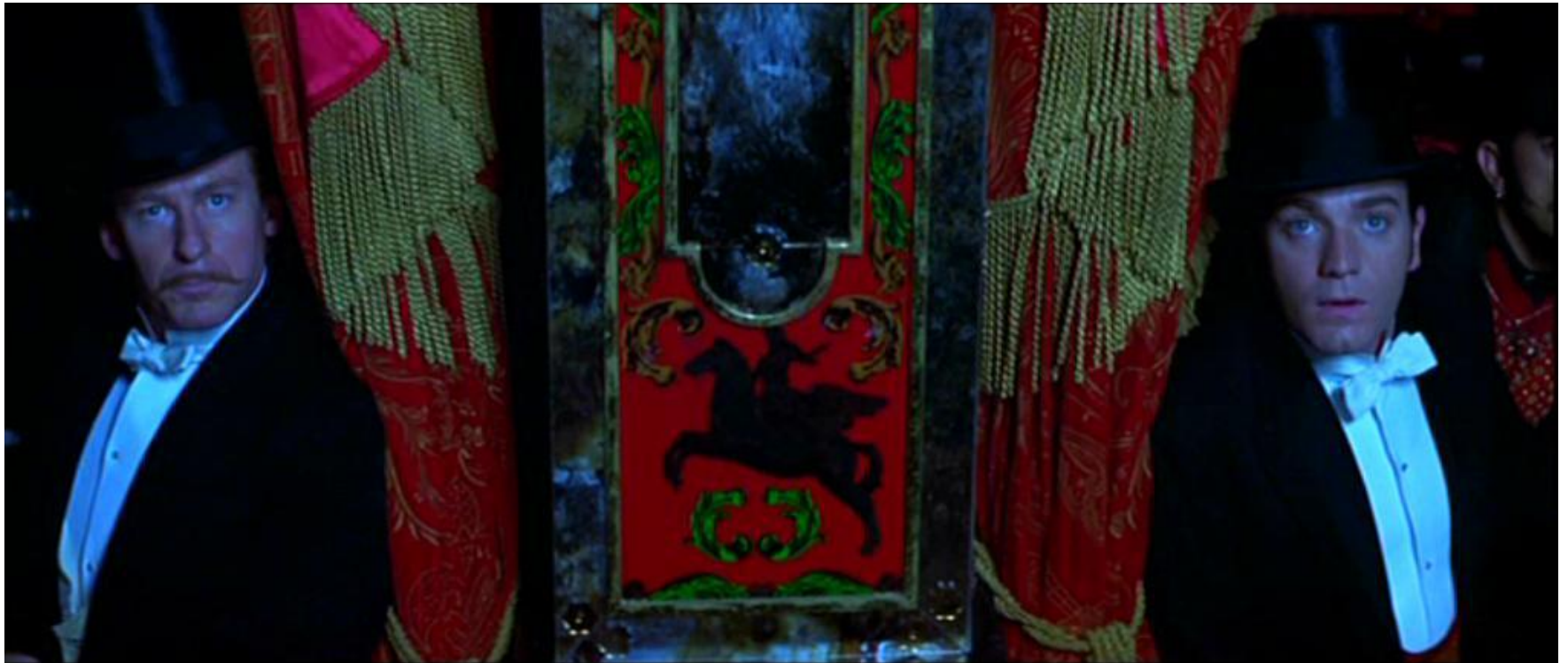
Space here is filled by files and blinds – all verticals. The actor's position on the far left of the frame underlines his character's discomfort over the bad news he is bringing to the unseen listener. The verticals add subliminal barriers.

Danny Huston in *The Constant Gardener*

The space between figures can be used to show the emotional gap between characters

as in this scene between the estranged brothers (Matthew Macfadyen and Colin Foy) from *In My Father's Den*.

or to both connect and separate the rivals (Richard Roxburgh and Ewan McGregor) for Satine in *Moulin Rouge* – with humorous effect.



long shot / LS

a shot that shows a human body in full and within the frame



a publicity shot of Ian McKellen as Gandalf

An LS is often used to put a character into the context of the wider setting.



Jamie Bell in *Billy Elliot* (2000)

extra long shot / ELS

describes almost any shot with the human figure dwarfed by its surroundings.



Wes Bentley and Kevin Spacey in *American Beauty*



Jamie Bell and Nicola Blackwell in *Billy Elliot*

Too many long shots in a movie emphasises the context over the drama and keeps the viewers at a distance, making it hard for them to get involved.

Shooting one or two characters in LS or ELS tends to leave a great deal of picture space to fill, especially in widescreen.



In this shot from *The Princess Bride*, the barn on the right and the gate and tree on the left fill the frame and eliminate awkward gaps.



The emptiness of the yard underlines the despair of Shaun Toub in *Crash*

Into the Wild director Sean Penn used many ELS shots to show first Emile Hirsch's Chris McCandless's joy in the wide open spaces, and then increasingly his dangerous isolation.





camera angles

low angle

a shot in which the subject is photographed from below



Mary Barrie (Radha Mitchell) takes the high moral ground – literally and metaphorically – with her husband JM Barrie in *Finding Neverland*



Here it is used – as it so often is – to show power and authority.

Hugo Weaving and friend in *The Matrix*

Contempt and condescension from Pat Thomson, in *Strictly Ballroom*





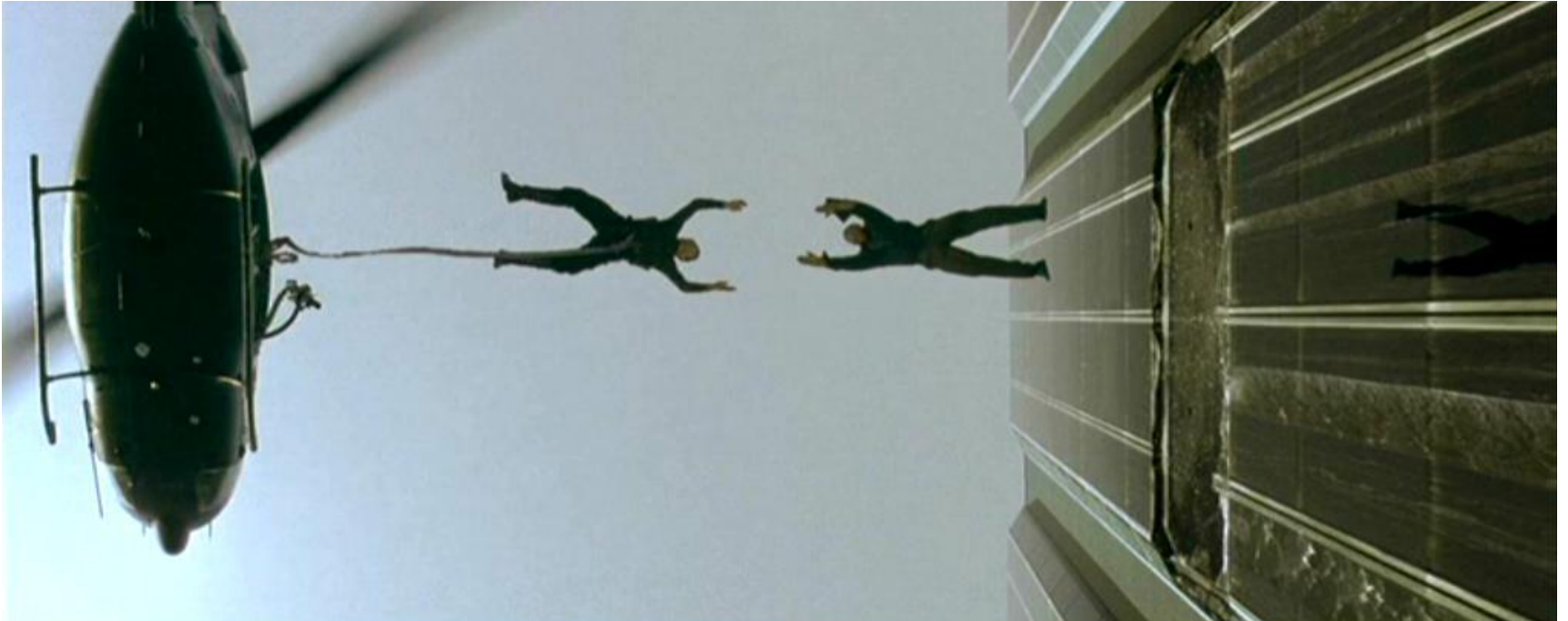
Mandy Patinkin, Wallace Shawn and Andre the Giant in *The Princess Bride* – the effect here is deliberately more comedic. This is the POV of the Man in Black who is climbing the cliff face towards them.



The prison in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) is designed to intimidate



as is Lord Farquaad's castle in *Shrek* (2004).



spectacular use of a low angle shot as Neo rescues Morpheus
in *The Matrix*



This low angle shot is also a POV shot as Neo wakes and sees Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) looking down at him.

high angle

a shot in which the subject is photographed from above



It gives an overall view of the arena in *A Knight's Tale* (2001)



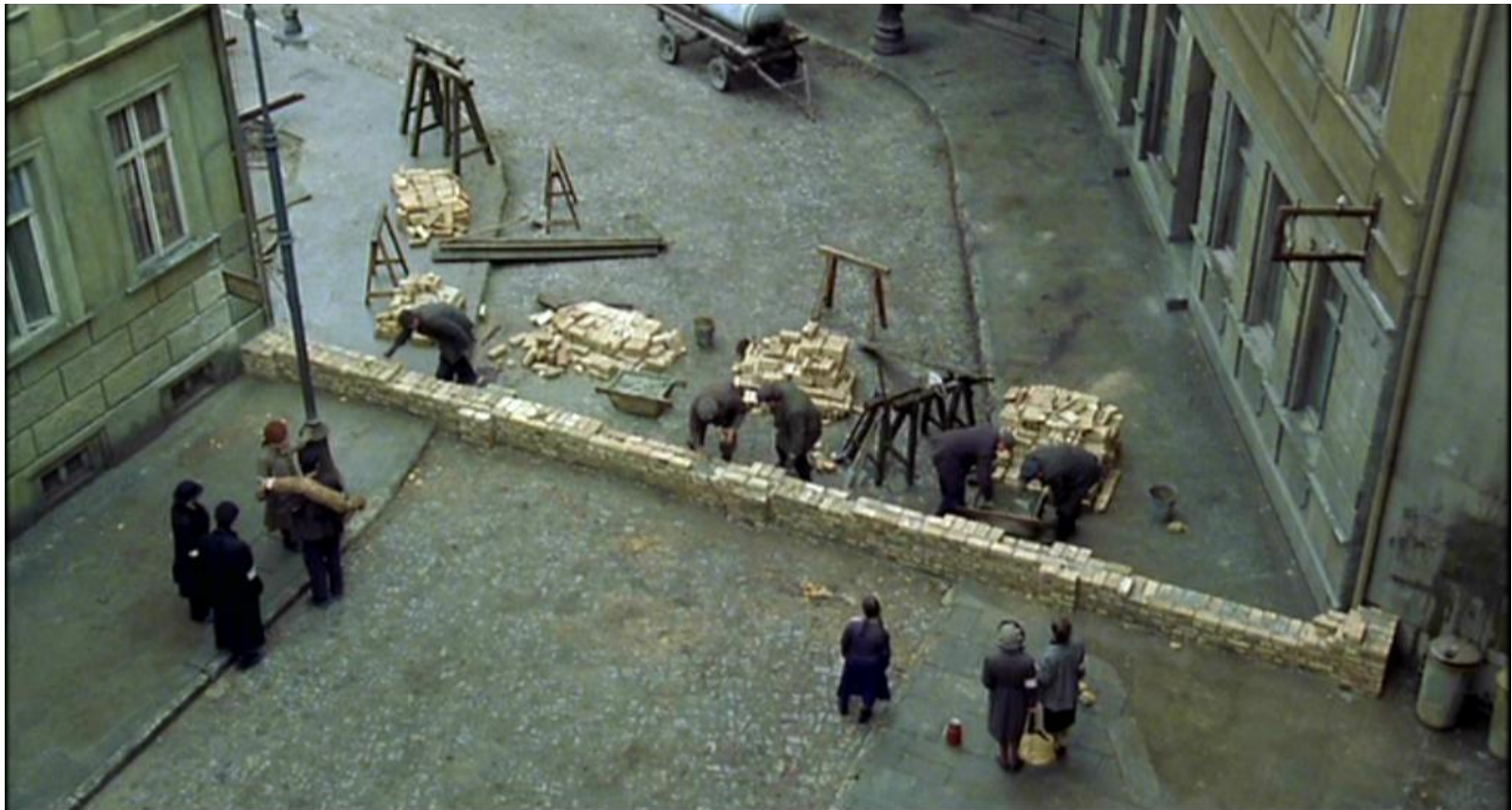
and of the committee that is planning Princess Diana's funeral in *The Queen*



This high angle shot is also a POV shot, as young Briony witnesses from the window above – and misinterprets – an encounter between Robbie (James McAvoy) and Cecilia (Keira Knightley) in *Atonement*.



An older Briony (Romola Garai) is shown alone and small as she faces the fact that the evidence she gave years earlier was false.



Heinrich Szpilman and his family watch the building of the wall that will imprison them in the Warsaw ghetto – a high angle POV shot from *The Pianist*.



Later, he watches the battle for Warsaw through the windows of his hiding place – another POV shot that emphasises his imprisonment as he hides from the Nazis.

extreme high angle



The Matrix

- it is meant to look scary, and since it is Neo's view from the window ledge he is on, it is.



A low angle shot may be juxtaposed with a high angle one

– in this case for comic effect.

(Chicken Run, 2000)



Using the Camera

a standard camera films a scene from *Julie and Julia* (2009)



Note the shading from the sun, softening the light, and the booms – microphones on long arms above the actors.

a street scene



filming in an enclosed space:



Chris Messina in *Julie and Julia*

crane shot

a shot taken by a camera on a crane, a device which resembles a huge mechanical arm.



The crane carries the camera (and usually the cinematographer) and can move in virtually any direction.

smaller versions are manipulated from the ground and don't hold the camera operator

like this one used in filming *Slumdog Millionaire*

on location for *Julie and Julia*



The most obvious uses are to view the actors from above as in this famous shot from *High Noon* (1952), showing the sheriff Will Kane on his own to face the outlaws coming to kill him

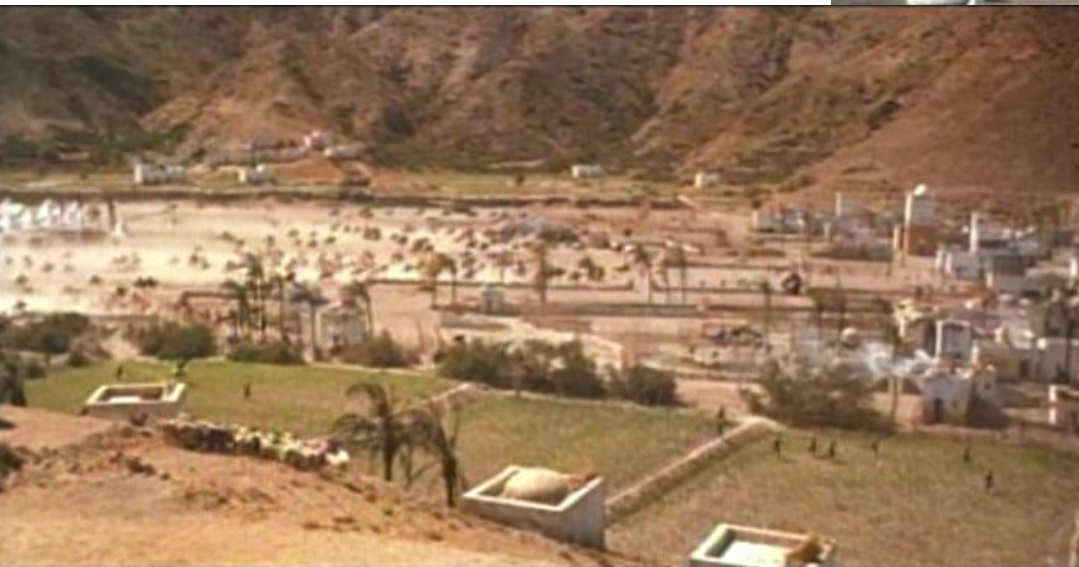


or where Tim Robbins is in danger of being thrown off the roof by a warder in *The Shawshank Redemption*.



a shot like this is very effective in making the viewer share the feelings of the character.

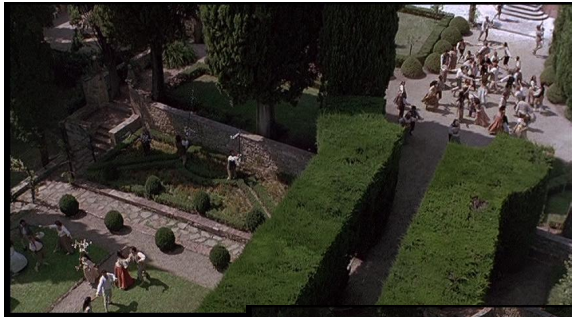
or in these shots from *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), showing the Arab tribesmen, having crossed the desert, attacking the Turkish-held Aqaba



– giving a vivid sense that we are watching history happen.

or to move up and away from the actors, a common way of ending a movie

as in the famous 3-minute crane shot that ends Kenneth Branagh's film of *Much Ado About Nothing*



Sometimes it is used to show visual patterns, as in this scene from Branagh's *Much Ado*



aerial shots are taken from planes or helicopters



a stunning view of northern Kenya, in *The Constant Gardener*

The prisoners in *The Shawshank Redemption* rush to the fence when a new intake arrives.



Aerial shots are often used to establish locations



dawn over Auckland Harbour in *Sione's Wedding*



THE PENTAGON 1953 - FIVE YEARS LATER

A Beautiful Mind



Mumbai's Juhu slum in *Slumdog Millionaire*



canted angle

a camera tilted to one side so the horizon is on a slant is **canted**; also called a 'Dutch angle' or a 'Dutch tilt'

not to be confused with a 'tilt shot'
which involves camera movement.



The canted angle helps show how disorientated Peter is after the spider bite in *Spider-Man*.



Dr Rosen (Christopher Plummer) as seen by the schizophrenic John Nash in *A Beautiful Mind*

Sam's POV of Gandalf, who has just hauled him in through the window of Frodo's home, is a more comic image.



When the gangster Javed arrives home early, his appearance is frightening and threatening.



Mahesh Manjrekar in *Slumdog Millionaire*



the combination of a canted angle and an extreme ELS emphasises the despair and hopelessness of Jamal in this shot from *Slumdog Millionaire*.

level of framing

It is not only the angle from which a camera shoots, but the height at which it shoots that can be significant.

Most cameras are set at eye-level, so we experience a film as if we are watching real life



Professor Hilbert (Dustin Hoffman) talks to Karen Eiffel (Emma Thompson) in *Stranger Than Fiction* (2006)

In Gurinder Chadha's *Bend it Like Beckham*, a 'WEGO' camera was used at ground level to give the foot's or ball's POV during a match.



usual camera height – high angle shot

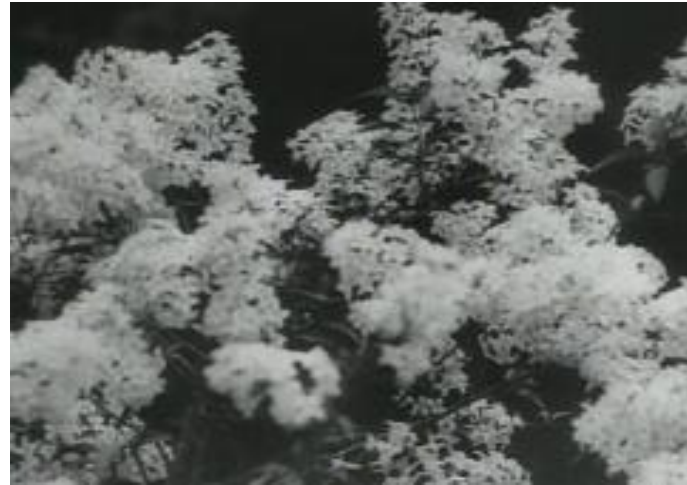
WEGO camera – shot at ground level



focus

focus

refers to degree of the sharpness of the image's outlines and distinct textures



depth of field

the distance through which elements in an image are in sharp focus

Greater depth of field will be obtained in bright rather than dull light, and with a narrow lens aperture; or with a wide-angle rather than a long lens.

A shallow depth of field is often used as a technique to focus audience attention on the most significant aspect of a scene.

•**Shallow focus** is more manipulable than **deep** focus, and so the director has more control over the images

Depth of field is directly connected, but not to be confused, with focus.

focus is the quality – the 'sharpness' of an object as it is registered in the image

depth of field refers to the extent to which the space represented is in focus.



a shallow depth of field in this shot of Romola Garai in *Atonement*



much greater depth of field in this shot from *Shakespeare in Love*

deep focus

describes a scene that is kept in sharp focus, from close-up to the furthest plane



Lester's office in *American Beauty*

It can be used for interior scenes



The Shawshank Redemption



Remember the Titans



Spider-Man

or exterior scenes.



O Brother, Where Art Thou?



Finding Neverland



Spider-Man



Deep focus makes appallingly clear the number of people collected for transportation to the concentration camps in *The Pianist*.



shallow focus

The camera focuses on objects in the foreground, so the background is blurry,

as in this shot from *Pleasantville* (1998).



The purpose is often to ensure the focus of attention will be the object or person in question



Gwyneth Paltrow in *Shakespeare in Love* (1998)



Keira Knightley seems as delicate as the flowers she is arranging in this shot from *Atonement*.

or to create a sense of intimacy



Harold Crick (Will Ferrell) is in ecstasy as he eats one of Ana Pascal's cookies, in *Stranger Than Fiction*.

It is often used to separate a character from their surroundings, perhaps emphasising loneliness or isolation, emotional or real.



Frank (Steve Carell) and Dwayne (Paul Dano) are both alienated from society and family in *Little Miss Sunshine*.



Gerry tries to maintain a bit of privacy as he talks to his girlfriend while his impatient team-mates queue to use the phone, in *Remember the Titans*



The focus is on the broken fragment of vase – the tension in Robbie is revealed in his hand – as Cecilia gets out of the fountain in *Atonement*.



a wonderful example from *Spider-Man*, with the focus on the spider and its web, and the students, including Peter Parker unfocussed below



The Queen sits by the river with the young Princes barely visible on the other side in *The Queen*.

Here shallow focus serves to both isolate her – underlining the essential loneliness of her position – and at the same time keeps the Princes out of the limelight.

differential or selective focus

used to describe those shots where the focus is neither deep nor shallow but on a chosen plane or object.



The focus is on the magnificent stag the Queen sees extraordinarily close; it is her POV and she is merely a blur on the picture plane as she looks at it.



Keira Knightley and James McAvoy in *Atonement*

Robbie's POV of Cecilia has her in focus while he is out of focus on the edge of the frame.

In another example from the exquisitely photographed *Atonement*, Robbie's POV of Cecilia is in focus while the background and, to a lesser extent, Robbie himself are out of focus.



the shot beautifully demonstrates the intensity of his feelings for her

zoom

A zoom lens has variable focus that permits the cinematographer to change from wide-angle to telephoto shots (and vice versa) in one continuous movement, often plunging the viewer in or out of a scene rapidly.

- Whereas a tracking shot takes us **into** the space, with a zoom we remain distanced while the image gets bigger. This can be disorientating and distancing and is often used for shock effects.

It is difficult to demonstrate zoom using still pictures.

However, the following shots from *The Fellowship of the Ring*, a film that utilises the zoom lens in a number of scenes, will give a hint of the idea.

The scene is the one where Frodo becomes aware of evil on the road. The zoom turns a peaceful road into a tunnel of dread.



this is Frodo's POV; the film then CUTs to Frodo for his reaction



In the initial sequence of *The Stendhal Syndrome* (Italy, 1996), Dario Argento's camera zooms from a medium long shot of people queuing up at a museum's entrance to a medium close-up of the protagonist



Notice how she 'helps' the zoom to achieve its purpose of singling her out by moving her head.

rack (or pull) focus

focus change from one object to another, by **lens movement** rather than by a CUT

It forces the viewer's eye to travel with those areas of an image that remain in sharp focus.

'Rack' focus is the movement of the focus within a shot; 'selective' or 'differential' focus is static.

In this shot from *American Beauty*, the focus is on the glass of carrot juice; Jane is only a blur in the background.



for a brief moment, both images are blurred



Jane is coming into focus; the juice blurred



Jane is fully in focus; the carrot juice merely a blur



camera movement

dolly shot

Tracks are laid on the set to permit a smooth movement of the camera, which can then follow a moving person or object.



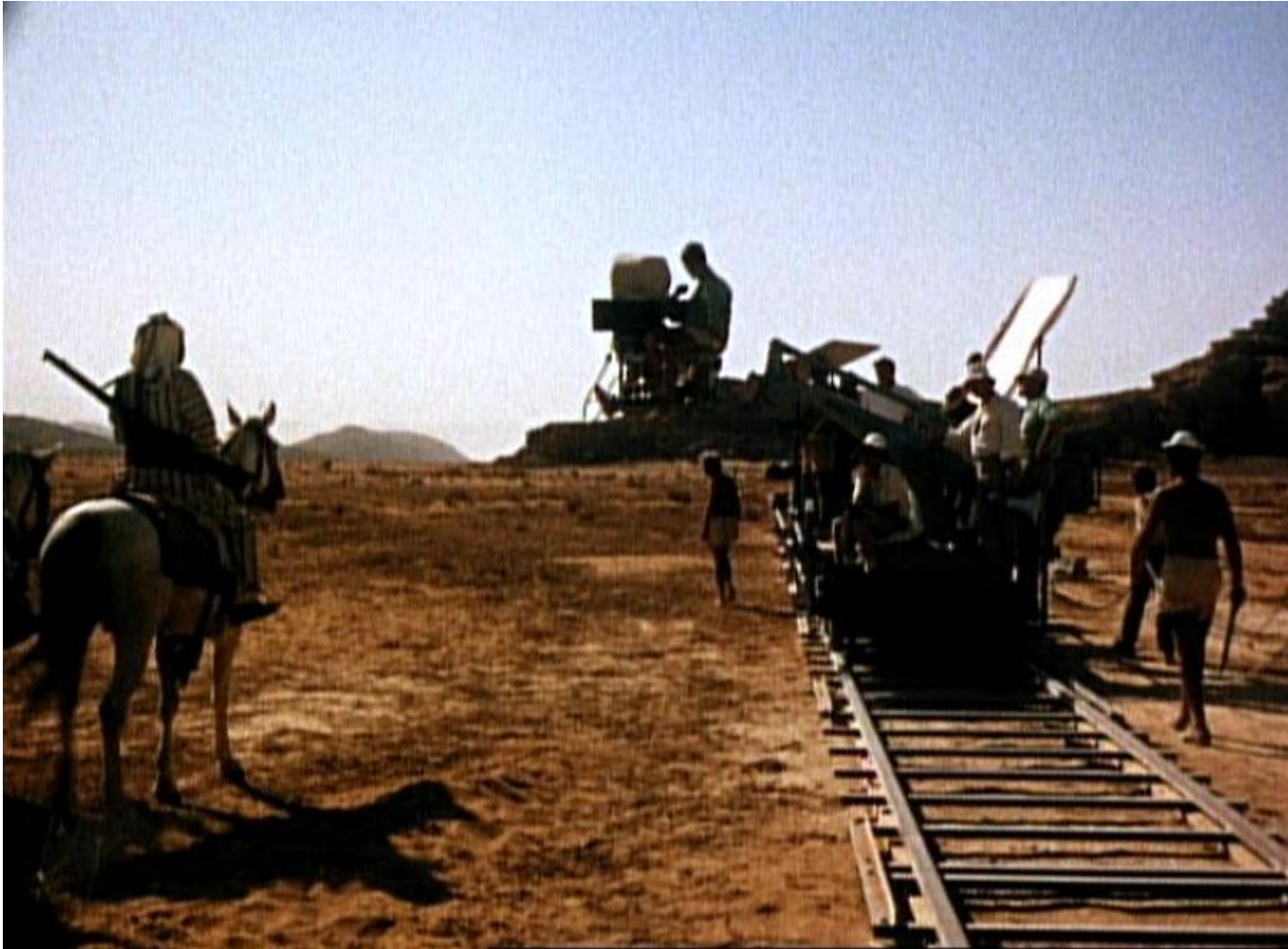


straight

or curved

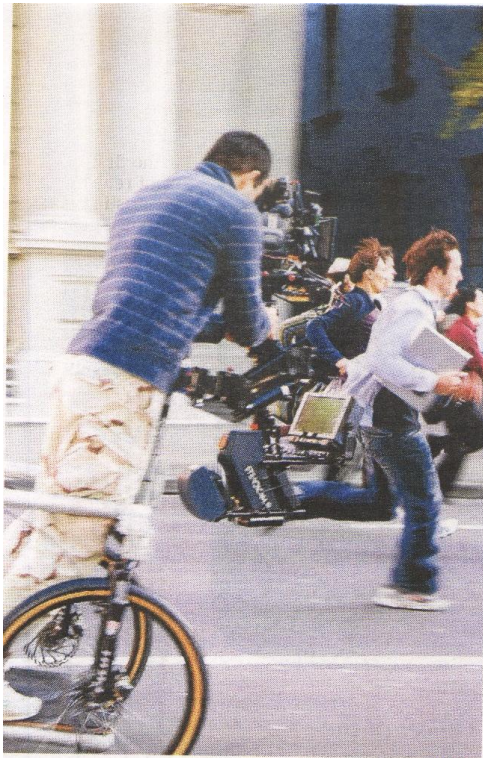


filming *Lawrence of Arabia* in the desert.



tracking / trucking shot

A shot taken from a moving vehicle , that follows a moving person, animal, vehicle or other object.



there is clearly much more flexibility of movement than with a dolly – but also less stability



For closer work, there is hand-held – or more likely 'shoulder-held' – as in this photograph of filming in the London Underground.



Hand-held cameras are often used to give a deliberately unsteady effect, to suggest the sort of authenticity that a documentary would give.

Dollies are used less than they used to be since the invention of the **Steadicam**, which gives a smoother, less jerky result than a hand-held camera, but has a flexibility a stationery camera (or even one on tracks) can't have.



Meryl Streep and Stanley Tucci wander through Paris in *Julie and Julia*



Note her very thick-soled shoes, needed to create Julia Child's height of 6 ft 2 ins; the shoes will not be seen in the film.

racing through a Mumbai slum with the latest digital camera



In the famous 9-minute tracking shot that begins Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992), the camera picks up and follows Tim Robbins' Range Rover as it comes into the lot...



follows him to the door of his office



and then follows Fred Ward as he walks and chats...



reverse tracking

tracking shots are usually made on a slight angle from the side of the subject

Occasionally a **following shot** will be shot from behind a moving subject. Following shots are not common because faces cannot be seen

Reverse tracking is a moving shot from in front of a moving actor or object, with the camera moving backwards as the actor moves forwards.

A REVERSE TRACKING SHOT being filmed in Daley Plaza in Chicago, as Harold Crick (Will Ferrell) runs through the pedestrians in *Stranger Than Fiction*.





In *Julie and Julia*, this REVERSE TRACKING SHOT uses dolly tracks.



reverse tracking is used when the director wants to focus on the face and body of the character being tracked

or wants the audience to share the character's experience,

as in this very famous sequence of Cary Grant's being chased by a crop-duster in Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959)











Let's finish by looking at a brief (90 second) scene from *Spider-Man*, to see how good camerawork and editing support the story-telling,

how a few carefully chosen shots can say so much.

The scene comes almost exactly half way into the film; Oscorp founder and chief scientist Osborn reports the great success of the company to his Board of Directors.

the scene opens with an EST shot of the company building



and DISSOLVES



to an interior, where Oscorp reports to the Board.



SLOW PULL BACK from Osborn gradually reveals the board members



not looking terribly impressed, as he gets smaller and smaller



until he is ELS at the end of the table, out of focus, with the solid and implacable head of the Chairman dominating the foreground.



CUT to Osborn's POV of the whole power of the Board as the Chairman announces the sale of the company.



CUT to MCU to show Osborn's incredulous reaction



REVERSE SHOT of his antagonist



Osborn appeals to the board – insignificant and powerless in ELS



a few shots of board members are INTERCUT as Osborn pleads unsuccessfully for his company



the Chairman takes a callous sip of coffee to underline Osborn's defeat



but the OUTPOINT shot is Osborn's Goblin smile, promising revenge.

