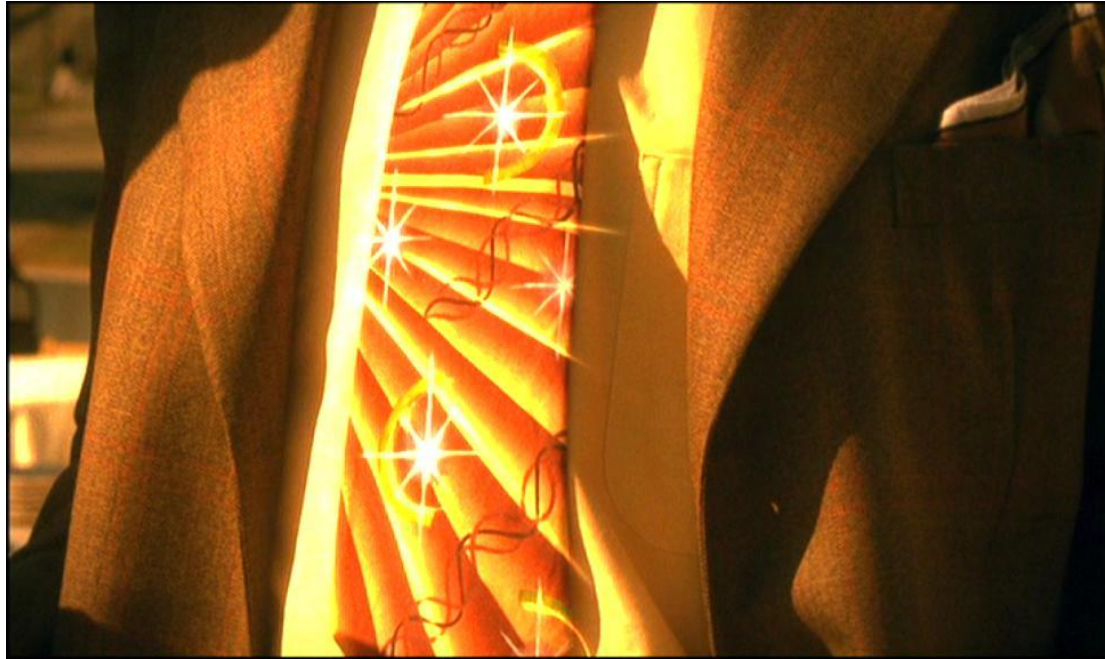


Film Techniques



part 3: pre- and post-production

pre-production

storyboarding

Shots and scenes – and even whole films – are sometimes sketched in advance and in sequence, like a comic strip, thus allowing the filmmaker to outline the *mise en scène* and construct the editing continuity before production begins.

Producers and studios like directors who do this, because production money isn't being wasted on 'dead time' on the set; crews don't have to sit idly while a director thinks about the next set-up.

Alfred Hitchcock said that he found this the most interesting part of making a film. Once he had planned every shot, the actual filming was just finishing the job.

Steven Spielberg, Peter Jackson and Sam Mendes all regularly use storyboards.

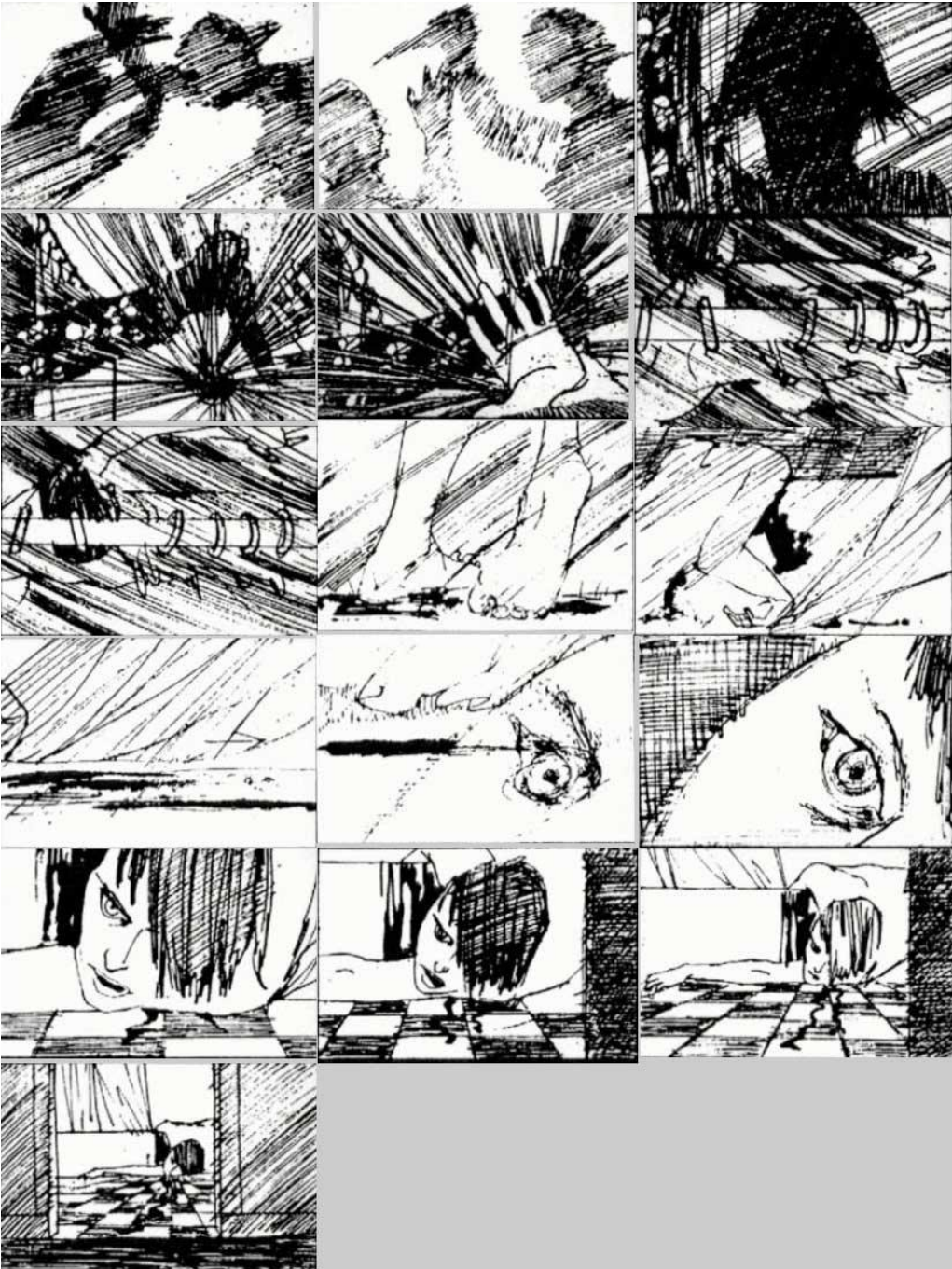
They can be simple sketches,
like these for *Mean Creek*
(Jacob Aaron Estes)



or complex and elaborate, like this set of storyboards for the famous shower scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960)



and even more detail:



American Beauty · Sam Mendes · Tony Stone · 2/13/07

INT. BRAD'S OFFICE



1. Brad is sitting
behind his desk
... to the man
you can understand



2. Brad Pitt
Lester looks
small and
isolated...



3. Lester too



An office scene in *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes) with the actual scene beside each storyboard sketch

Or more elaborate like this one for *The Fellowship of the Ring*.



This exact view didn't make the final cut.

Instead we saw this



this

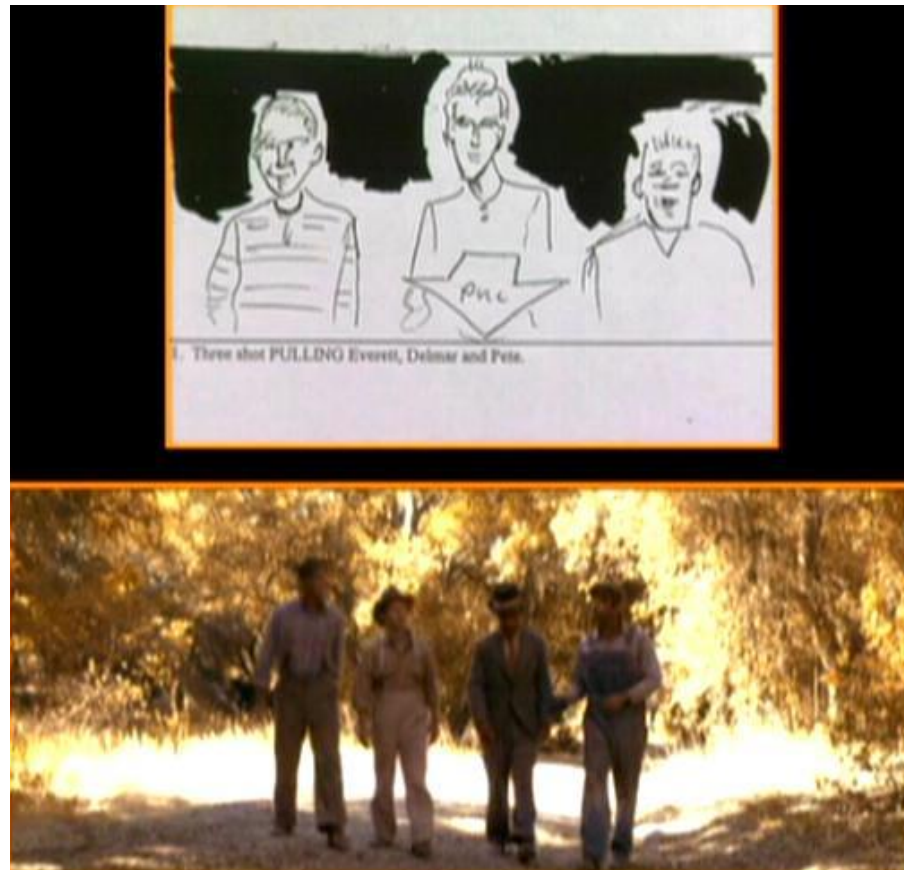


and this



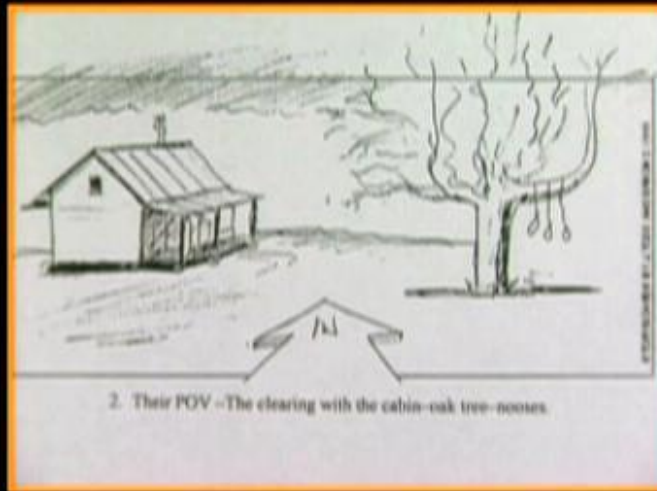
Look at how the Coen Brothers planned a scene in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

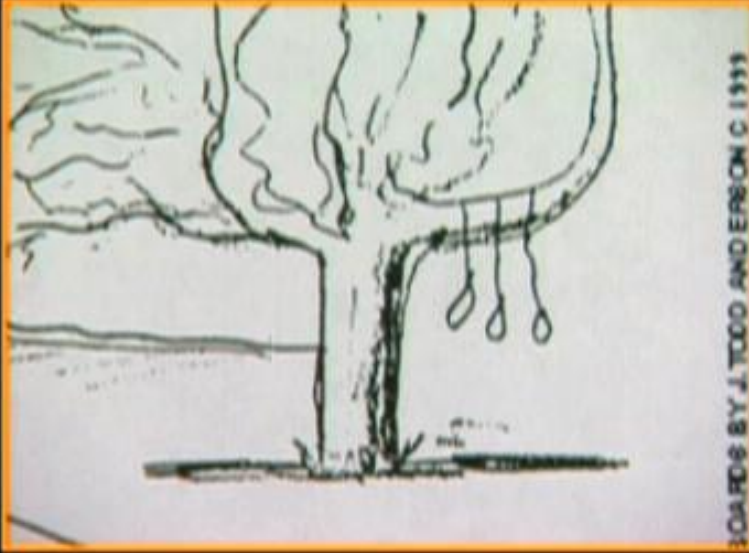
Everett and the boys have come to his old cabin to look for his wife's wedding ring, secure in the knowledge that they have been pardoned by the Governor.



Note that the original plan was to have just the three main characters; in the actual shooting, they have included a fourth, Tommy, whom the boys saved from being lynched.

Ironically Tommy now faces being hanged by the sheriff who has been pursuing the boys from the start.



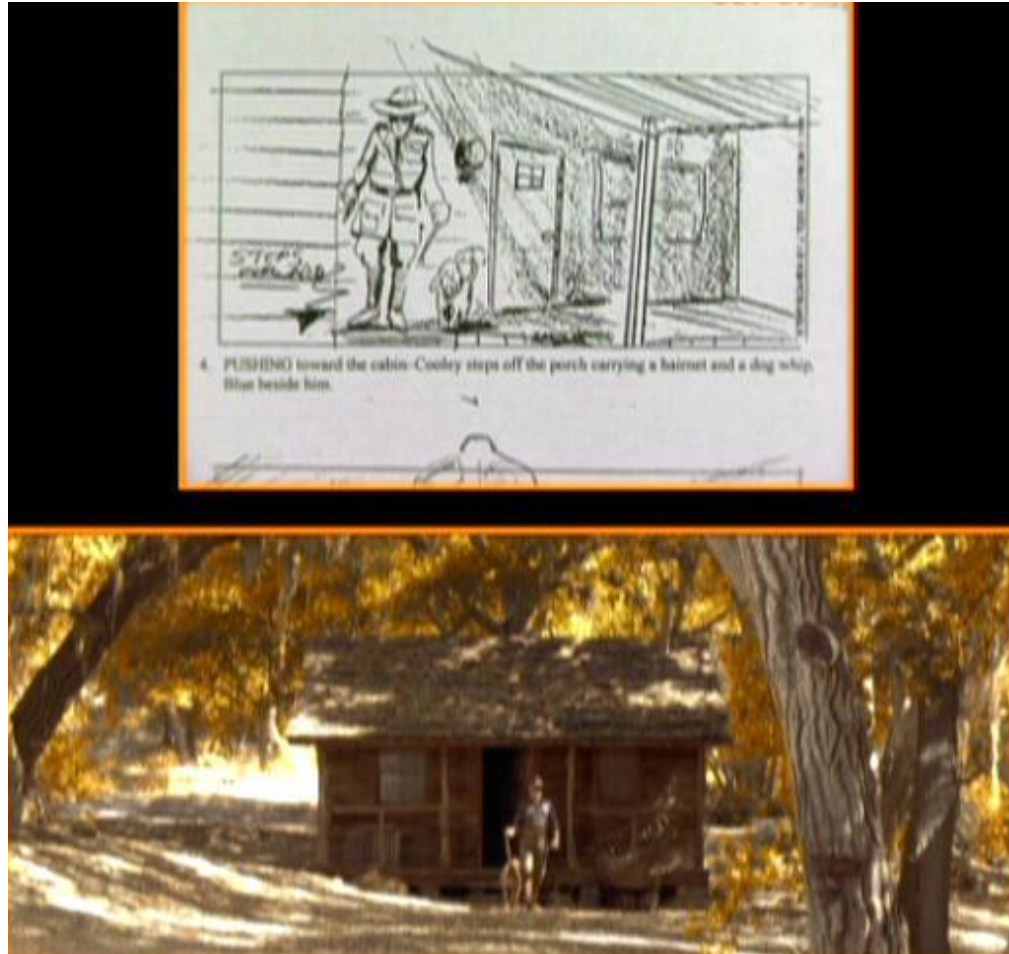


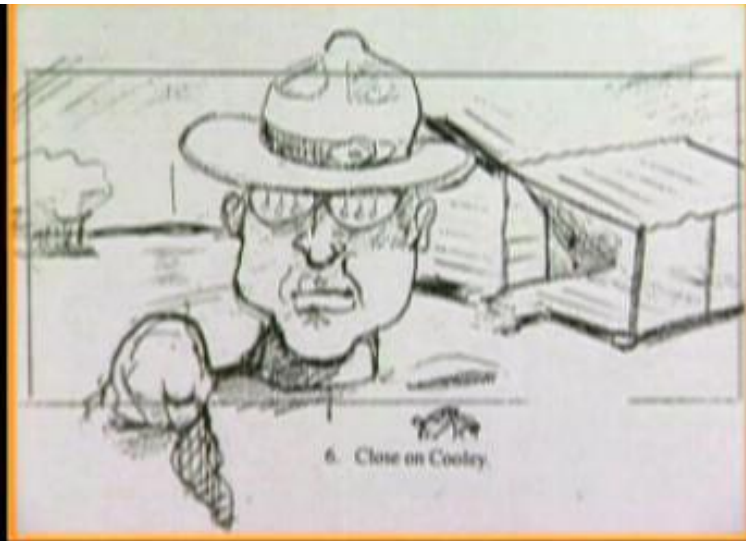


3. Back to the three shot as two goons fall in behind the boys' pushing them forward

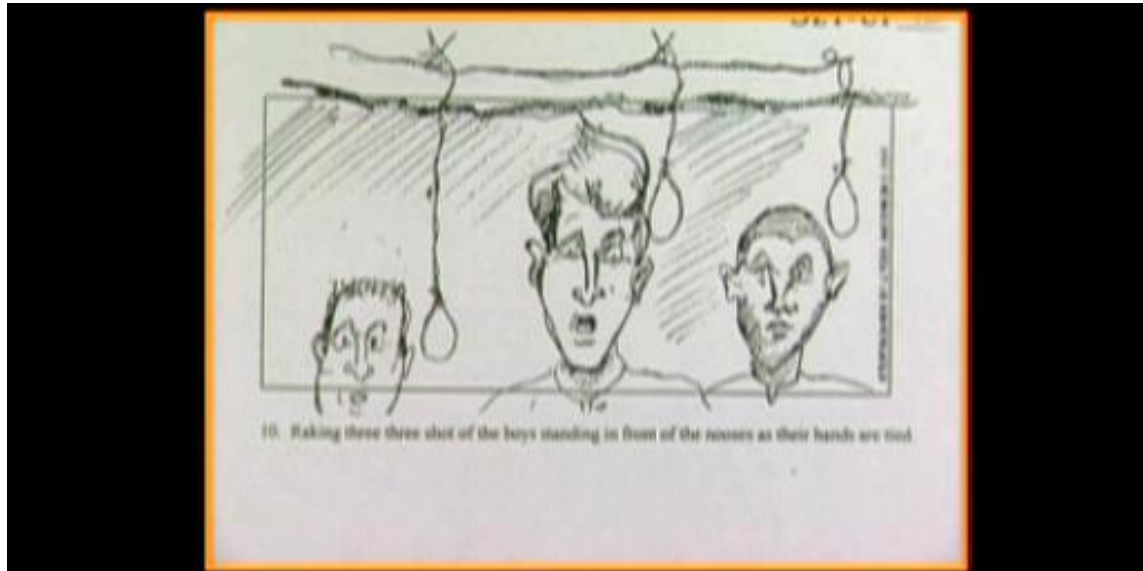


only to find their old nemesis waiting for them.









By the way, they are rescued! It is a comedy.

design

The Designer and/or Art Director are responsible for the look of a film.

An important element of *mise en scène* is **décor** – the design and furnishing of the basic setting.

Décor can be used to make a significant contribution to the ideas or mood of a film,

as these sets from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1969) demonstrate:



the futuristic furniture and reduced colour scheme stress the sterility and impersonality of the space station environment

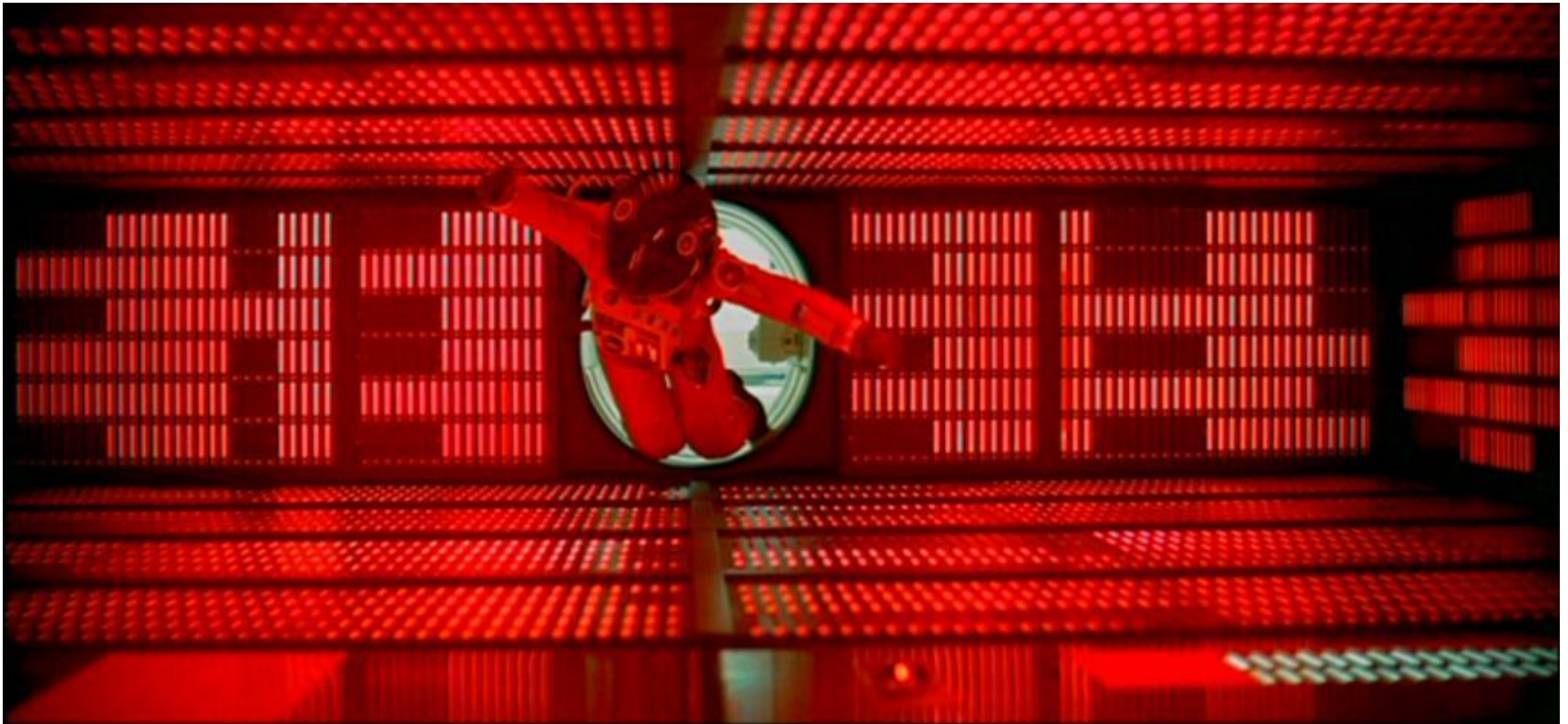


which is emphasised by the deep focus

and in the spaceship

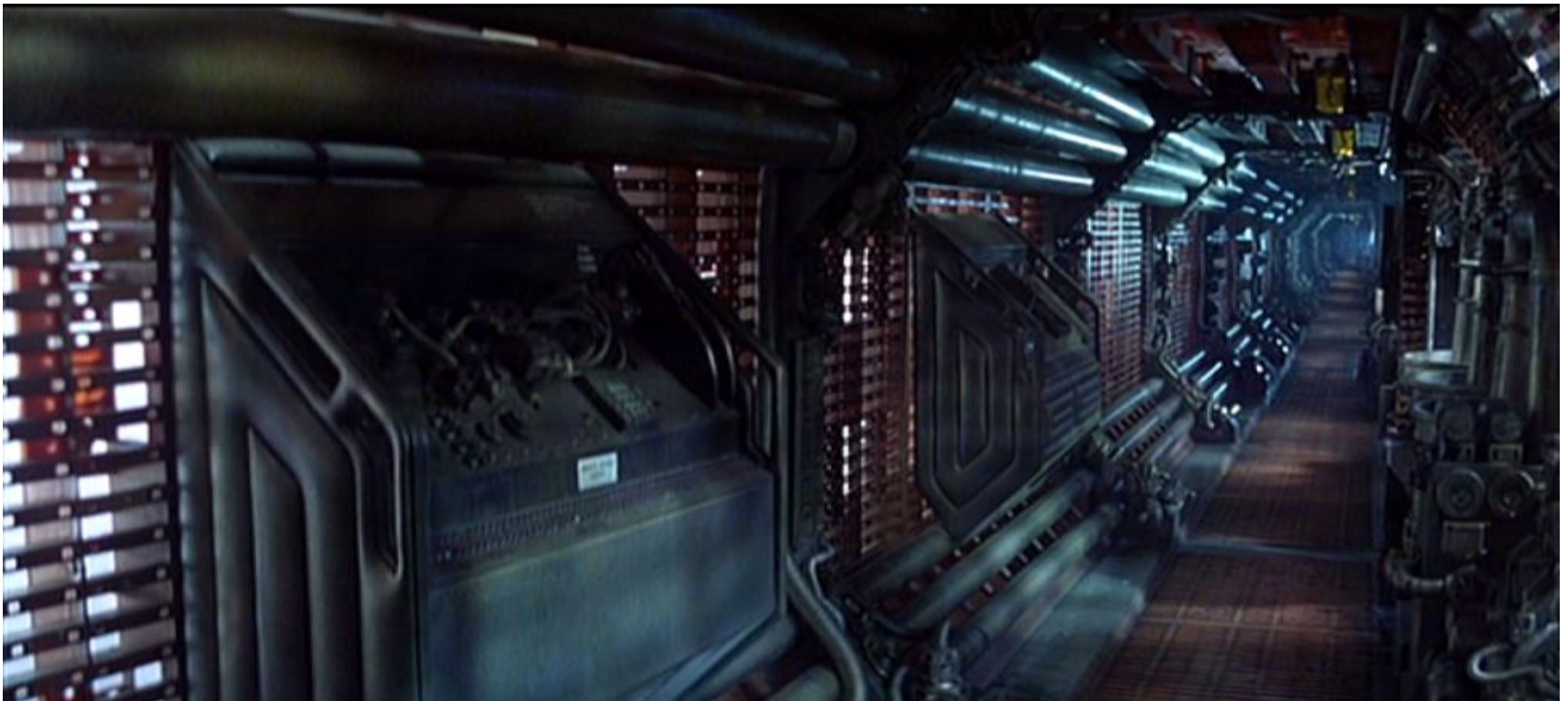


Here the digital nature of the HAL computer is represented by the repeating patterns and strong geometrical design of the set.



but the very clean look of the *2001* sets seems artificial today.

Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) creates much grittier, more realistic and high-tech work spaces:





Even small details matter.

In this shot from *Slumdog Millionaire*, Jamal (Dev Patel) is sitting at a computer in the call centre where he works as a tea-boy.



On the work station is the name of the current promotion 'Friends and Family' – which is all Jamal wants in life.

Décor can be an important aspect of **characterisation**.



The stark bareness of his room hints at the psychological problems of Lars (Ryan Gosling) in *Lars and the Real Girl*,

especially when contrasted with the warm, lived-in home of his brother and sister in law (Emily Mortimer).





The warm colour palette of the kitchen contrasts with the cold palette of Lars' room.



Lars's work space is equally bare



compared with that of Kurt.



Later, as Lars starts to enjoy life again, this is reflected in the set decoration.





before Bianca
comes into his life

and afterwards



Richard Loncraine's *Richard III* updates Shakespeare's play to the 1930s.



The royal family eats amid much luxury.

Richard builds himself a powerful following. This political rally is clearly designed to evoke the Nazi Party.



His headquarters are designed to intimidate.



Will (Hugh Grant) lives a life of pointless consumerism, as is indicated in the design and décor of his flat.



About a Boy

It looks very tasteful and colour co-ordinated but has no personality. He almost seems to get lost in it. His life is as grey as his flat.

He has all the up-to-date gadgets.



By contrast, Fiona and Marcus live in a house that looks much cheaper and less luxurious, but is a home – they have made their mark on it.

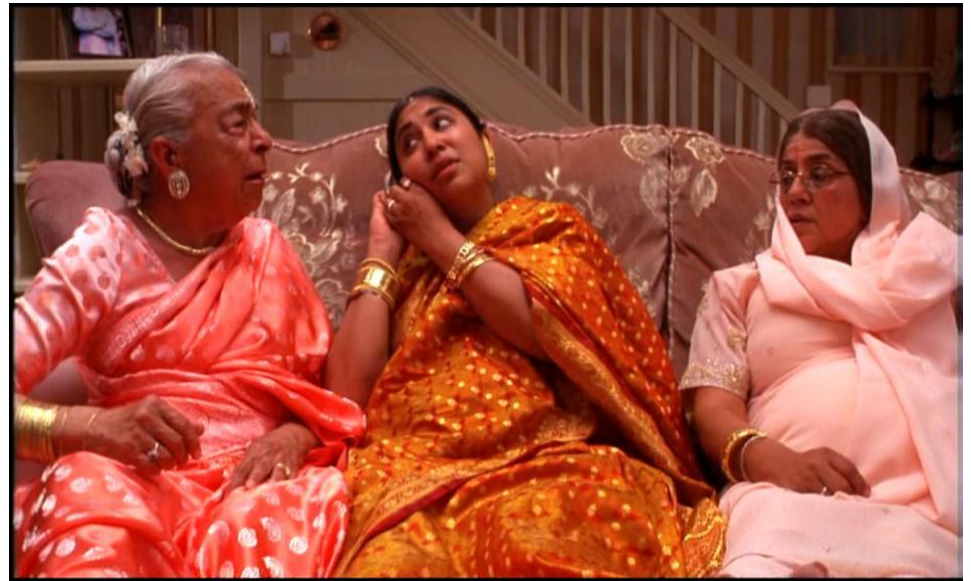


costume design

There is much more to costume than just making sure characters have clothes to wear.

Costume is an instant indicator of **culture,**

Bend it Like Beckham
(1999) is set among a Sikh
community in London.



Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) is set in C19 China



Zhang Ziyi, Chang Chen,
Michelle Yeoh

Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* in early C20 China



Yimou Zhang's extraordinarily beautiful *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) is set during the Tang Dynasty (between 600-900).



Zhang Ziyi and Andy Lau



of **historical time**,



Italian Renaissance – *Romeo and Juliet*

medieval – *The Navigator* (1988)

Elizabethan –
Shakespeare in Love





early C19 – *Sense and Sensibility*
(1994)



1870's – *The Age of Innocence*
(1993)

the turn of the C20 – *Moulin Rouge*



or the 1920s, as in these shots from Clint Eastwood's *Changeling* (2008), with Angelina Jolie





Army and nurse uniforms, and the caps of the waitresses indicate a World War II setting for part of *Atonement*

and of **social class**

Peter Bogdanovich's *The Cat's Meow* (2001) is set among the wealthy in 1920s America.



Joanna Lumley, Eddie Izzard,
Kirsten Dunst, Jennifer Tilly



Tim Robbins' *The Cradle Will Rock* (1999) is a story of Depression (1930s) New York, with the wealthy and not so wealthy.



Vanessa Redgrave, Cary Elwes, Hank Azaria, Angus Macfadyen, John Turturro, Emily Watson

John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) tells of the dispossessed farmers of the 1930s.



Jane Darwell, Henry Fonda

even films set in contemporary society may choose to distinguish between middle class and working class – or 'blue collar', as in *Juno*



Jason Bateman and Jennifer Garner as the yuppie Loring

J.K. Simmons and Allison Janney as the more working class MacGuffs



The décor reinforces the effect of costumes.

Characters wearing hats on an everyday basis is an instant indicator of earlier times,

as these shots from *North by Northwest*, made in 1959, show.



Ed Harris as a 1950s spy in *A Beautiful Mind*



Jean Marsh in *Danny the Champion of the World*, also set in the fifties.

or earlier, when women wore bonnets out of doors



JJ Feild and Felicity Jones in
Northanger Abbey (2007)

Jennifer Ehle and Colin
Firth in the BBC's *Pride and
Prejudice* (1995)



Costumes can also tell us a great deal about character.

Juliet Stevenson, in *Bend It Like Beckham*, is rather overdressed for a football match,



and so demonstrates both a total lack of understanding of her daughter's passion, but also the effort she is making to share it.

Juno (Ellen Page) isn't interested in clothes or fashion.



unlike her best friend (Olivia Thirlby)

When Juno meets Mark (Jason Bateman) and Vanessa (Jennifer Garner), the couple who wish to adopt her baby,



their clothes indicate how 'responsible' and 'ready' they are for this baby, and what good parents they will be.

But as Mark gets cold feet, his clothes change until they are more like Juno's than Vanessa's, a clear external signifier of his inner doubts.



In *Stranger Than Fiction* (2006), Will Ferrell's Harold Crick is the exemplary company man, shown here getting ready to go to work as a tax auditor...

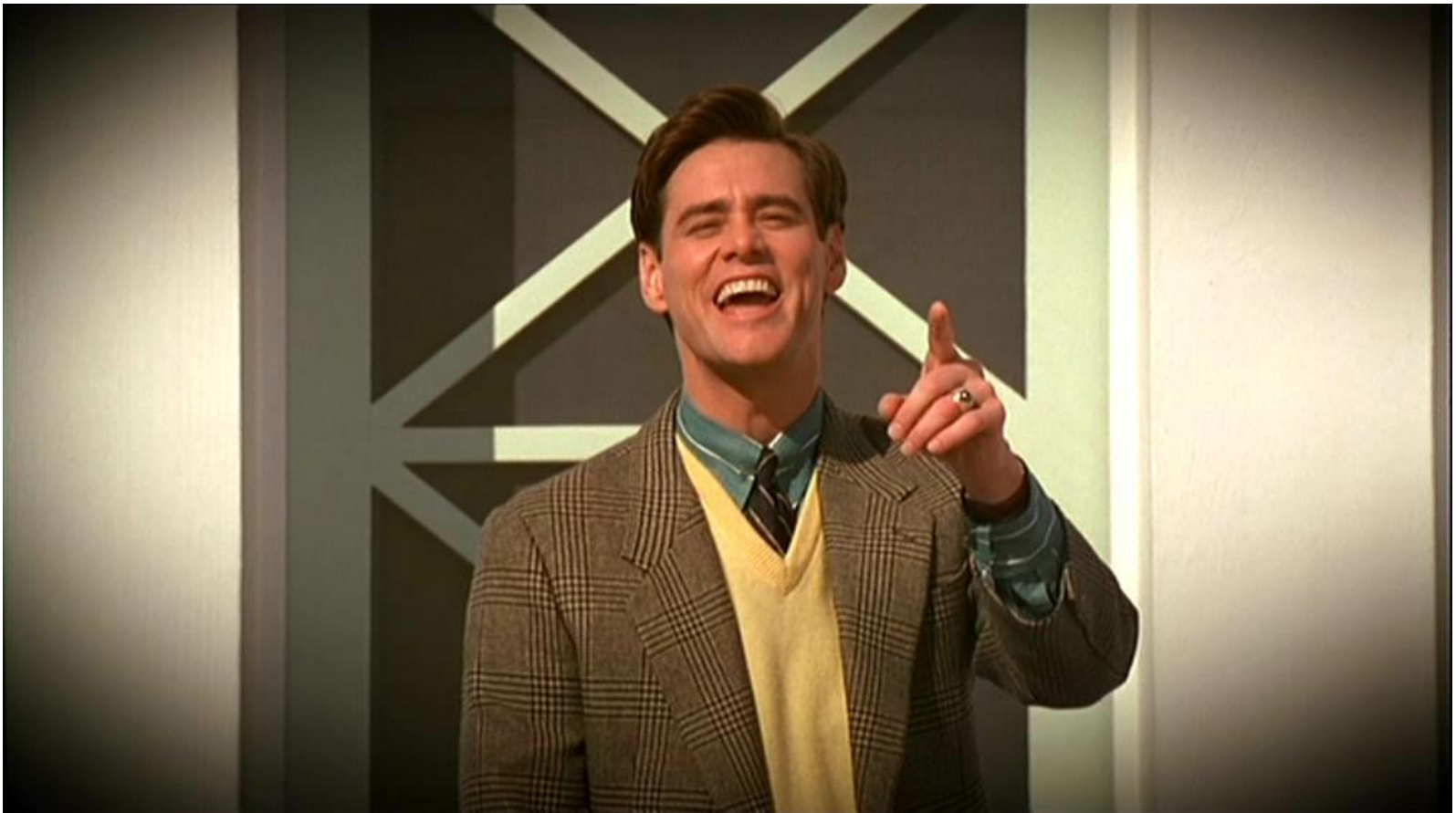


but as he learns to enjoy life, changes in his clothes reflect the changes in his life.



The Truman Show uses costume to show that the world that has been created for Truman is a fantasy world, trapped in the past.

Truman (Jim Carrey) dresses the way men used to in the fifties.



in contrast with the costumes of the TV audience



'The Truman Show' creator Christof (Ed Harris) always wears black, a beret and round glasses as signifiers that he is a 'creative artist'.



Even hairstyles can be significant.

In *Eternal Sunshine for the Spotless Mind* (2004), Clem (Kate Winslet) changes the colour of her hair on a regular basis – an indicator of her unconventional, colourful and dramatic personality.



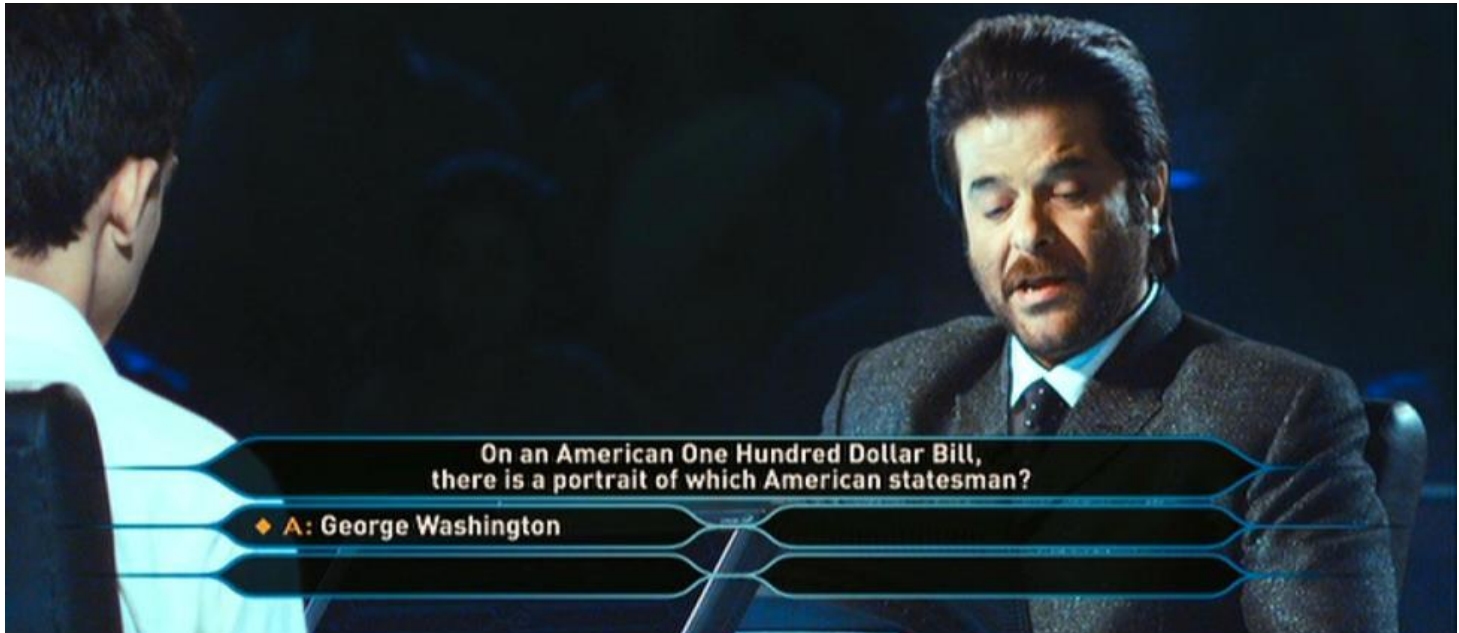
post-production

editing techniques

the most basic editing technique is the **CUT**

Cuts can be made unobtrusively – in the 'classic continuity style' – or obviously, so they draw attention to themselves.

The following are examples of simple cuts, from *Slumdog Millionaire*:



Taj Mahal from a distance

CUT to much closer



the foreground is slightly out of focus, which is on Taj Mahal itself

jump cut / shock cut

An abrupt transition between shots, which is deliberately disorienting in terms of the continuity of space and time.

In 'classic continuity' style of editing, where editing is discreet and 'invisible', a jump cut refers to a cut within a scene that is abrupt and jarring, and so is considered a mistake.

However, editors now frequently employ deliberately abrupt transitions, so the term is used more loosely.

In *Heavenly Creatures*, Peter Jackson ends a black and white fantasy shipboard sequence with this shot of Juliet's parents, who begin to turn around



– and he abruptly CUTS to

the present reality, to near where the murder took place



The cut is so abrupt, it is described in the screenplay as a 'crash cut'

match cut / graphic match

any cut that emphasises the **continuity** of time and space, by cutting together similar or linked images.

Because there is often an element of metaphorical or other meaningful comparison between shot A and shot B, it is sometimes called a 'metaphor cut'.

A famous **match cut** ends the opening 'Dawn of Man' sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

A primitive ape has discovered the use of bones as a weapon and throws the bone into the air.



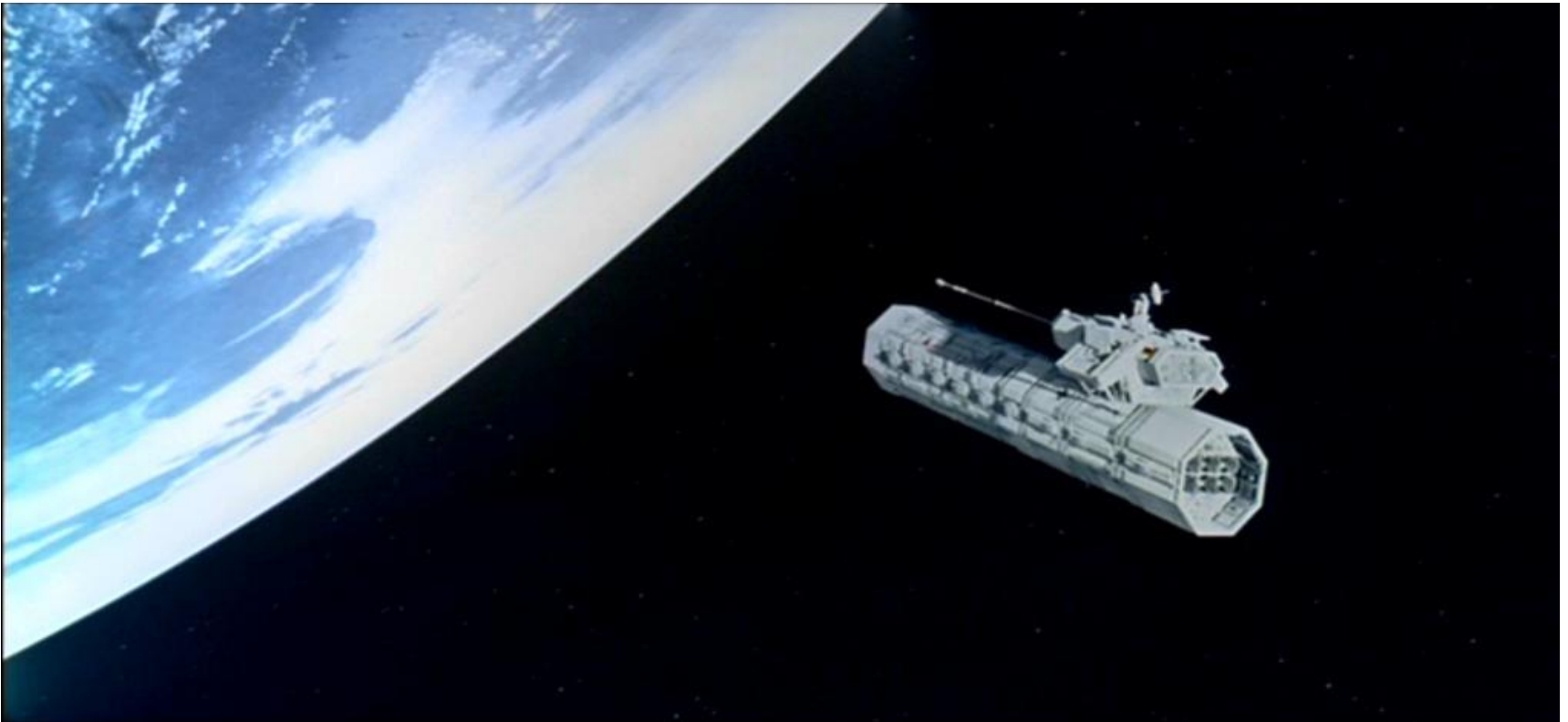
When the bone reaches its highest point,



the shot cuts to that of a similarly-shaped space station in orbit above the earth



- a nuclear weapons platform.



This edit has been described as a jump cut (including on the box of the DVD), but it is more correctly a **graphic match** because the viewer is meant to see the **similarity** between the bone and the space craft and not the discontinuity between the two shots.



Another famous **match cut** comes from *Lawrence of Arabia*, where an edit cuts together the blowing out a lit candle by Lawrence (Peter O'Toole) with the desert sun rising from the horizon.



or in *Richard III*, where a shot of the train bringing the new king to London



cuts to his younger brother's train set

implying that Richard is treating the real train as if it were a toy.



A notable **match cut** occurs at the end of *North by Northwest*.

As Cary Grant desperately tries to rescue Eva Marie Saint on Mount Rushmore,



she is finding it difficult to hold on to his hand.



He encourages her

and the film cuts from this image of her desperation
immediately to his pulling her up to his bunk on the train.



This match cut skips over the courtship, marriage proposal and actual marriage of the two characters who have for much of the film been adversaries.

a match cut makes an explicit link between Robbie and Cecilia
in *Atonement*:

Cecilia dives into the lake



followed immediately by Robbie's emerging from the water of his bath.



Cutting on action / matching on action

Where the editor cuts from one shot to another view that matches the first shot's action and energy,

as in this example from *Slumdog Millionaire*, where we see Jamal walking through a market and the CUT takes us to him walking in exactly the same direction and at the same speed, but in the hotel kitchen where he works.



juxtaposition

where two contrasting or similar images or scenes follow one after the other but not on the cut,

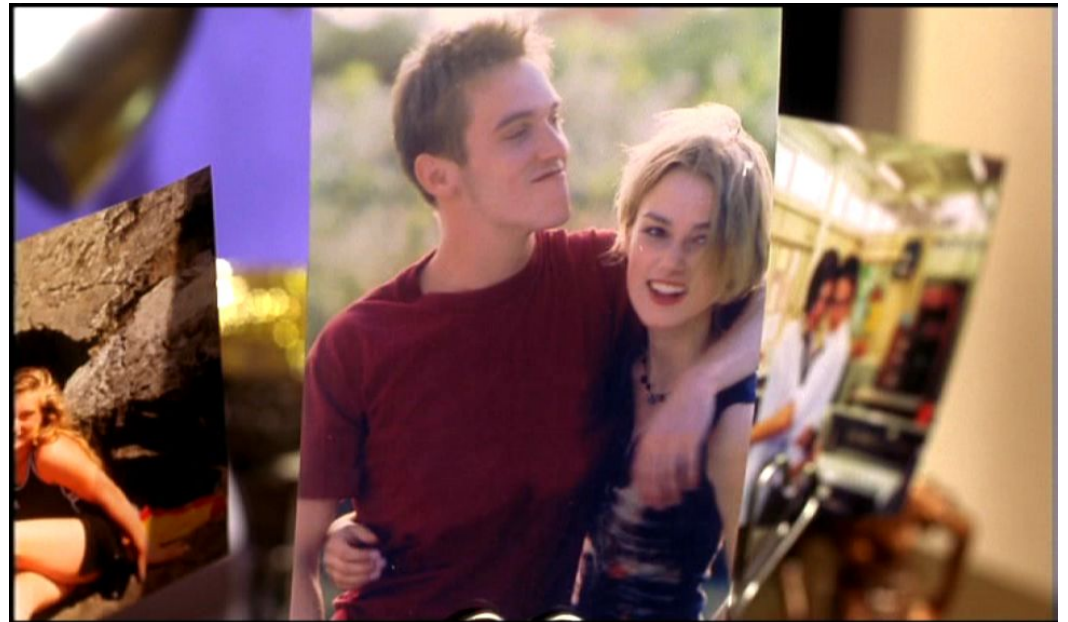
as in this example from *Atonement*, where the image of Briony writing in her journal about Robbie is followed by Robbie's writing a note to Cecilia.





Jess (Parminder K. Nagra) limps off the field, helped by Joe (Jonathan Rhys-Meyers) in *Bend It Like Beckham*.

The inpoint of the next scene is a photo of Joe and Jules (Keira Knightley) in a similar though happier pose.





John Nash (Russell Crowe), delivers his report to his spymasters in suitably murky light in *A Beautiful Mind*. The film then cuts to

Nash and Alicia (Jennifer Connelly) in a contrasting idyllic setting by the river.



JM Barrie sits by the bedside of the dying Sylvia



Kate Winslet and Johnny Depp in *Finding Neverland*

while in the next scene, his opening night audience hears Peter Pan bravely facing – even welcoming – death.



Kelly Macdonald and Kate Maberly

shot / reverse shot

conversations are often filmed and cut to show each speaker in turn, (usually with an establishing two shot at the beginning):



first Truman



then Meryl

The Truman Show

Latika



Jamal

and Latika again
Slumdog Millionaire



insert

a detail shot of something in the scene, such as a close up of a letter

Frodo finds the envelope containing the 'One Ring'.



The envelope burns while Frodo and Gandalf watch.



The Fellowship of the Ring

Paul Mercurio stands in a spotlight in an empty room while he plans his dance, in *Strictly Ballroom*.

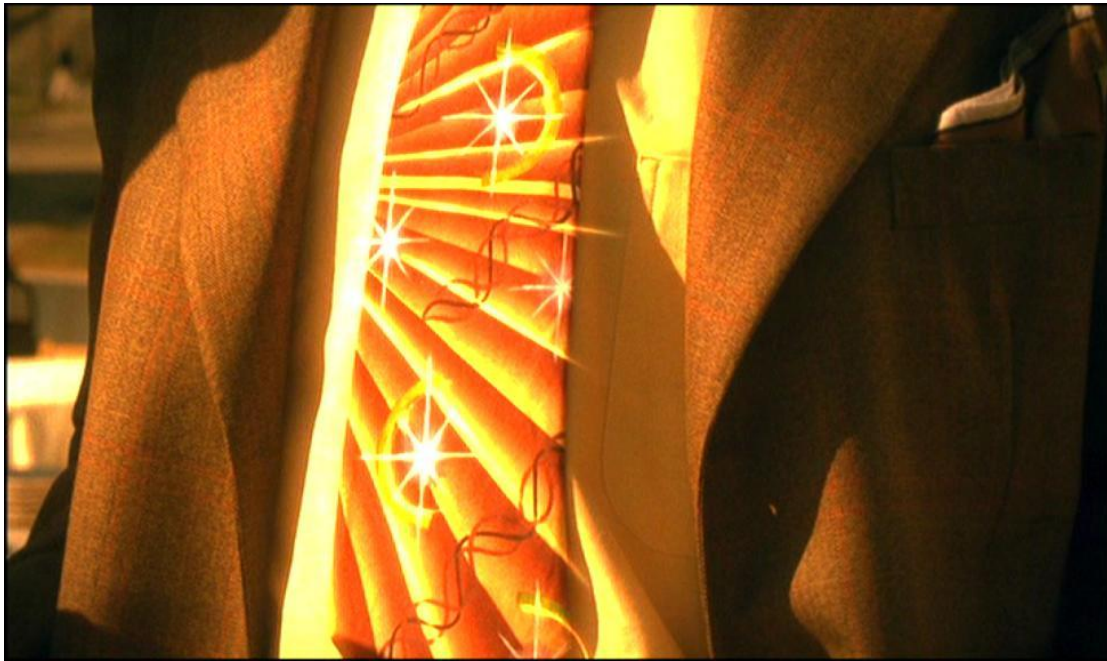


then the film cuts to his feet, as they start to move



John Nash meets fellow students in *A Beautiful Mind*





and sees patterns
in a tie,

and in a plate of
oranges.



cutaway

A brief shot inserted into a scene that shows something connected but outside the action, such as a shot of the audience watching a show or a game that is being filmed.

A cutaway differs from an insert, in that the cutaway is of action not covered in the master shot.

It may be used to show the reactions of someone or some group to the major action,

as in the following cutaway in *The Truman Show*.

As Truman goes through his usual morning greetings, there is a brief cutaway to a Japanese family watching him on TV.



A cutaway may be used to remind us about some other character or action

as in this example from *Holes*, where the boys discuss what has happened to Zero, who has run away:



and the film cuts to show Stanley's vision of him walking in the heat of the day.



or to add tension – or humour – to the main scene, as in *Little Miss Sunshine*.

In the middle of an argument between Richard (Greg Kinnear) and Sheryl (Toni Collette) about whether they can afford to go to California, the scene cuts away to Olive (Abigail Breslin), already packing, and then back again to the argument.



dissolve

The slow fading out of one shot and the gradual fading in of the next one, with a superimposition of images, usually at the mid-point, creates a gentle transition between scenes, as in this scene transition in Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing*.





Into the Wild

If cuts and fades are 'full stops' that indicate the end of a scene, **dissolves** are 'commas', since they connect the scenes by both mixing and joining the images.

They are often used to introduce flashbacks, since they suggest the passage of time.

a dissolve may do more than just link two scenes

this superb example from *Lawrence of Arabia* gives an instant idea of just how far the two men have come – and how far there is to go.





superimposition

Superimposing one image on another can suggest the two things happening at the same time –

in this case Christopher McCandless's sister thinking of him while he is working on a harvester –



Jena Malone in *Into the Wild*

or suggest the ecstasy of experience



Emile Hirsh in *Into the Wild*

Branagh uses this technique in an extended sequence in *Much Ado*, to show the delight Beatrice and Benedick feel at their realisation of the love that each feels for the other.



montage

Transitional sequences of rapidly edited images, used to suggest the lapse of time or the passing of events. Often uses dissolve and multiple exposures.

A montage is a bit like a moving collage – a linked group of images 'cut' from a more coherent narrative.

It is difficult to demonstrate with only still shots but what follows is a selection from a montage in Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures*.



The last shot shows Kate Winslet embracing a tramp – Peter Jackson in a Hitchcockian cameo.

wipe

a less common transition between scenes, this is when one picture seems to push the previous one off the screen

as in these two examples, both from *Slumdog Millionaire*

Here the image of Jamal's dead mother is gradually erased as the CU of Jamal gradually replaces it



the effect is to suggest how difficult he finds it to forget this most traumatic experience of his life

Later, there is a most unusual vertical wipe, when the face of the distraught Jamal (above) is replaced by the upside down view of the worried one.



fade

the screen gradually darkens – or black gradually lightens to show the image, as in this example from *Sione's wedding*.



fades (unlike cuts) call attention to the beginning or end of a scene and so suggest a relationship without a direct link.

split screen

two or more separate images within the same frame



Director Sean Penn uses split screen extensively in *Into the Wild*, the story of Christopher McCandless



Chris alone on the road is juxtaposed with the return to them of all his parents' letters to him.

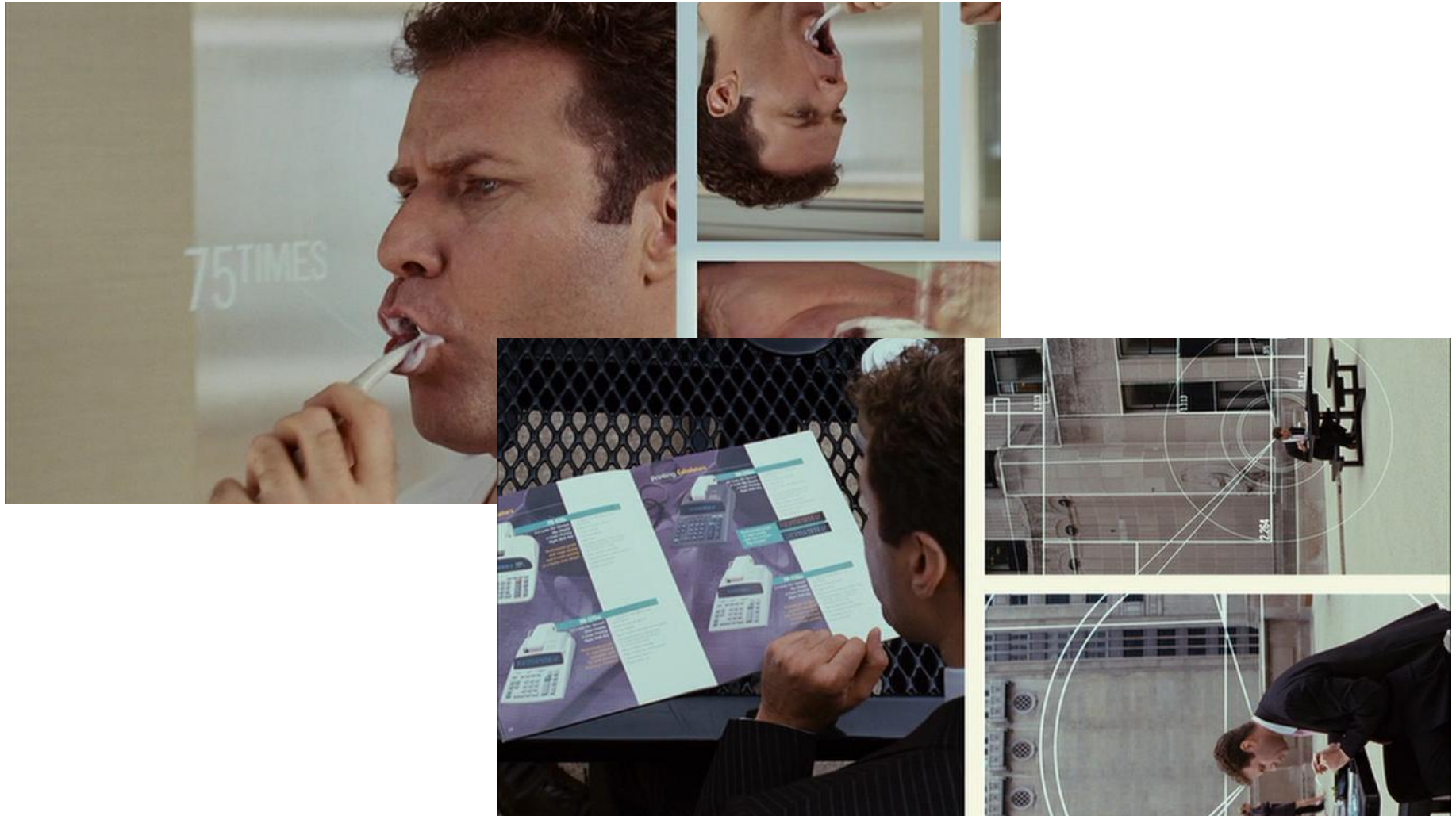


His parents drive to visit him as, hundreds of miles away, he walks.

To the split screen the editor has added a **superimposed image**, which is in fact an enlargement of the figure in the larger picture



Stranger Than Fiction (2006) goes a step further. In a couple of frames, not content with split screen, the editor has rotated the images as well – to suggest the unusual ways Harold (Will Ferrell) sees his world.



post-production:

sound and music



diegetic sound (actual sound)

sound presented as originating from a source **within the film's world** (the diegesis).

- voices of characters
- sounds made by objects in the story
- music coming from within the film world (as opposed to the score)



Johnny Cash (Joaquin Phoenix) and June Carter (Reese Witherspoon) sing on stage in *Walk the Line* (2005)



Wlodek Szpilman (Adrien Brody) in *The Pianist*.



Evey (Natalie Portman) listens to the juke box in *V for Vendetta*



The keyboardist plays soothing music while Truman sleeps, watched by Christof (Ed Harris) in *The Truman Show*.

In a nice twist, the keyboardist is also the composer of the film's score.

non-diegetic sound

Sound which has a source neither visible on the screen nor implied in the action

- narrator's commentary (voice over)
 - sound effects which are added for dramatic effect
 - the score / mood music

Gene Wilder's *Blazing Saddles* (1974) has an elaborate joke built on this.

The sheriff (Cleavon Little) rides across the desert to the strains of the film's musical score



which is revealed as coming from Count Basie's orchestra playing beside the trail.



Finally, something to ponder.

Stranger Than Fiction poses an interesting question about diegetic or non-diegetic sound.

The film's protagonist Harold Crick (Will Ferrell) hears a voice narrating his life.



Though he can hear the voice, she cannot hear him when he tries to engage her in dialogue.



Her voice does not come from a source within Harold's diegesis, but she is a character in the film, and she and Harold eventually meet.



Emma Thompson as Karen Eiffel, creator and narrator of Harold Crick's life story, looks at the world from the POV of the omniscient author.

It is an issue that is typical of postmodern films, which play with the form of film, with the way stories are told.

So is her voice-over diegetic or non-diegetic?

What do you think?