

CAMERA HEIGHT

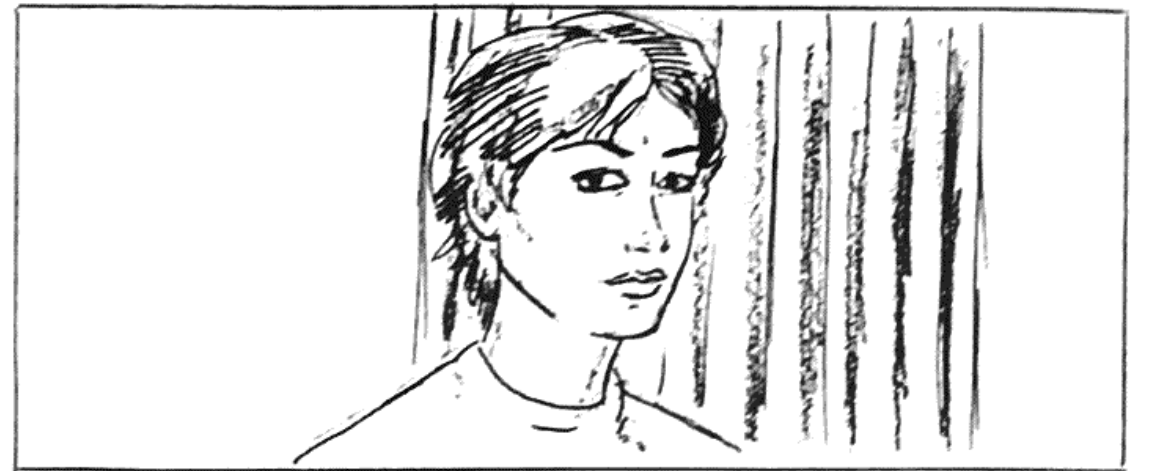
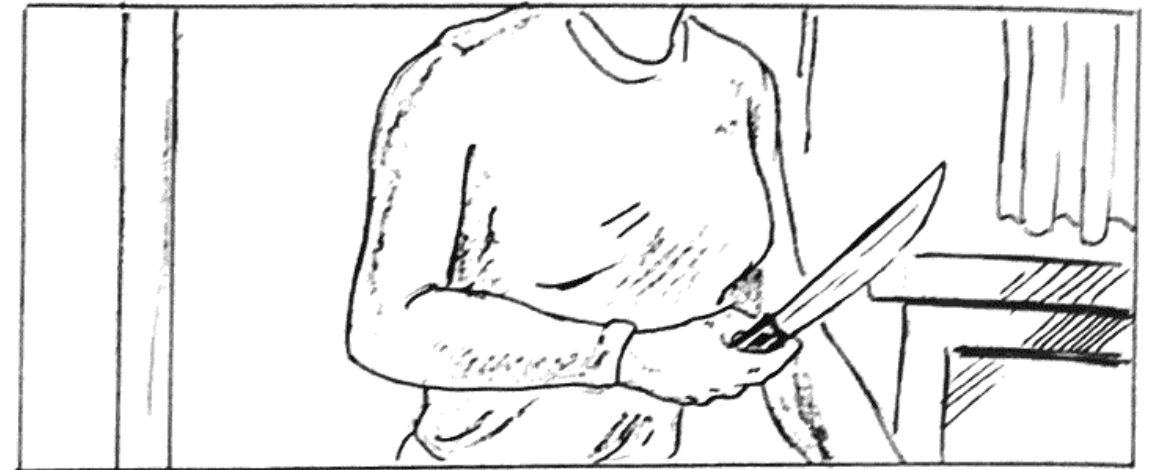
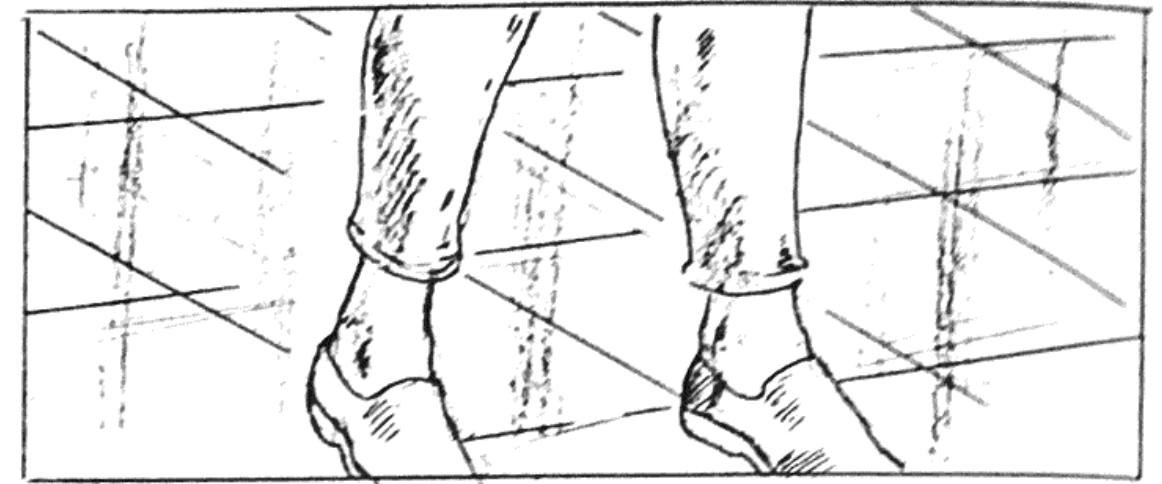
What does it look like?

The height of the camera has a considerable effect on the meaning of a shot.

If you only show a person's feet, there is a mystery— who are they? This is a very common technique. If you show their upper body but not their face, you discover more about them (they might be doing something with their hands), but you still don't really know who they are. Finally, when the camera is brought up to eye level with the actor, the mystery is resolved and the character is revealed.

Where can I see it?

Rosemary's Baby— near the end, in the scene where Rosemary is carrying a knife. The camera alternates *Camera Heights* to show different aspects of her emotional state. Her feet, the knife in her hands, and a close-up of her fear and anxiety all heighten the effect of the scene.



Camera Heights

DRAMATIC ANGLE, EXTREME ANGLE, BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

What does it look like?

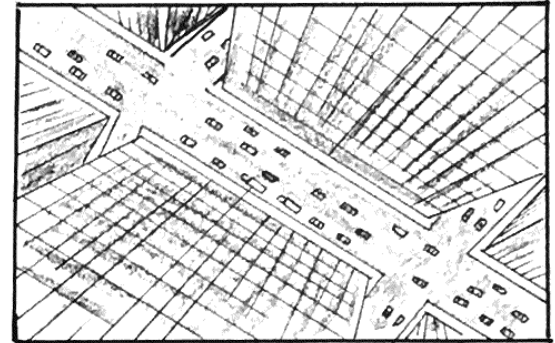
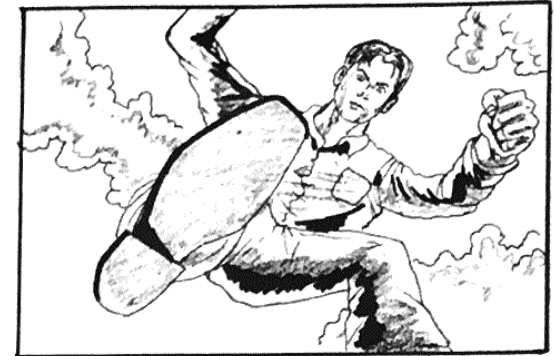
A *Dramatic Angle* adds to the emotional impact of a scene. A low camera angle makes characters and objects seem tall and powerful. A high camera angle gives the characters a diminished feel— as if the audience is looking down on them.

An *Extreme Angle* is a magnified version of a *Dramatic Angle*. An extreme low angle might start below the feet of a subject, staring up into the sky. An extreme high angle could be the view from the top of a tall office building, looking down on the insignificance of humanity.

A *Bird's-Eye View* is an *Extreme Angle* in which the camera is positioned directly above a scene, facing straight down.

Where can I see it?

The Crow uses many *Extreme Angles* to achieve the aesthetic of a comic book, a medium which commonly exaggerates angles and perspective. In Terminator 2: Judgment Day, many of the sequences with the Terminator are shot from a low angle. This technique enhances his image of strength.



Dramatic Angles

SCREEN DIRECTION

What does it look like?

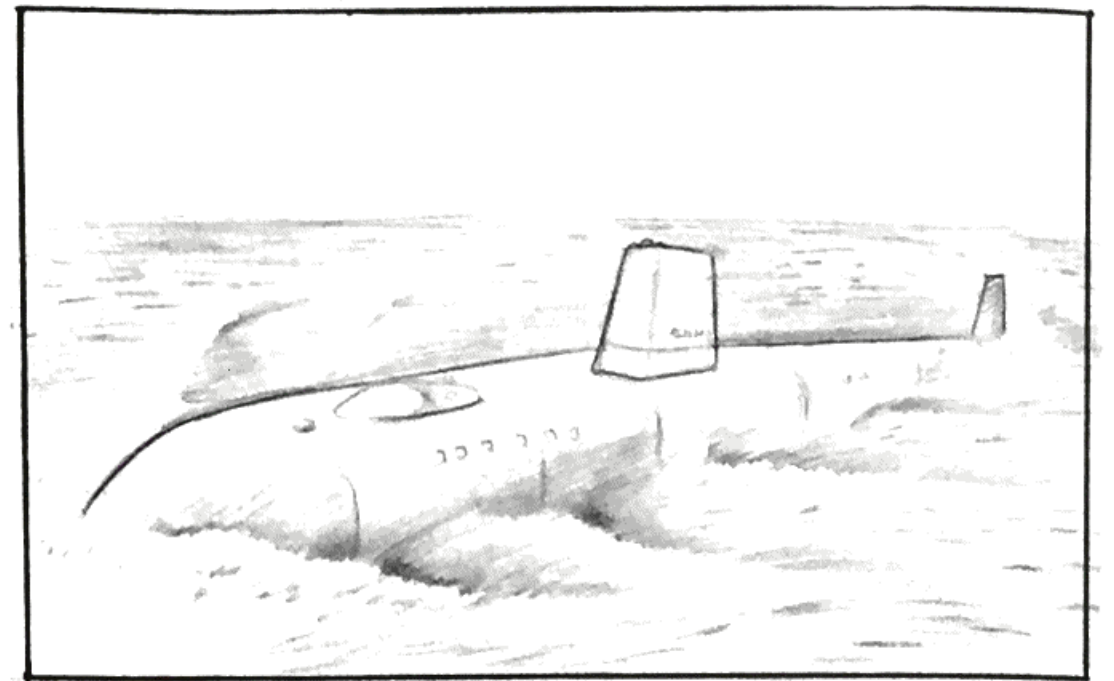
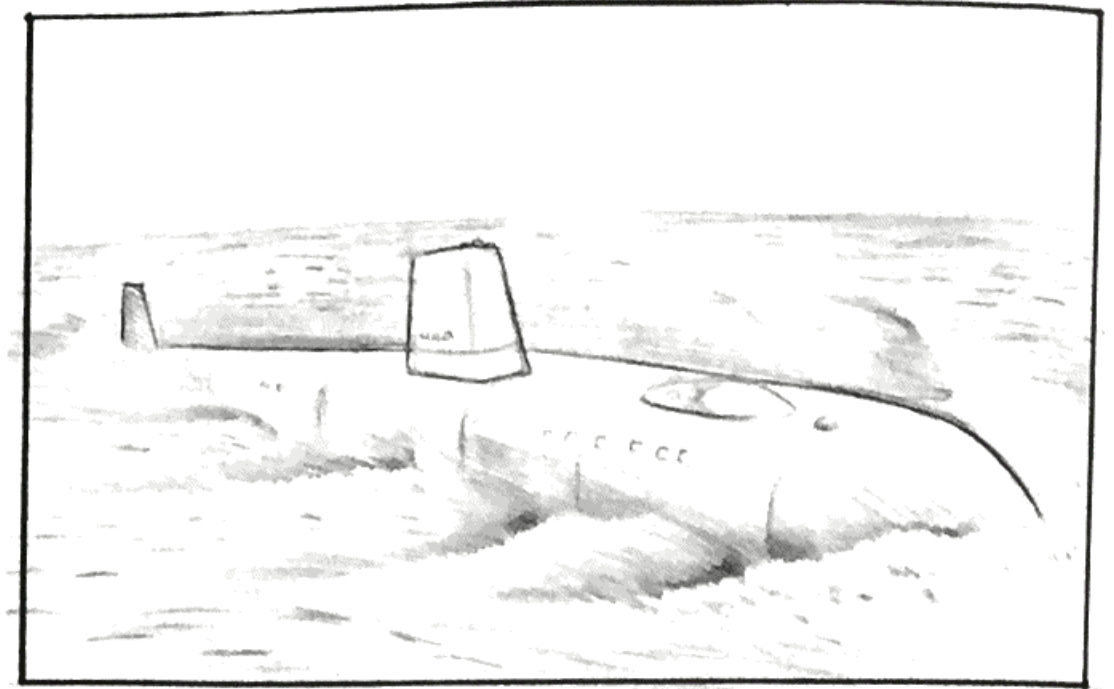
Essential to establishing the visual flow of a collection of shots, *Screen Direction* is simply the direction an object is facing in a scene—left or right. *Screen Direction* can maintain a visual continuity when making cuts, or it can be used in a non-standard way to add impact to a scene.

For example: If a director is filming two actors talking to each other, he might want to use close-ups. He must be careful to always film the actors from the same side. If he doesn't do this, one of the actors might face the right side of the screen in sections of the dialogue and the left side of the screen in others. This would be very disconcerting to an audience.

This is commonly referred to as the 180° rule—you must stay within a 180° arc of the actors in order to maintain consistent *Screen Direction*. Of course, all rules can be broken at the director's discretion.

Where can I see it?

In Das Boot, the submarine always faces toward the right side of the screen when traveling out to sea and toward the left when coming back to port.



Screen Direction

TILTED HORIZON

What does it look like?

Tilted Horizon simply involves tipping the camera slightly to the side in order to increase the tension in a scene.

Also known as a Dutch angle or a canted shot, this technique is most effective when there are strong horizontal and vertical lines that the non-uniform camera angle enhances.

Because our eyes are used to seeing everything straight up and down, the diagonals that result from *Tilted Horizon* tend to attract our attention.

Where can I see it?

Tilted Horizon is used extensively throughout The Third Man.



Tilted Horizon

EXTREME CLOSE-UP

What does it look like?

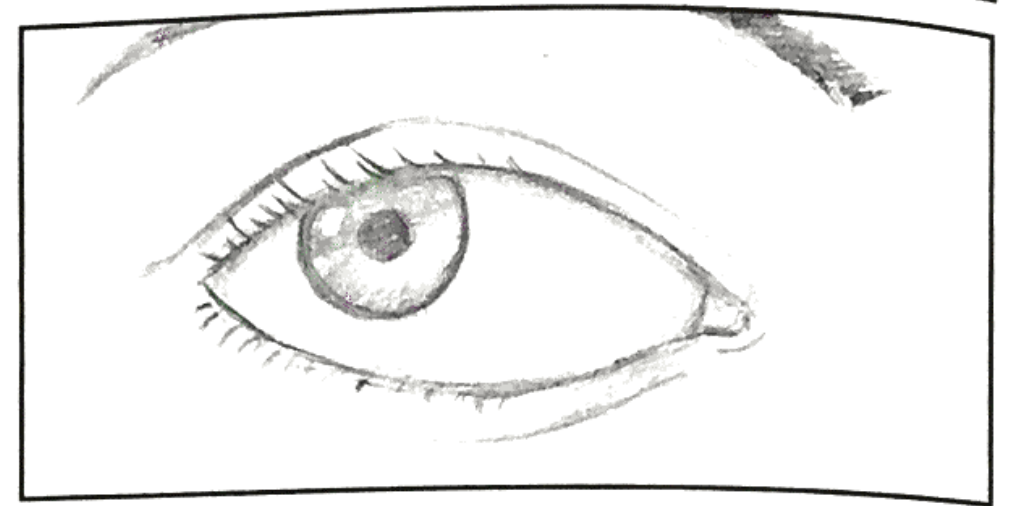
An *Extreme Close-Up* is simply a magnified view of a small object, causing it to fill the entire frame.

Extreme Close-Ups are effective because we are not used to seeing an abnormally magnified level of detail. By filling the frame with a singular feature, the audience's attention is drawn to that subject, to the exclusion of everything else.

Extreme Close-Ups can be used to emphasize a particular scene or a sequence of dialogue. For example: if a character is nervous, the director might cut to an *Extreme Close-Up* of the actor wringing his hands or shifting her eyes.

Where can I see it?

In U Turn, *Extreme Close-Ups* are frequently cut in at odd intervals with the action and dialogue. In The Fifth Element, we see an *Extreme Close-Up* of Leeloo's eye opening as she discovers the horrors of war.



Extreme Close-Ups

STAGING

What does it look like?

Staging is somewhat the opposite of montage. Instead of cutting between wide shots, close-ups, reversals, and cutaways, *Staging* involves filming in very long sections.

Staging derives its name from its similarity to watching a play being performed on stage. When you watch a play, there is no camera to cut back and forth between the actors. The audience sees all of the action being performed from a single distance and angle.

Where can I see it?

Rope is an experimental Hitchcock film composed of extremely long takes. Woody Allen is known for filming scenes as very long sequences without cutting. This gives the actors more freedom to improvise, because they don't have to worry about how the editor will splice the cuts together in post-production.



Staging

DEPTH STAGING, PLANAR STAGING

What does it look like?

Throughout the history of film, different waves of film style have emphasized varying aspects of staging within the camera frame.

Depth Staging involves placing the characters in the frame at excessive distances from each other, emphasizing depth. One character could be all the way down the hallway, while the other character sits in close-up toward the front.

Planar Staging has roots in the theater, where all the characters are lined up on a stage. *Planar Staging* emphasizes a flat surface for staging a scene.

Where can I see it?

Citizen Kane makes considerable use of *Depth Staging*. In 2001: A Space Odyssey, there is a conference in which the speaker stands at a podium far in the background.



Planar Staging



Depth Staging

MULTI-LEVEL ACTION

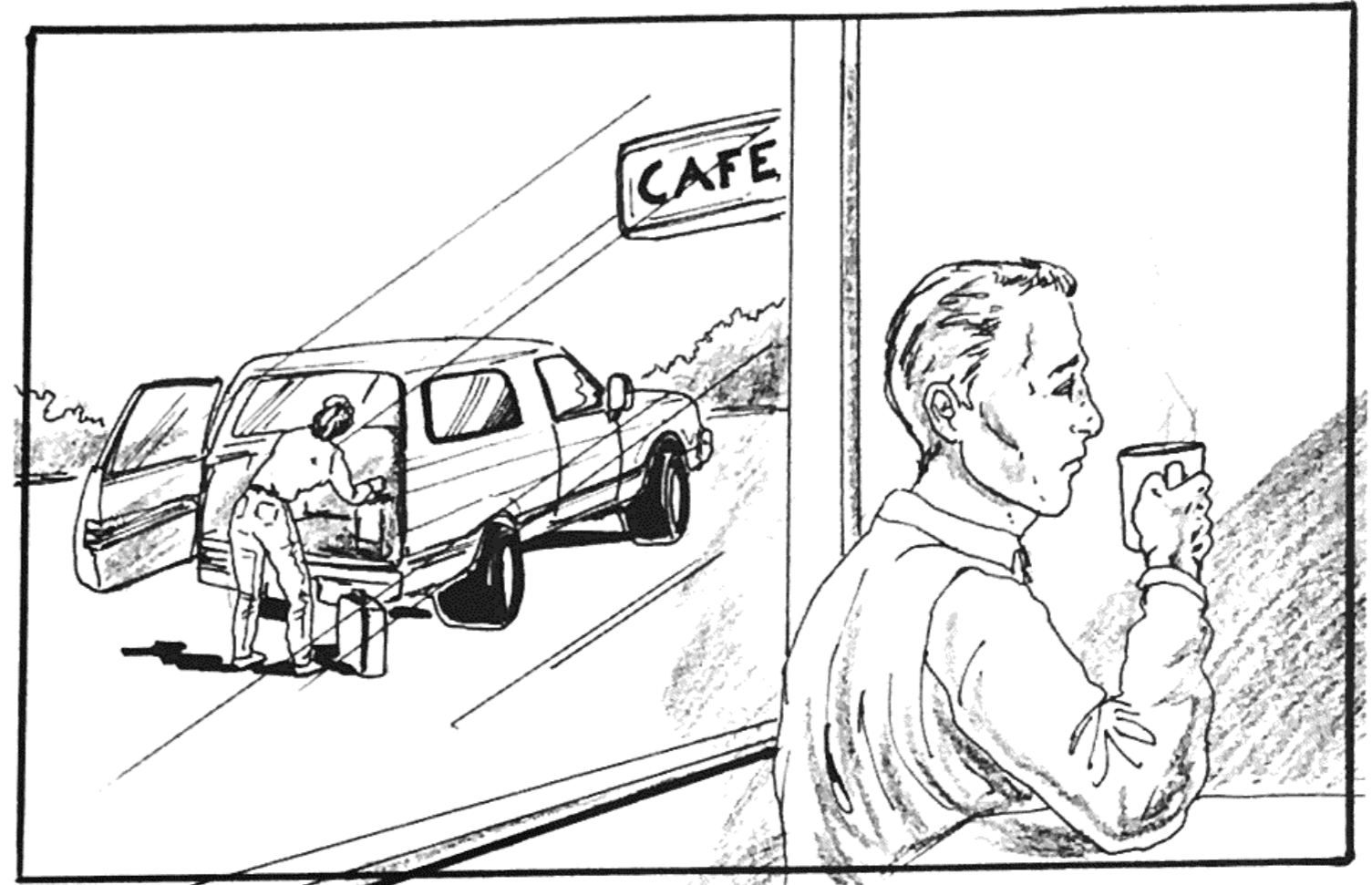
What does it look like?

With *Multi-Level Action*, the audience watches one scene occur in the foreground while another occurs in the background.

This can be an exciting way to bring together storylines or to show the relationships between multiple story paths in a film.

Where can I see it?

In *Red*, the camera focuses on two levels of an exterior scene. In the foreground is a man's girlfriend, walking toward his apartment. In the background, a model runs outside to turn off her car alarm.



Multi-Level Action

EXERCISES

- **Read a few good books on composition.** You can find this information in books about photography, fine arts, graphic design, and more. Composition has been studied for thousands of years. There is plenty of material on the subject.
- **Visit an art gallery or read a photography book.** Try to identify the compositional techniques you have learned within a work of art. Use these techniques in any films you direct.
- **Watch some movies and concentrate on how the director composes objects in a scene.** Skilled directors will use every cinematic technique available to them, including composition.
- **Practice composition.** You don't need an expensive film camera to do this. You can practice with pencil and paper, or by simply observing the composition of objects in the world around you.