

Basic Film Terms

- Shot** - one uninterrupted image resulting from ~~the~~ what appears to be a single run of a camera.
- Framing** - the use of the edges of the film frame to select and compose what is visible on screen.
- Long shot** - a shot which shows the subject at a distance. Characters are seen in their entirety, with some area above and below them visible. Often used as the **establishing shot**.
- Medium shot** - framing which generally shows a character from the waist up.
- Close up** - framing in which the head of a person, a small object, or part of an object fills the screen.
- High angle** - a shot taken from above the subject, when the camera "looks" down at the subject.
- Low angle** - a shot taken from below the subject, when the camera "looks" up at the subject.
- Bird's eye view** - a shot taken from directly overhead.
- Worm's eye view** - a shot taken from directly below.
- Canted or Dutch framing** - framing which deviates from the normal vertical and horizontal axis. When rather than straight, the image is tilted.
- P.O.V. (point of view)** - a shot taken with the camera placed approximately where the character's eyes would be; showing what a character would see. AKA **subjective shot**.
- Pan** - a camera movement with the camera body turning right or left.
- Tilt** - a camera movement with the camera body swivels up or down
/Tracking/Traveling shot
- Dolly** - a camera movement when the camera itself moves (usually by wheels) along the horizontal plane; left or right, in or out.
- Crane** - a camera movement when the camera moves through space up or down.
- Depth of field** - the area of focus within the frame, from foreground to background. When all three planes are in focus, it is called **deep depth of field**. When only one is in focus it is known as a **shallow depth of field**. *(see sheet on LENSES)
- Mise en scene** - all of the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed: settings, props, costume, lighting, make-up, and figure behavior
- High Key Lighting** - illumination that creates very little contrast between the light and dark areas of the shot.
- Low Key Lighting** - illumination that creates strong contrast between the light and dark areas, with deep shadows. (or *Noir lighting*)

Editing - The task of selecting and joining camera takes, and/or sound

Cut - an editing transition which results in an instantaneous transition of one image to another, or one sound to another

Cross cutting or parallel editing - editing that alternates two or more lines of action occurring in different spaces, seemingly simultaneously

Dissolve - an editing transition when one image (or sound) gradually disappears while the second image (or sound) gradually appears; for a moment the two images (sounds) blend in a **superimposition**. It is usually used to depict a passage of time, or to create metaphor.

Fade In/out - When an image gradually darkens until the screen goes black (fade out); when the screen is black and gradually brightens to an image (fade in).

Wipe - a transition between shots in which a line crosses the screen, eliminating the first shot as it goes across, replacing it with a second.

Match on action - a convention of continuity editing when two different shots of the same action are cut together, making it continue uninterrupted.

Jumpcut - a cut which rather than matching action, looks like an interruption.

Overlapping action - cuts that repeat part, or all of an action, thus expanding its viewing time and plot duration

Eye-line match - a cut in which the first shot shows a person looking off screen in one direction, and the second shot shows what he or she sees.

Long take - a shot that continues for an unusually lengthy amount of time before the transition to another shot.

Flashback - an alteration of story order in which the plot presentation moves backward to events that have taken place earlier than the ones already shown.

Flashforward - an alteration of order where the plot presentation moves forward to future events, then returns to the present.

Afro 3654 - Ben Pike

Here are a few terms commonly used in analyzing/discussing films. I have offered a very general meaning for each term; you may want to consult a film encyclopedia for more complete definitions.

available light - shooting a film with natural light, i.e. with whatever light source is naturally available.

back lighting - illumination of a scene from behind the subject and in the direction of the camera. This usually makes the subject stand out more from the background.

boom shot - a single, continuous shot which may incorporate many camera angles and levels using a crane-like device (a boom). It allows for very fluid filming of long scenes. Hitchcock used a boom to give fluidity to an entire film (The Rope).

bridging shot - any shot used to cover a break in continuity such as a cutaway or an insert.

Cahiers du Cinéma - one of the most influential magazines devoted to the study of film as an art. It was started in 1951 by (mainly) André Bazin. It promoted the 'auteur' theory, and attracted a number of young people who loved film and eventually went on to make films on their own and forming a core of the French Nouvelle Vague (or New Wave). Among them were Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer. This movement would influence early African film makers such as Sembene and Mambety.

camera angle - the visual point of view of the shot or scene. This determines what you see as well as how you see it. Eye-level shots are perhaps most 'neutral' and least dramatic; high-angle shots look down on subjects, may slow the action or give you a sense of superiority, or suggest subordination of individual characters; low-angle shots look up at the subject, may increase tension, suggest power in its subjects and speed up action. There are also many other camera angles that may be used.

cinéma vérité - a style of filmmaking which tries to capture 'truth' on film by presenting 'reality' without directorial control or otherwise using film technique to manipulate the images portrayed. This style probably began with Dziga Vertov and the Kino-Pravda (cinema truth) technique in Russia. This style was popular with young filmmakers in the US and France in the 1950's. In the US it came to be called 'Direct Cinema' and among its practitioners were Richard Leacock, Robert Drew, the Maysles brothers and D.A. Pennebaker. Its style was often used in 'documentary' films, and has been used occasionally by African filmmakers.

cross-cutting - intercutting two independent scene sequences back and forth to that a relationship is formed between them. It is used most commonly in building tension in chase scenes, shifting perspectives from pursuer to pursued. Appeared as early as Porter's The Great Train Robbery (1903) and D.W. Griffith's early films.

cutaway - a shot of an action or object related to the principal scene, used to either call attention to the principal scene or comment on it (a cinematic metaphor). It is very useful to an editor to bridge a lapse in time or avoid a jump cut. Typical cutaways are shots of spectators at a sporting event, or clouds or waves substituting for a love-making scene.

depth of field - the range in which images in the camera's field are in focus.

Director - normally the person responsible for the creative aspects, technical and interpretive, of the film. The importance of the director can vary greatly, but in most African films he/she is the most important figure, responsible for conceiving, writing, directing and perhaps even producing the film.

dissolve (lap dissolve) - gradually fusing one shot into another. One scene seems to melt into another. It is often used to indicate a time lapse or a location shift (whereas a direct cut often suggests concurrent action). The speed of the dissolve may suggest the length of time that has passed.

documentary - a difficult term to define, but in broadest sense a "factual" film depicting real people and actual events. The term was first used by the British filmmaker John Grierson in 1926, and came from the French term *documentaire* which at that time referred to travel films. The roots of documentary films was probably in early newsreels. The history of documentary filmmaking in Africa can be traced to early ethnographic films, and the many films of the Empire Marketing Board and the Colonial Film Unit. made to support and explain British colonial policies

dolly - a platform on wheels used to move the camera (and its operator) while shooting a scene. They may or may not move on tracks, and may or may not incorporate a crane.

dolly shot - often called a "tracking shot", it is a smooth, moving shot of either a moving or stationary subject.

découpage - the breakdown of dramatic action into constituent units. Editing.

editing - the joining of one shot with another.

establishing shot - usually a long shot at the beginning of a sequence which sets the location, setting and mood of subsequent action. It gives the audience a general visual orientation for the more specific scenes to follow.

fade - the gradual emergence of a scene from a black screen (fade in), or its gradual disappearance (fade out). This is a common transitional device and usually suggests a distinct break in the film's continuity - e.g. a change in location or time - and often corresponds to a new act in play or chapter in a book.

film noir - a term used for films which create a dark, sinister, pessimistic mood. Although the term was coined by French critics, and came from an earlier term used for 18th and 19th century Gothic novels, film noir was used to describe the Hollywood gangster films of the 40's and 50's whose heroes and villains were both disillusioned, cynical figures (e.g. Humphrey Bogart's The Maltese Falcon, Billy Wilder's Sunset Boulevard or Alfred Hitchcock's Spellbound).

freeze frame - the "freeze" effect attained by repeatedly printing a single frame. Used to highlight a point or create dramatic effect. The famous scene at the end of Trauffaut's The 400 Blows "freezes" on a close-up of the young boy's face. Sembene uses this same effect in the dramatic ending to Xala.

intercutting - a technique of editing in which two different sequences of action are alternated to show action taking place simultaneously. Among other things this allows the filmmaker/editor to slow down or speed up time.

jump cut - a cut that creates an abrupt movement of the subject, often by cutting out the middle of a shot and joining the ends together, or by editing to make the subject appear to be "jumping" from one place abruptly to another. Quite common in contemporary cinema, and on MTV. Used effectively in Quartier Mozart

lip sync - simultaneous recording of voice and picture

long shot - favored by many African filmmakers, a long shot offers the viewer a broad view of the subjects/action at the expense of detail. Often uses a wide-angle lens.

montage - a term linked today to the pioneering Russian film maker Sergei Eisenstein, it is in general the juxtaposition of two images to suggest a completely independent meaning. It can also be used to compress action or suggest the passage of time (e.g. linking images such as calendar pages, news headlines, train or car wheels, etc.).

mise-en-scène - originally a theatrical term about the act of staging or directing a play, the term has come to mean for film an emphasis on the content of an individual scene. For some film theorists this has meant de-emphasizing montage (the relationship of scenes through editing), but most good filmmakers make use of both.

overlap - the extension of one scene into another, such as action, music, dialogue, or sound effects. Adds to continuity and makes for a smooth transition.

pan - camera movement along a horizontal plane from one section of a scene to another.

point of view shot (or a subjective camera) - a shot filmed so as to seem as if we are seeing the action from the point of view of one of the actors.

stock footage - previously shot film footage, taken from newsreel or company archives, and incorporated into a new film. Used extensively, for example, in Afrique, je te plumerai, Stone's JFK, or in Forest Gump.

storyboard - sketches, drawings, or sometimes photos set out in continuity to outline the flow of the film.

swish pan (flash pan or zip pan) - the rapid movement of the camera horizontally so that the subject blurs on the screen.

35 mm - the standard gauge for feature films.

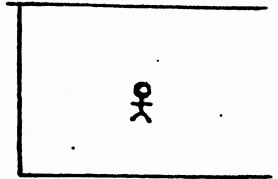
voice over - narration or dialogue spoken by a person not present on the screen.

SHOT DISTANCES

EXTREME LONG SHOT:

A framing in which the scale of the object shown is very small; a building landscape or crowd of people would fill the screen.

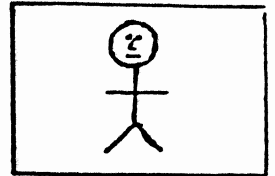
ELS



LONG SHOT:

A framing in which the scale of the object shown is small; a standing human figure would appear nearly the height of the screen.

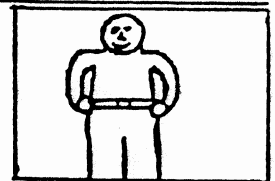
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MEDIUM LONG SHOT:

Also known as "The American Shot." Figure or figures appear from the knees upwards.

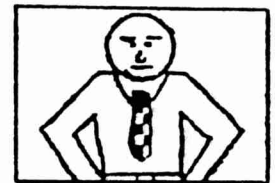
MLS



MEDIUM SHOT:

A framing in which the scale of the object shown is of moderate size; a human figure seen from the waist up would fill most of the screen.

MS



MEDIUM CLOSE-UP:

A framing in which the scale of the object shown is fairly large; a human figure seen from the chest up would fill most of the screen.

MCU



CLOSE-UP:

A framing in which the scale of the object shown is relatively large; a head seen from the neck up, or an object of comparable size would fill most of the screen.

CU



EXTREME CLOSE-UP:

A framing in which the scale of the object shown is very large; a part of a face or a small object would fill the screen.

ECU



LENSES & DEPTH OF FIELD

PERSPECTIVE RELATIONS IN LENSES:

focal length of lens=distance from center of lens to the point where light rays converge to point of focus on the film. Alters magnification, depth and scale of things.

1) **short focal length/wide angle lens** (less than 35mm in focal length) distorts straight lines near edge of film. Spatial distortion - Exaggerates depth.(especially in close ups.) When an object is traveling, it appears to be moving very quickly--distances seem to be crossed faster. Image tends to be harsher.

2) **middle focal length/ normal lens** (35mm - 75mm) Closer to image of human eye. Image appears "normal", avoids noticeable perspective distortion. horizontal and parallel lines appear straight and perpendicular.

3) **long focal length/telephoto lens** (75mm-250mm+) Compression, or flattening space, objects in different planes appear close together. Images appear flatter, more 2-dimensional. When an object is traveling, it appears to be moving very slowly--distances seem to be crossed slowly (running in space effect.) Images tend to be softer.

4) **zoom lens** allows continuous varying of focal length in one shot--used for newsreels, and came into motion picture shooting in late 1950's after cameras more portable. (Important for NEW WAVE.)

DEPTH OF FIELD AND FOCUS:

DOF=range of distances before the lens within which objects can be photographed in sharp focus.

DOF is inversely related to focal length. Thus, **WIDE ANGLE** lenses (shortest focal length lens) have the **GREATEST DOF**.

TELEPHOTO lenses (longest focal length lens) have the **LEAST DOF**.

selective focus=focusing on one plane and allowing others to be out of focus. Common in pre-1940 Hollywood close-ups.

deep focus = **greatest DOF**, all or most planes in focus, usually uses wide angle lens and/or faster film. An example is the shot from Citizen Kane when inside of cabin and boy outside in snow are both in focus. (Note: Do not confuse **deep focus** with deep space. Deep space relates to mise-en-scene, but not focus. In a shot with Deep Space, there is a lot of space between the plane closest to the camera, and the plane farthest away. More than one, or all planes may or may not be in focus.)

racking focus/pulling focus=shot begins w/ focus on nearby object, then rack-focuses to far away object bringing it into sharp focus (**racking** or **pulling out**). The opposite, initial focus on far away object, then rack-focus to nearby object is **racking**, or **pulling in**. Example is the shot from Last Tango in Paris, by the subway train.

smile, so that you think daybreak has come. "I'm glad you didn't," he said. We hugged and went home.

Everything about actors and movie acting is in that story. The use of self at whatever cost, the self-knowledge, the confidence that a director and actor have to develop in each other, the devotion to a text (Marlon never questioned the words), the dedication to the work, the craft.

It's experiences like that that make me love actors.

5

THE CAMERA

Your Best Friend

First of all, the camera can't talk back. It can't ask stupid questions. It can't ask penetrating questions that make you realize you've been wrong all along. Hey, it's a *camera!*

But:

- It can make up for a deficient performance.
- It can make a good performance better.
- It can create mood.
- It can create ugliness.
- It can create beauty.
- It can provide excitement.
- It can capture the essence of the moment.
- It can stop time.
- It can change space.
- It can define a character.
- It can provide exposition.

- It can make a joke.
- It can make a miracle.
- *It can tell a story!*

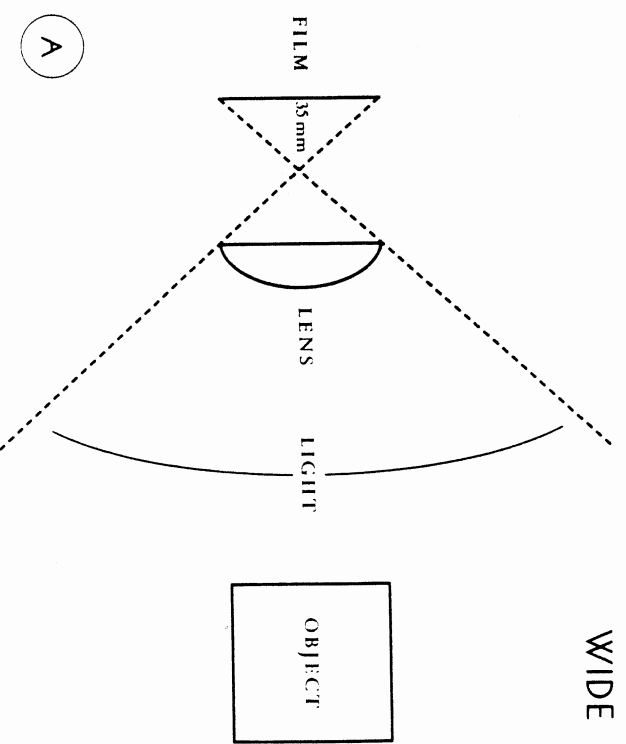
If my movie has two stars in it, I always know it really has three. The third star is the camera.

Mechanically, a camera's quite simple. A reel of unexposed negative is mounted on the front. A take-up reel, pulling the exposed negative and rolling it up, is on the back. In between are notched wheels that keep the film taut at all times. They turn at a constant rate of speed, passing through the perforations in the negative, so that during a take, the film is moving. In the center of this mechanism is a lens. The light comes through the lens and strikes the negative. The camera has actually photographed a still picture, called a frame. After the frame is exposed, the camera's mechanism starts to pull the next frame into position behind the lens. But as the film moves, a shutter comes down and blocks all light from hitting the negative. Then the next frame—another still photograph—is exposed. There are twenty-four frames per second, sixteen frames to a foot of film, one and one-half feet to twenty-four frames. When projected back onto a screen by exactly the same mechanism, it looks as if the images are in constant motion—even though we are actually seeing twenty-four still pictures per second. To the human eye, the movement looks continuous. As Jean-Luc Godard once said, movies “are twenty-four frames of truth per second.” Like the finger-clumsy contraption can produce a profound aesthetic result.

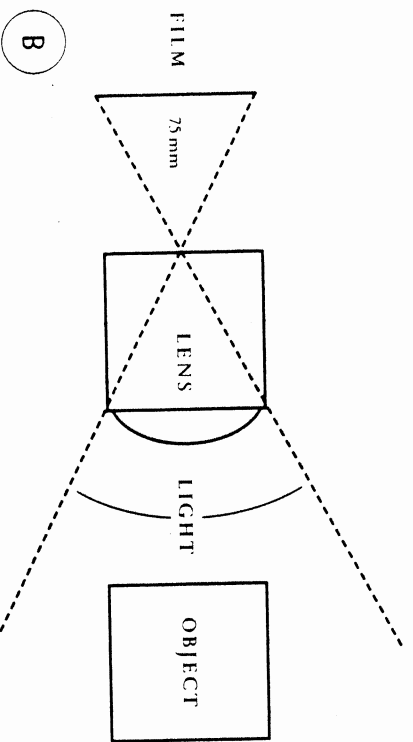
There are four primary elements that affect the picture produced in the camera. First, there is the light that exists even before it enters the lens. This light can be natural, artificial, or

a combination of both. Second, there are color filters and nets, usually placed behind the lens, to control the color and change the quality of the light. Third, there is the size of the lens itself. Fourth is the lens stop, which determines the amount of light that will pass through the lens onto the film. There are other factors—the angle of the shutter, the negative stock, and so forth. But these four basic elements will suffice for now.

The most fundamental photographic choice I make is what lens to use for a particular shot. Lenses vary over an enormous range from 9 millimeters to 600 millimeters and beyond. Technically we refer to the lenses on the lower millimeter range (9 mm, 14 mm, 17 mm, 18 mm, 21 mm) as wide-angle lenses, and to those from 75 mm on up as long lenses. I hope I can help make this clear with the following drawings:



LONG



425

The distance from where the image reverses itself to the recording surface (the film) is what determines the millimeter count of the lens. In drawing A, notice how much more room there is above and below the photographed object than in drawing B. The 35 mm lens (A) takes in a significantly larger area than the 75 mm lens (B). The wider-angle lens (35 mm) has a much larger "field" than the 75 mm lens. The 75 mm lens has a long tube drawn on it because it needs more distance from the recording surface. Theoretically, given all the space one needed, one could achieve the same size of any photographed object using a longer lens by simply backing the camera up. But changing lenses for the amount of information the lens gathers (its "field") is only a partial use of a lens. Lenses have different feelings about them. *Different lenses will tell a story differently.*

Murder on the Orient Express illustrated this very clearly. During

the body of the picture, various scenes took place that would be retold at the end of the movie by Hercule Poirot, our genius detective, using the retelling as part of his evidence in the solution of the crime. While he described the incidents, the scenes we'd seen earlier were repeated as flashbacks. Only now, because they'd taken on a greater melodramatic significance as evidence, they appeared on the screen much more dramatically, forcefully, etched in hard lines. This was accomplished through the use of different lenses. Each scene that would be repeated was shot twice—the first time with normal lenses for the movie (50 mm, 75 mm, 100 mm) and the second time with a very wide-angle lens (21 mm). The result was that the first time we saw the scene, it appeared as a normal part of the movie. Viewed the second time, it was melodramatic, fitting in with the drama of a solution to a murder.

Lenses have different characteristics. No lens truly sees what the human eye sees, but the lenses that come closest are the midrange lenses, from 28 mm to 40 mm. Wide-angle lenses (9 mm to 24 mm) tend to distort the picture; the wider the lens, the greater the distortion. The distortions are spatial. Objects seem farther apart, especially objects lined up from foreground to background. Vertical lines seem to be forced closer together at the top of the frame.

Longer lenses (from 50 mm upward) compress the space. Objects that are lined up from foreground to background seem closer together. The longer the lens, the closer the objects seem, both to the camera and to one another. These distortions are tremendously useful. For example, if I were doing a tracking shot or dolly, or simply panning from right to left, I could create the illusion of the photographed object traveling at much greater speed by using a long lens. Because it seems

closer, the object seems to travel past the background at a much greater speed on a long lens. The foreground object (a car, a horse, a running person) seems to be covering more ground faster. Conversely, if I wanted to increase the speed of an object moving toward or away from me, I would use a wide-angle lens. This is because the object seems to be covering greater distances as it is approaching or leaving us.

The lenses have another characteristic. Wide-angle lenses have a much greater focal depth of field—the amount of space in which an object moving toward or away from the camera stays in focus without changing the focus of the lens mechanically. Again, this can be put to tremendous use. If I wanted to get rid of as much background as possible, I'd use a long lens. The background, even though it seems closer, is so out of focus that it becomes unrecognizable. But with a wide-angle lens, although the background seems farther away, it will be sharper and therefore more recognizable.

Sometimes, when I need a long lens but want to keep the image sharper, we'll pour in more light. The more light, the more focal depth, and vice versa. The added light will give us a greater focal depth, compensating somewhat for the loss of depth that the long lens created.

It gets even more complicated. Since light affects the focal depth, the stop (the amount of light allowed to pass through the lens) is very important. The stop is created by opening or closing a diaphragm mounted in the lens. We call it opening up (letting in more light by setting the diaphragm in its most open position) or stopping down (closing the diaphragm so it allows the least amount of light to reach the film). Whew!

The purpose of these boring technical discussions is to convey that the basic photographic elements—lens, stop, light, and filters—are wonderful tools. They can be used not just

out of necessity but to achieve aesthetic results. Perhaps I can illustrate with some examples.

12 Angry Men, Boris Kaufman, photographer. It never occurred to me that shooting an entire picture in one room was a problem. In fact, I felt I could turn it into an advantage. One of the most important dramatic elements for me was the sense of entrapment those men must have felt in that room. Immediately, a "lens plot" occurred to me. As the picture unfolded, I wanted the room to seem smaller and smaller. That meant that I would slowly shift to longer lenses as the picture continued. Starting with the normal range (28 mm to 40 mm), we progressed to 50 mm, 75 mm, and 100 mm lenses. In addition, I shot the first third of the movie above eye level, and then, by lowering the camera, shot the second third at eye level, and the last third from below eye level. In that way, toward the end, the ceiling began to appear. Not only were the walls closing in, the ceiling was as well. The sense of increasing claustrophobia did a lot to raise the tension of the last part of the movie. On the final shot, an exterior that showed the jurors leaving the courtroom, I used a wide-angle lens, wider than any lens that had been used in the entire picture. I also raised the camera to the highest above-eye-level position. The intention was to literally give us all air, to let us finally breathe, after two increasingly confined hours.

The Fugitive Kind, Boris Kaufman, photographer. For the first time, I tried assigning lenses to characters. Brando's character, Val Xavier, is trying to find love for himself and others as the only possibility of his own salvation. (I once asked Tennessee