The Department of English

RAJA N.L. KHAN WOMEN'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)
Midnapore, West Bengal

Course material- 2 on

Techniques of Cinematography

(Some other techniques)

A close-up from Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* (1969)

For

SEC (English Hons.)

Semester- IV

Paper- SEC 2 (*Film Studies*)

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Techniques of Cinematography

(Film Studies- Unit II: Part 2)

Dolly shot

Dolly shot uses a camera dolly, which is a small cart with wheels attached to it. The camera and the operator can mount the dolly and access a smooth horizontal or vertical movement while filming a scene, minimizing any possibility of visual shaking. During the execution of dolly shots, the camera is either moved towards the subject while the film is rolling, or away from the subject while filming. This process is usually referred to as 'dollying in' or 'dollying out'.

Establishing shot

An establishing shot from *Death in Venice* (1971) by Luchino Visconti

Establishing shots are generally shots that are used to relate the characters or individuals in the narrative to the situation, while contextualizing his presence in the scene. It is generally the shot that begins a scene, which shoulders the responsibility of conveying to the audience crucial impressions about the scene. Generally a very long and wide angle shot, establishing shot clearly displays the surroundings where the actions in the

remaining portion of the scene will gradually unfold. A very common feature in the films of the classical era, establishing shots are seen to be ditched at times to inject speed in the movement of the narrative.

Crane shot

A crane shot from Italian filmmaker Luchino Visconti's *The Leopard* (1963)

Crane shots are recent import to the act of filming. These are the shots that are filmed with the help of a moving crane which may generally accommodate both the camera and the operator. However, cranes without an operator would require a remote control to regulate the operations of the camera. The crane gives the cinematographer an advantage of height that allows him to take 'over the head' shots or shots from a considerable height, which essentially ensures a scope to film a wider expanse at once.

Aerial shot

Aerial shot, also referred to as drone shot, are usually shots that are filmed from a moving device that is airborne. For example, drones are used extensively in filming aerial shots. The camera is fixed in a drone which is then released in air, its flight being controlled by

a remote. This not only gives the cinematographer access to height, but also is capable of covering a large area within its scope.

Medium shot

A medium shot from Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019)

Medium shots are shots where the characters on screen are captured only above their waist height, but do not provide a frame too tight like a close-up. A medium shot can easily accommodate a couple of character or more in the same frame. This shot is general used when there are only a few characters in a scene and they are found conversing among themselves with limited necessity to change the frame. Although the significance of the subject and the background is almost similar in the medium shot, at times the subjects have an edge over the surroundings.

Long take

Long take is a process of continues filming where the rolling of the film is not paused or cut during editing for a considerable duration of time. Naturally, a long take exceeds the duration of conventional editing pace and cuts. War scenes, adventures or a walking scene could provide scope for implementation of this particular technique. It also ensures that the visual experience of the audience is not hindered. Therefore, it is also referred to as a continuous shot.

Trunk shot

A trunk shot from *Pulp Fiction* (1994) by Quentin Tarantino

Trunk shots are a peculiar filming sequence where the camera is necessarily placed inside the trunk of a car and filmed. The angle thus created is therefore very similar to a low-angle shot and also has traces of point of view shots. Trunk shots are generally used to give the audience an impression that the concerned character was stuffed inside the trunk and the world is visible to him only when someone lifts the lid of the trunk. This kind of shot is very common in film made by the American filmmaker Quentin Tarantino.

Wide angle shot

A wide angle shot from Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa's *The Throne of Blood* (1957)

Very similar to long shots, a wide angle shot also projects the characters in their entirety while also leaving enough space for the background. However, wide angle shots stand out because of its focus on the subject and not only on the surroundings. Rather, wide angle shot seeks to locate the individual's position within the scope of his surroundings.

Point of view shot

A point of view shot from Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958)

A POV shot, or a point of view shot is one which is deliberately filmed in such a way that the audience receives an impression that the entire scene is being seen by a particular subject's physical viewpoint. The camera is placed in such a way that it seems the complete scene is being observed by a character. Therefore, a point of view also gives the viewers a peek at that particular character's psyche by tracing the course of movement of their sight.

Over the shoulder shot

Over the shoulder shot from Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarotami's *Close-Up* (1990)

In this kind of shots the camera uses such an angle that it is paced just behind the shoulder of the person who is standing just opposite the person who is facing the camera. The camera captures the back of the head and shoulder of the person standing just in front of him while facing the other characters over his shoulder.

References and suggestions for further reading:

1. Andrew, Dudley. Concepts in Film Theory. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1984.

2. Arijon, Daniel. *Grammar of the Film Language*. Silman-James Press, 1976.

3. Malkiewickz, Kris J. & M. David Mullen. *Cinematography*. Simon & Schuster, 1992.

4. Monaco, James. How to Read a Film. Oxford University Press: New York, Oxford, 2000.

5. Stam, Robert. Film Theory: An Introduction. Blackwell Publishers: Massachusetts, 2000.

6. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinematic_techniques

7. https://www.adorama.com/alc/14-basic-cinematography-techniques-for-better-cinematic-shots

8. https://www.masterclass.com/articles/film-101-what-is-cinematography-and-what-does-a-cinematographer-do#what-is-cinematography

Note:

The following link will direct you to a YouTube video that might be helpful in understanding some of these techniques through demonstrations.

https://www.masterclass.com/articles/film-101-what-is-cinematography-and-what-does-a-cinematographer-do#what-is-cinematography

P.S.: With this material prepared by me, I am also attaching a short material "Cinematography techniques: The Different Types of Shots in Film" by Timothy Heiderich. Hope this proves to be helpful.

Cinematography Techniques: The Different Types of Shots in Film

By Timothy Heiderich

What is Cinematograpy?

   Cinematography is the art of visual storytelling. Anyone can set a camera on a tripod and hit record, but the artistry of cinematography comes in controlling what the viewer sees (or doesn't see) and how the image is presented. Film is a visual medium, and the best-shot films are ones where you can tell what's going on without hearing any of the dialogue.

   With some basic knowledge of composition and scene construction, you can plan scenes using this visual language. Learn how different shots work together to form a clear, cohesive narrative and how to compose each shot in a way that is visually pleasing for the viewer. Understanding these simple rules will help make your films more thrilling and engaging.

Basic Rules of Composition

There are some simple cinematography techniques that will have a great impact in making your videos look more professional.

The Rule of Thirds is a technique of dividing the frame up into a 3x3 grid, splitting your frame into nine boxes. Our natural impulse is to put our subject dead center, but a centered subject will look like they're caught in a spotlight, and by dropping them in the center of the frame, it gives them nowhere to go. Instead, by positioning your action in any of the four vertices where those nine boxes meet, you create a balance in your composition that feels more natural. For example, a side view of a person driving a car: on the top left vertex is the driver's head and shoulder, which follows their arm down to the lower right vertex to the steering wheel. This creates a nicely balanced frame of the driver on the top left and the wheel on the lower right.

Relatives of the rule of thirds are Head Room and Look Room. Just as the rule of thirds splits up your frame to add balance, head room and look room mean to give your subject a little extra room in wherever direction they're facing. If you are filming a public speaker, position them so there's a little less room at their back and a little more above their head. Subconsciously, we picture the edge of the frame as a wall, so by giving your subject more look room and head room, there is a space for them to speak into. By not giving them enough look room, they'll look like they're talking to a wall!

Varying your shots will keep your audience interested by giving them something new to look at or an object presented in a new way.
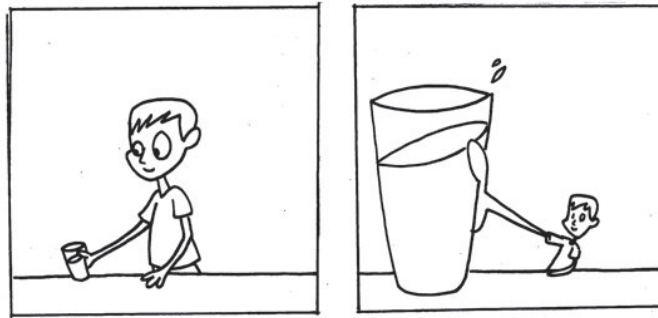
Find unique ways to show everyday things. Observing a scene from the height of your camera operator can get dull; one way to avoid over-reliance on this point of view is to meet your subject on its own terms. If you are filming someone setting down a glass, rather than show the person from the torso up setting the small object on a table, make the glass your subject and position your camera on the table, then watch as a giant drink fills the frame. Your audience will know that because you took the time to focus on this object that it must be important and helps keep the visual element of the story from growing stale.

Add depth to a composition. Rather than imagine the scene taking place on a single plane, use the foreground, midground and background to create depth in a scene. For example, a factory worker has entered his boss's office to ask for a raise. The subject of the scene, the worker, is in the midground, while the large, looming figure of his boss occupies the foreground. Behind them, the factory scene hums along with dozens of other workers. You have tied the three key elements of the scene (the worker, the boss, the factory machines) together in one visually rich composition.
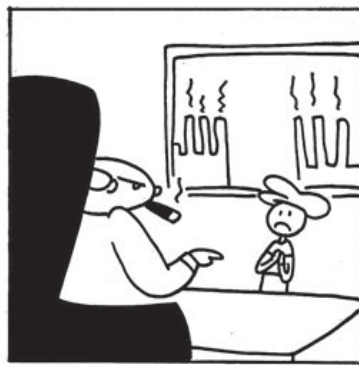

These are just the simple rules, but they will do a lot for improving the look of your compositions, and will help you to start thinking of the frame as a canvas where you create your images.

The Types of Shots and What They Mean

Your camera is a surrogate for your audience. The way it interacts with the scene dictates the way your audience feels they are interacting with the scene. How do you want your audience to feel watching a scene? Do you want them to feel disoriented? Detached? Should the story feel serene, off-balance, or static? Do you focus on sweeping grandeur or small details? Different shots convey different tones to a scene; answering these questions first will help decide what types of shots to use.

Moving from long to close shots is a trade-off between showing informative visuals or intimate emotions. You can't have more of one without giving up an equal amount of the other. Starting at the extreme long shot, actors are made very small compared to their surroundings, but this is where you establish the scene and its elements. It is also where you can express yourself visually in the patterns in scenery and shadows that you are afforded at this range. At the opposite end is the extreme close-up that puts a character's emotions front and center. There is less contextual information at this range, but at this proximity to a subject, the emotional intensity can be powerful. Let's take a closer look at the different types of shots and how they can set the tone for a scene:
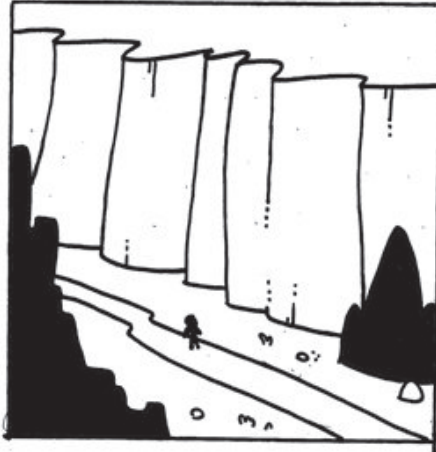
Extreme Long Shot: Typically used to show subjects of relatively massive scale. Picture a mountain climber represented as a tiny speck against a vast expanse of snow, the extreme long shot conveying the relative insignificance of the character struggling against their environment. It is a study in scale and majesty.


Long Shot: The distance of the camera from its subject also reflects an emotional distance; the audience doesn't get as emotionally involved in what's going on as they would if they were closer. In a way, it makes viewers a casual bystander, somewhat aloof to what's happening. Take a couple arguing, where the details of their argument are lost to the viewer, and only the big blow-ups are able to catch our attention. Something is happening, but we can't be sure what it is.

Medium Long Shot: falling between the long and close shots, this is more informative than emotional. It is too close for the epic scale of a long shot and too far to convey the intimacy of a close up, making it emotionally neutral.

Medium Shot: the medium shot is where we are starting to engage with the characters on a personal level. It is an approximation of how close someone would be when having a casual conversation.
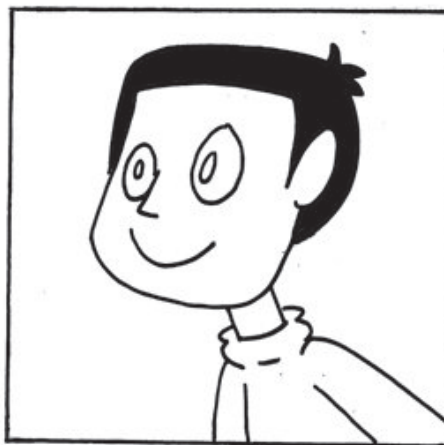
Close Up: More intimate than the medium shot, the expressions and emotions of an actor are more visible and affecting and is meant to engage the character in a direct and personal manner. You are starting to lose visual information about the character's surroundings, but the character's actions are more intimate and impacting.

Extreme Close Up: For amplifying emotional intensity, the extreme close-up puts the camera right in the actor's face, making even their smallest emotional cues huge -- and raises the intensity of the problems behind them. This works for objects too: the ticking hands of a clock, a bullet shell hitting the floor, the blinking cursor of a computer terminal. What the extreme close up lacks in context, it makes up for by taking a small event and making it enormous.

Dutch angle: Tilting the camera gives a subtle cue that something about the scene is unstable or just a little bit off-kilter. The effect shows the unbalanced mental or emotional state of the character, or to make the scene feel somehow unsettling.
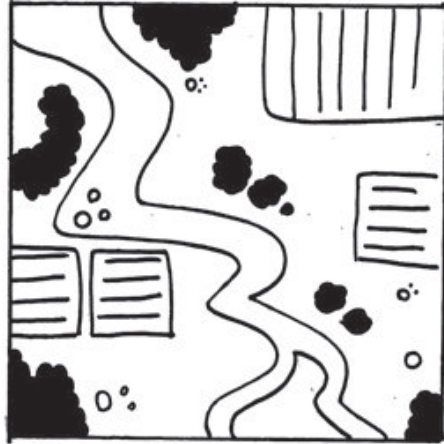
Bird's Eye Shot: Similar to the extreme long shot, this starts to get into the abstract realm of shapes and lines. It is an opportunity to be completely divorced from character, and let the shape of a grove of trees, the tangle of a freeway overpass, or the grid of city lights on a clear night dazzle the viewer.

Knowing what kinds of information these shots give your audience, think about how each of them fit together to compose your scene. Using wide shots can make your scene feel distant and impersonal or grand and epic in scale. Moving in very close to the action gets your audience invested in the characters and what's happening to them, but at the cost of disorienting them in visual space.

What Kind of 'Character' is my Camera?

Not being in front of the screen, it's easy to forget that there is one very important character helping to tell the story -- the camera! As the cinematographer, your job is to decide what kind of 'character' your camera is. Does it have an objective or subjective viewpoint of the scene? Is it a passive observer or is it close to the action? Once you start thinking of the camera as its own character, you'll find this will dictate the shots you use.

What does it mean to have an objective or subjective camera? An objective camera is that of a third-party observer, like you watching a scene play out. When picking your shots, ask yourself which character interests you. What do you think is important to pay attention to? Picture a scene of a man leaving his wife and child on a business trip. You can choose to focus on the wife planting a tender parting kiss on the man's cheek, or the young child's preoccupation with a toy, or even a neighbor's cheerful wave. These are all elements in the scene; it's up to you to decide what you think is important to show.
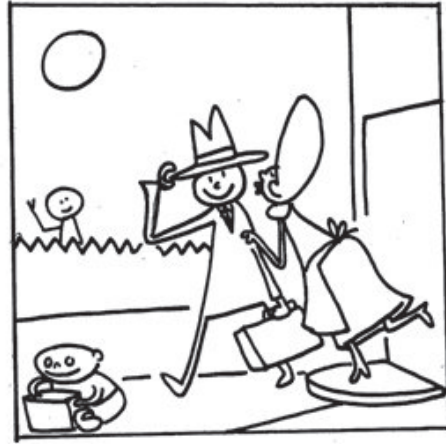
A subjective camera takes the point of view of one of the characters, and you witness the scene through their eyes. How different would it be to see the same scene from above happen as an objective observer versus one of the characters? From the subjective point of view of the husband, you see the sadness in the wife's face and experience the disinterest in the child as the character would. Or you can choose the child's point of view, meaning you'll only be vaguely aware of the dialogue of the parting couple while the toy is the focus of the scene. Each is a different perspective on the same event.

Shooting a Basic Scene

Now that you understand how to use different shots to set the tone for a scene, let's go through the process of shooting a basic scene: two cowboys ready to draw at high noon. Each shot is an opportunity to move in closer on the action. As your shots move in closer, the audience becomes more involved in the scene.

First we start in the long shot, establishing the entire scene: a wide, high-angle view of a dusty wild west town, overlooked by a clock tower. From there, we see our two gunfighters enter the scene. This shot gives context for where we are and what's going to happen.
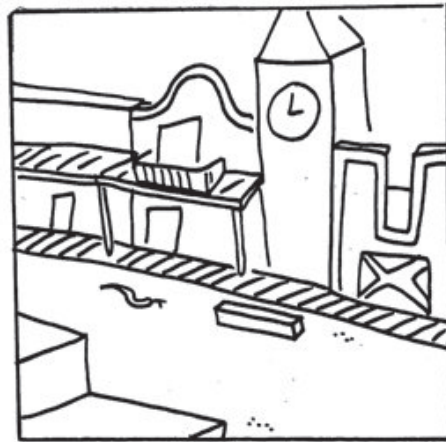

Once you have established your scene in the long shot, you can move in closer to cover one of the characters in a medium. Here we get an opportunity to identify each of our gunfighters.
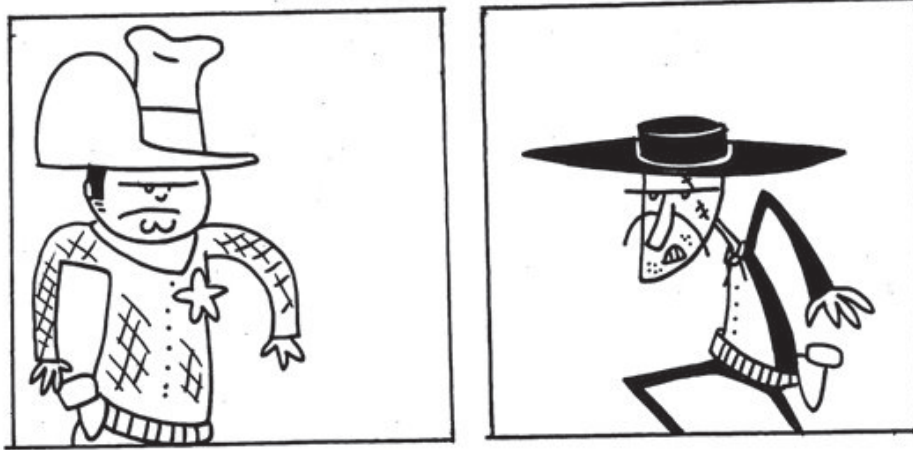
Each shot is meant to draw the viewer deeper into the scene by narrowing their focus. A close-up on the good guy will let us identify with him. A close-up on the bad guy is our chance to dislike him. Getting closer to our characters helps us identify who is in this scene and why we should care what happens to them.

Now we can draw out time by focusing on individual elements of the scene. A close-up of the hero's hand at his holstered gun. The bad guy's hand doing the same. Extreme close-up of the hero's steely stare, then on the bad guy's wild, panicked eyes. An extreme close-up of the clock tower's hands hovering on 11:59.
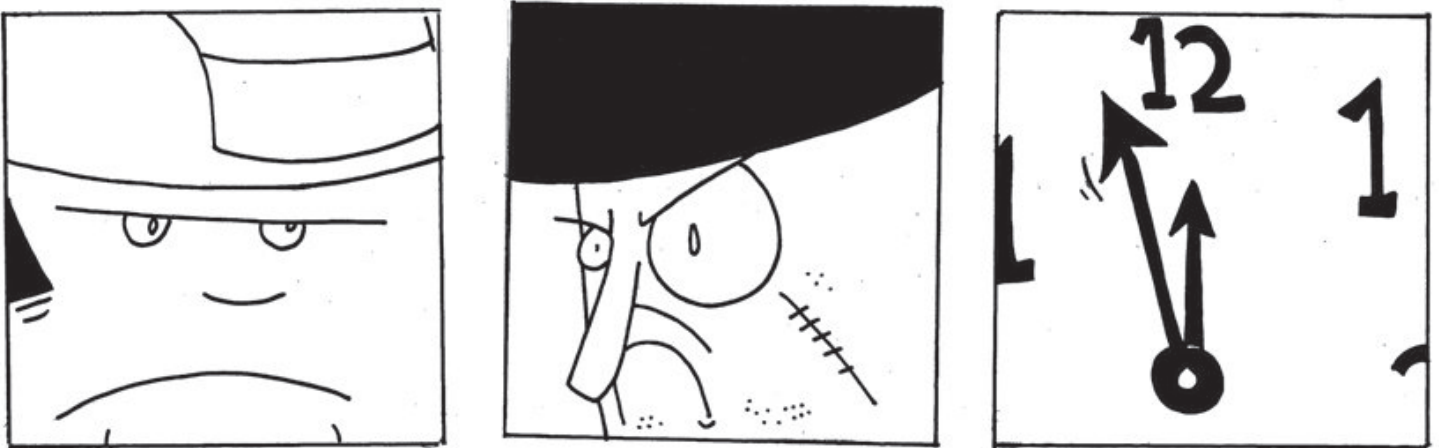
Out to a medium to see the action in the scene. Each gunfighter drawing his pistol, then a medium shot of the bad guy as he clutches his chest and falls over.
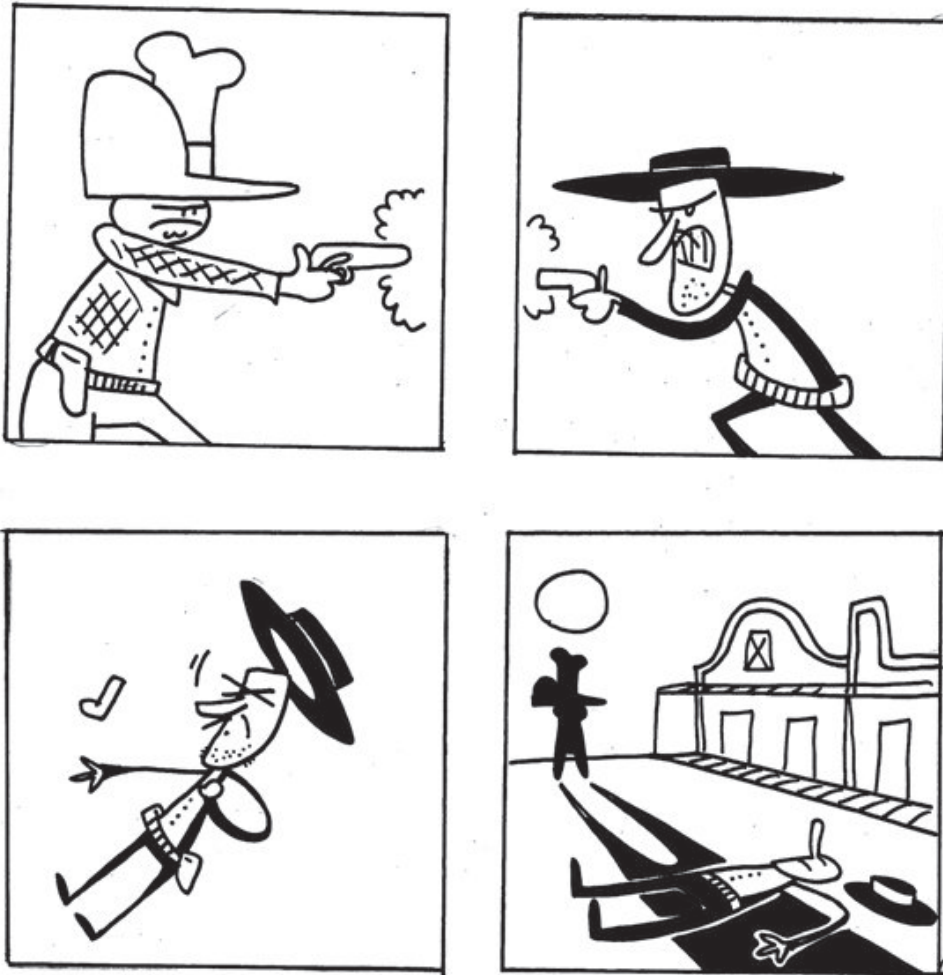
Finally out to a long shot, we see our hero walk off, the body of his vanquished opponent lying in the street. The wide shot allows the scene to decompress, letting the audience come up for air after diving deep into the drama that just unfolded. Each new shot pulls us closer into the action: first, a wild west town, then our hero and villain, their guns, push in close to read their emotions, then show the action. Finally, back out to decompress from the scene. This is just one example, and there is an endless variety of ways this same scene can be told using the given shot types.

Conclusion

   These basic lessons should get you thinking like a cinematographer. Treat your camera as another character in the scene, exercise proper framing of subjects, try different camera angles and use the various types of shots to set the tone for your scene. By understanding the language of visual storytelling, you will open up a whole new dimension to your films.

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