AMERICAN CINEMA/AMERICAN CULTURE

Second Edition

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■■■ ■ SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

The Gold Rush (1925)   *The Terminator* (1984)
Citizen Kane (1941)   *Pulp Fiction* (1994)
Rear Window (1954)   *Memento* (2001)
Vertigo (1958)   *Mulholland Drive* (2001)
Some Like It Hot (1959)

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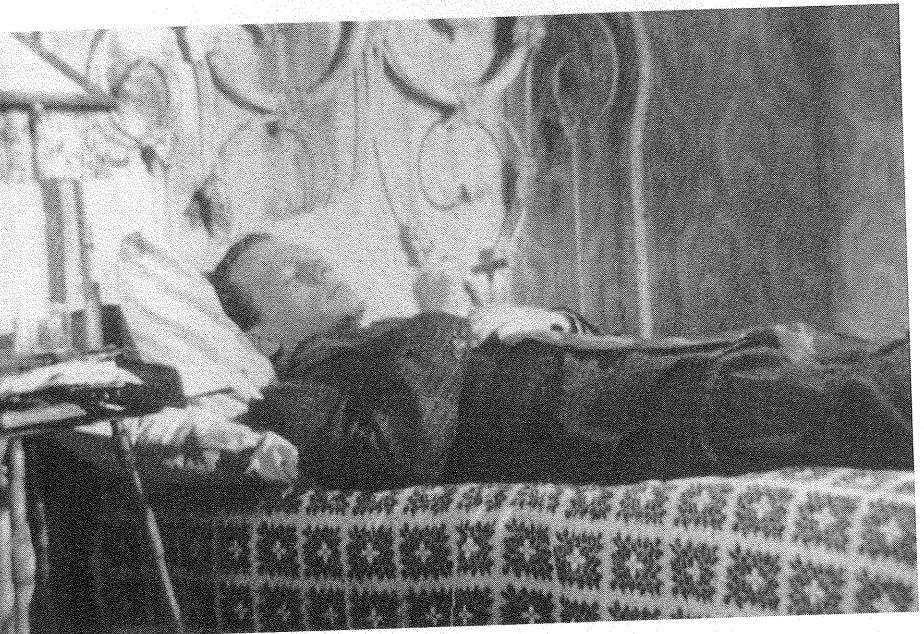
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CHAPTER **3**

Classical Hollywood Cinema: Style

FILM FORM AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Classical Hollywood cinema is a character-centered cinema. Not only are nar-
ratives structured around the goals of individual characters, but basic elements
of film style are also put at the service of character exposition and dramatic
development. Even at the level of setting, the narrative machinery seeks to
maximize its use of the medium—to use it to describe character psychology, to
visualize the goals and desires of characters, and to convey their development
as characters through the action that follows.

Classical Economy:
The Opening Sequence of *Shadow of a Doubt*

The introductory sequence of Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) pro-
vides a perfect example of classical economy and efficiency in character de-
lineation. A series of establishing shots connected by dissolves identifies the

Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotten) lies stretched out on a bed in a rooming house in the opening sequence of *Shadow of a Doubt.*

setting of the action as a lower-class neighborhood in Philadelphia. Establishing shots function to present the spatial parameters within which the subsequent action of a scene takes place. Here, long shots of the city, with derelicts, trash, and abandoned cars in the foreground, establish an aura of decadence and decay that dominate our perception of the world into which the dissolves bring us, and of the character who occupies the center of that world. Dissolves (a fluid form of shot transition which involves fading out on one shot while fading in on another) gradually narrow the spectator's field of view from the entire city to a specific block, kids playing stickball in the street, a rooming house on that block, and finally a specific window in that rooming house.

In a low-angle shot, the camera looks up from below at the second-story window of the rooming house. Then there is a dissolve to the second-floor interior. The camera tracks (that is, moves bodily) across a room to reveal Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotten) lying fully dressed in a business suit on a bed in midday and smoking a cigar. On the nightstand next to him lies a wad of high-denomination currency; some of the bills have fallen to the floor. There is also a half-empty whiskey glass.

The landlady enters through the door, pulls down the blinds of the window, and announces that two men have called, looking for him. The lowering of the blinds casts shadows on Charlie's face. Once she has left, Uncle Charlie rises, drinks the whiskey, and angrily throws the empty glass into the basin in the adjoining bathroom, smashing it. Then he walks to the window, raises the blinds, and looks out onto the street where the two men stand. In an internal

monologue in which we hear his thoughts, Charlie challenges the men to prove that he has done anything wrong, declaring that they have nothing on him. Finally, Charlie leaves the room, defiantly walks by the men, and subsequently eludes them in a chase through the surrounding tenements.

The Art of Details

This introductory scene establishes Uncle Charlie as an enigmatic figure. His clothing and bearing suggest that he is clearly out of place in this lower-class setting. Yet the money, the whiskey, and his violent reaction to the news that he is being followed suggest that he belongs in a criminal milieu. The mise-en-scène (that is, the staging of the sequence) presents Charlie as a man who is at the end of his rope. His posture is that of a dead man, a fully dressed corpse stretched out on a bier in the funeral parlor. The crumpled bills on the floor convey his disregard for money. His depressed state is clearly less a result of material wants than of unstated spiritual needs.

Yet there is also something monstrous about him. Charlie rises, like Dracula from his coffin, when the room is made dark by the landlady's lowering of the blinds. His subsequent behavior expresses his potential for violence: when he gets up, one of the first things he does is to smash his glass by throwing it across the room into the bathroom sink. At the same time, his actions express tremendous hubris: his internal monologue voices defiance toward his pursuers. At the end of the scene, he goes out to confront them, behaving like a character in a Dostoevsky novel who is driven by a desire for such challenges.

At the same time, the sequence epitomizes the narrative economy and efficiency of classical Hollywood cinema. Every detail in the scene serves a purpose, advances the narrative, and gets used up by the conclusion of the scene. The window is there for the camera to enter at the beginning of the scene, for the landlady to pull the blinds down on, and for Charlie to raise the blinds on and look through to see the men outside. The bed is there for Charlie to lie on and get up from; the nightstand is there to provide a surface on which the money and the whiskey can be placed. The whiskey glass is there for Charlie to drink out of, and the bathroom sink is there for him to use to smash the whiskey glass. The door is there for the landlady to enter and for Charlie to use when exiting. By the time Uncle Charlie leaves, every prop and every feature of the room have been used to advance the narrative; the room has been narratively exhausted, so to speak, and it is time to move on to the next space.

MISE-EN-SCÈNE

Not every Hollywood film is so meticulous in its use of décor and mise-en-scène; *Citizen Kane,* for example, overwhelms the spectator with detail, much of which never finds its way into the narrative except as atmosphere. But films

like *Shadow of a Doubt* reflect the general principles of narrative economy that informs the majority of Hollywood films and sets a standard for efficiency that a surprising number of narratives meet. Elements of film style are not merely ornamental. They are not the superficial coating of a story that could be told in a thousand different ways. Classical Hollywood style becomes *the means by which* narratives are realized; it provides the formal system that enables them to be told. Elements of style serve to shape the narrative. They function to read it for the audiences. They draw attention to, underline, and point out what it is that the audience needs to see or hear in order to read or understand the scene.

In presenting stories on the screen, the cinema relies on actors and actresses to stage events, much as they are staged in the theater. The term "mise-en-scène" describes this activity. Mise-en-scène encompasses a variety of theatrical categories related to the staging of action. These range from purely theatrical areas of expression such as set design, costume design, the blocking of actors, performance, and lighting to purely filmic techniques such as camera movement, camera angle, camera distance, and composition. Strictly speaking, mise-en-scène (or "putting on the stage") includes the relation of everything in the shot to everything else in the shot—of actors to the décor; of décor and actors to the lighting; of actors, décor, and lighting to the camera position; and so forth.

In the theater, mise-en-scène serves as a reading of the action. Set design, costume, lighting, and the movement of actors are designed by the stage director (or producer) to present the ideas in the script to the audience in a more or less predigested way. That is, these elements of stagecraft, which are used to organize the drama, process the action for the audience. Mise-en-scène translates the contents of a scene into the language of the theater, producing a reading of the action that guides the audience's attention in specific ways.

THE CAMERA

In the cinema, theatrical mise-en-scène provides a primary interpretation of the drama. Costume and set design become a reflection of character, as we saw in the introduction of Uncle Charlie lying fully dressed on a bed at midday in *Shadow of a Doubt*. Lighting becomes an extension of the character's psychological makeup into the surrounding space. The shadow of the blind which falls over Charlie's face becomes the "shadow" of his doubt, conveying the concern that creeps over him about the two men waiting outside for him in the street. The mise-en-scène's theatrical reading of the action is driven home, in turn, by means of a variety of uniquely cinematic techniques such as camera position (which includes the camera's angle on and distance from the action) and camera movement (which includes pans, tracks, zooms, and combinations of all three).

Thus, the low-angle shot of Uncle Charlie from below as he looks out of the window, coupled with the high-angle shot from above of what he sees (the two men outside), communicates ideas. The shots function in terms of both their narrative context and their relation to one another in a system of other shots to convey a sense of conflict or opposition between his view and physical position in space and theirs. These two seemingly insignificant shots help to set up the tense confrontation that follows, when Charlie walks directly toward, then past, the two men.

Meaning through Context: Camera Angle and Distance

Camera angle and distance become expressive devices as a result of their participation in systems of difference. They possess no absolute meaning but derive their meaning through a relative process that depends on the specific dramatic context in which they are used and their relation to other possible angles and distances. Thus, a low-angle shot, in which the camera looks up at the action, might acquire meaning through a process of association, becoming identified with a specific character or situation that it is repeatedly used to film.

At the same time, the particular meaning of a low-angle shot derives not only from the content of the shot but also from the relation of that particular angle to the other angles used in the film, that is, from its place in a system of differences. Thus, a particular low-angle shot differs not only from other low-angle shots (which look up at different angles), but also from eye-level and high-angle shots, in which the camera looks at the action straight on or from above, respectively.

It is often tempting to view low- or high-angle shots in somewhat literal terms as descriptive of the relative power of a character; thus, when the camera looks up at a character, it (and we) occupy an inferior position in relation to that character. As a result, our impression of that character's power or stature is thereby magnified. Similarly, high-angle shots automatically position viewers above the action, giving them a quasi-omniscient, quasi-omnipotent, god's-eye view of the action, indicating the relative weakness or inferiority of any onscreen character. However, this literal interpretation of camera angle proves to be rather limited, especially when it ignores the context in which the shot occurs.

Thus the low-angle shot of Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles) in *Citizen Kane* (1941) as he stands in his deserted campaign headquarters and talks to his friend Jed Leland (Joseph Cotten) after his defeat in the race for state governor conveys contradictory ideas. Kane's power and mystery are suggested in the camera angle—yet in losing the election he has just proven how vulnerable he is. The extremity of the low angle actually captures his powerful powerlessness, making it appear as if the character is about to topple over.

Something similar takes place at the end of *Ace in the Hole* (1951). The film's central character, a newspaper reporter named Chuck Tatum (Kirk Douglas), turns the simple rescue of a man trapped in a cave accident into a sensational

A low-angle shot of Kane (Orson Welles) and his friend Leland (Joseph Cotten) after Kane's defeat at the polls.

Frame enlargement by Kristin Thompson

front-page story, then delays the rescue process in order to further his own career as a journalist.

After the man dies, Tatum is fatally wounded by the man's wife. Back at his newspaper office, he renounces the fame he has won through his coverage of the story. As he does so, director Billy Wilder films him in an extreme low-angle shot. The exaggeration of the angle serves to caricature his excessive abuse of the power of the press and to look askance at his greed and self-interest; the shot concludes as Tatum drops dead on the floor, falling right into the camera. This particular low-angle shot can hardly be understood as a signifier of his power; rather, it dramatizes the terrible consequences of too much power.

Systematic Meaning: Some Definitions

At the same time, camera angle and distance determine meaning systematically. They participate in a system of differences that varies from film to film. Thus the extreme camera angles and distances employed in a Welles film, such as *Citizen Kane*, differ significantly from the more moderate angles and distances found in a film directed by Howard Hawks, such as *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) or *His Girl Friday* (1940). In *Kane*, the extreme close-up of Welles's lips as he utters the word "rosebud" and then dies *underlines* the importance of that moment and that word in a way that would be unthinkable in a Hawks film. In other words, the Welles system depends on exaggeration for effect, while the Hawks system employs a more subtle variation from shot to shot to drive home the meaning of its scenes.

Although camera distance is clearly a relative phenomenon, the terms used to describe it are more or less fixed. The scale on which the terms rely is that of the human body (though the content of shots, of course, is not restricted to human or even animate forms). Thus an extreme close-up presents only a portion of the face—Kane's mouth in *Kane* or the gunfighters' eyes as they face off against one another in *Forty Guns* (1957). A close-up frames the entire head, hand, foot, or other object, such as the shot of the wad of money on the floor in *Shadow of a Doubt* or the close-up of Kane's hand as he drops the glass ball to the floor in his death scene in *Kane*.
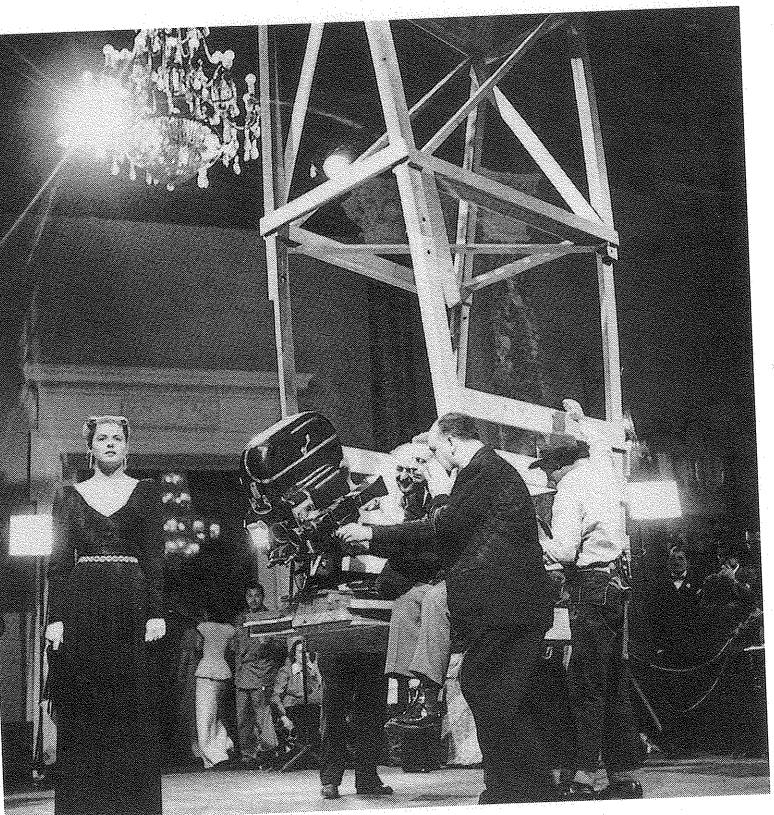
Medium close-ups give a chest-up view of individuals, as seen in most sequences in which two characters converse with one another, while medium shots tend to show the body from the waist up. Shots of characters that frame them from the knees up are referred to as medium long shots, while long shots range from full-figure images of characters as well as a bit of the surrounding space immediately above and below them (such as the first image of Uncle Charlie lying on the bed), to shots in which the human figure is only a small part of the overall scene (as in the point-of-view shot in which the two men are seen waiting in the street below for Charlie). In extreme long shots, the human body is overwhelmed by the setting in which it is placed, as in countless Westerns in which distant figures are seen as specks in a larger landscape.

Camera Movement

Camera movement emerges as a powerful element of mise-en-scène that (in most classical Hollywood films) serves the interests of narrative exposition. The term "camera movement" encompasses a variety of different formal devices, including one—the zoom—in which the camera makes no movement whatsoever. A zoom involves the use of a special lens that possesses a variety of different focal lengths ranging from wide-angle to telephoto. Manipulation of the lens produces the impression of movement toward or away from objects by shifting from wide-angle to telephoto focal lengths or vice versa. These shifts simply enlarge or decrease the apparent size of the image.

Since the camera does not literally move during a zoom shot (unless it is combined with other camera movements), its sense of movement is illusory. The famous vertigo effect in *Vertigo,* when the acrophobic central character, Scottie, looks down from a height, is achieved by the combined effects of zooming in and tracking out. This makes the space appear to expand and to contract at the same time. Zooms, which are frequently used to designate a character's subjective point of view or reaction to something, function as a kind of consciousness that surveys, studies, or scrutinizes the drama unfolding before it.

Actual camera movements consist of pans, tracks, and dolly or crane shots. In a pan, the camera rotates horizontally and/or vertically on its axis. Typically, it presents a panoramic view of a space by rotating from right to left (or from left to right) a certain number of degrees to reveal what lies before the camera

The camera, mounted on a makeshift crane (center), descends to photograph the key in Ingrid Bergman's hand in *Notorious,* as director Alfred Hitchcock looks on.

Author's collection

on either side. At the start of the cattle drive in *Red River* (1948), the camera pans 180 degrees as the owner of the herd (John Wayne) surveys his cattle and the men (including his adopted son, Montgomery Clift) who will drive them to market. The pan not only conveys the enormous size of the herd, but also sets up the conflict between Wayne and Clift that will dominate the rest of the narrative.

In tracking shots, the camera moves bodily through space in any of a variety of directions parallel to the floor. To facilitate smooth movement, the camera is either mounted on tracks fixed to the ceiling (as in the long tracking shot of the man's rendezvous with the woman from the city in the swamp in *Sunrise,* 1927) or to the floor. In the majority of instances, however, it is affixed to a movable camera support, such as a dolly, as seen in the continuous camera movements in *Rope* (1948). If mounted on a dolly, the camera can track in a variety of different directions. It can move laterally, either to follow the movements of a character walking parallel to it or to explore space in one direction or the other. It can move circularly, tracking around a central subject or observing a scene that is taking place around it from the center of a circle. The camera is also capable of moving circuitously in, out, and around the scene.

Most typically, the camera tracks in or out on an axis, moving at an angle to or perpendicularly to the dramatic action. In a crane shot, the camera can not only move forward, backward, or circuitously on the ground, as in any dolly shot, but can also rise or descend. The party sequence in *Notorious* (1946) begins with a crane shot that descends from an overhead long shot of the ballroom floor and surrounding staircase to an extreme close-up of an important key clutched in the hand of the heroine (played by Ingrid Bergman). Like other camera movements, this crane shot reads the action for the spectator, singling out a crucial detail that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.
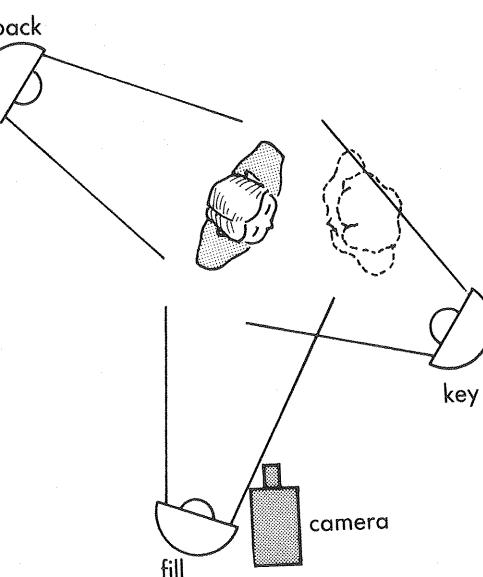
LIGHTING

Though set and costume design remain the most obvious and most forceful elements of expression among all the techniques of mise-en-scène, lighting has played an increasingly important role in the articulation of the meaning of a particular sequence. For the most part, lighting is a fundamental requirement. A certain minimal amount of lighting is necessary for the camera to photograph the contents of any scene. But there is more to lighting than ensuring proper exposure. Lighting has become a tool for reading the contents of a scene; and directors of photography carefully build their lighting setups to accomplish this goal.

Three-Point Lighting

In classical Hollywood cinema, the lighting setup begins with what is called general set lighting, which is designed not only to ensure proper exposure but also to establish overall lighting directionality. Natural or realistic lighting always establishes (or refers to) the source of the light. In exterior daytime sequences, light typically comes from above—from the sun. For many interior daytime or nighttime sequences, the same rule also applies because most interiors are lit from lighting fixtures located on the ceiling. In these instances, the key or dominant source light comes from above. In other instances, however, the major illumination for a scene comes from the front, the side, or the rear. Its source is a table or floor lamp, a fireplace, or a doorway or window through which exterior light comes. These lighting setups are realistically *motivated;* their source and direction are determined by the location or setting specified in the script.

The standard lighting setup employed in Hollywood films is called *three point lighting.* The three points to which the term refers are dominant sources of illumination. Most three-point lighting setups involve dozens of actual lights, not just three, but they are so arranged as to suggest three basic sources or lights. These lights are known as the *key light* (or chief directional light sources), the *fill light* (or weaker light sources that fill in the shadows cast by the key
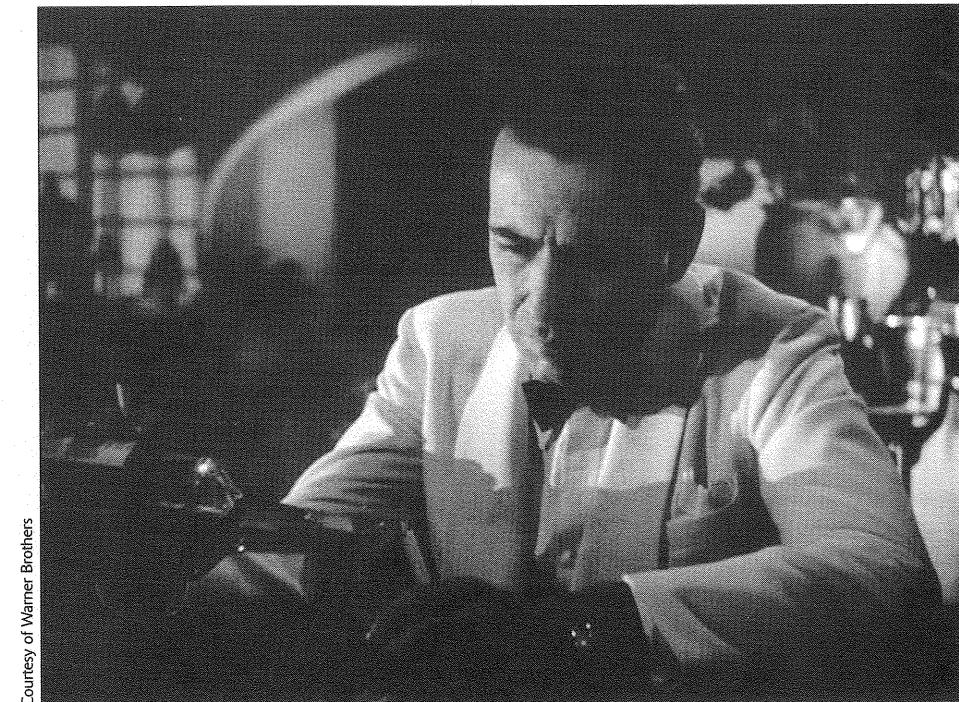
Artist's sketch of the three-point lighting system.

light), and the *back light*, the minor lights that are used to light the space between the back of the set and the characters to separate or distinguish them from the background. In certain situations, lights are also positioned to the sides or beneath characters to delineate important features. At the same time, a number of back lights are deployed to create the illusion of depth by lighting various levels of the set, curved surfaces of the set, or the shoulders of the characters; the latter are known as *clothes lights*.

High-Key/Low-Key Lighting

Three-point lighting can be manipulated to produce a variety of different lighting effects. However, most of these effects fall under two basic stylistic categories. These are either high-key or low-key lighting. The terms "high" and "low," unlike their use in connection with camera position, have nothing to do with the position of the lights. Rather, they describe the ratio of fill light to key light. In a high-key lighting system, this ratio is high; that is, there is a high amount of fill light, which washes out shadows cast by the key light. This produces a more or less brightly lit scene in which light is evenly distributed throughout the set. This style of lighting is associated with upbeat genres, such as comedies and musicals.

In a low-key lighting system, the ratio of fill to key light is low. Shadows cast by the key light are not fully filled in, producing a shadowy effect and an uneven distribution of light. This style of lighting is used in conjunction with
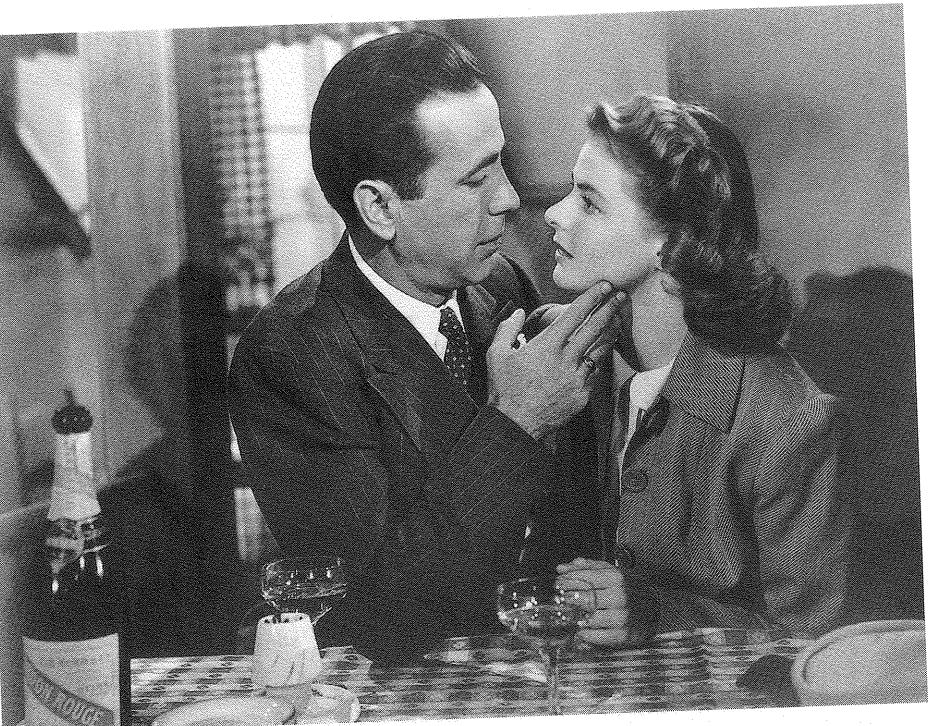
The dark side. Low-key lighting engulfs a cynical and embittered Rick (Humphrey Bogart) as he tries to drown his memories of Ilsa and Paris in *Casablanca*.

downbeat genres, such as mysteries, thrillers, and horror films, and with films noirs. These conventional associations of different lighting systems with different moods are occasionally violated. Billy Wilder, for example, used low-key lighting to film a number of comedies, including *Love in the Afternoon* (1957) and *The Apartment* (1960). Yet his appropriation of the low-key style is done deliberately to match the bittersweet moods that dominate these films' narrations. In other words, the low-key style retains its darker associations, even in a comedy.

The key light in a Western filmed outdoors in the daylight is normally the sun. Shadows cast by the sun on the faces of actors wearing cowboy hats are regularly filled in with light from reflectors or lamps positioned on or near ground level. This fill light violates the logic of nature; in daylit exteriors, light always comes from above and never from below. Yet it seems perfectly natural; it has established itself as a convention, which owes its existence to the necessity that faces be as legible or readable as possible. In fact, Westerns such as *Tom Horn* (1980), which do not always fill in the shadows under the brims of hats, appear unrealistic because they do not abide by this timeworn lighting convention.

The bright side. High-key lighting distributes the light evenly across the scene, filling in shadows, as Rick (Bogart) and Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) plan their future together in *Casablanca.* They'll always have Paris.

Star Lighting

Readability plays a major role in the development of lighting styles and conventions, serving to justify their violation of the dictates of realism and directionality. The building of the lighting setup begins with a nonrealistic foundation—with general illumination that is merely there to secure proper exposure (that is, to achieve literal readability). Over this is laid directional lighting, which is realistically motivated. On top of this, in turn, is placed star lighting, which highlights (or conceals) certain features of the major performers and makes the expressions on their faces readable.

Star lighting singles out the chief figures in a scene by giving them their own special lighting system. Star lighting thus functions to guide the attention of the audience to the actors and actresses whose roles in the scenes are of primary importance and to relegate other figures to the literal or figurative background. At the same time, star lighting serves to heighten the charismatic presence of certain performers. Directional lighting casts shadows on the faces of the minor players, whose faces become mere surfaces that reflect light coming from elsewhere. Star lighting, on the other hand, works to transform the

faces of the major performers into apparent sources of light. Since the light on their faces has no identifiable origin in the scene, it appears to come from within them—to radiate from them as if they were, indeed, astral bodies or stars. In other words, every scene in a Hollywood film combines realistic, directional, motivated lighting with unrealistic star lighting. And audiences never seem to be bothered by the apparent contradiction.

SOUND

Miking and Mixing

A blend of the realistic and the unrealistic, similar to star lighting, takes place in sound recording. Microphones are positioned to pick up sound effects and dialogue in a quasi-realistic way; the microphones duplicate, as it were, the general position of the camera, recording the sounds of what it sees. However, the intelligibility (or readability) of dialogue always takes precedence over that of other sounds in determining actual microphone positions. As a result, the overall realism and directionality of sound is combined with *star miking.* Specially placed microphones ensure that the words of major performers and crucial lines of dialogue will be heard, and sound-mixing practices lift them out of the general hubbub of sounds in the scene.

Sound mixing, which takes place on the set, in a recording studio, or in a sound-mixing facility, involves the combination of three different categories of film sound—dialogue, sound effects, and music. Sound mixers combine the various tracks in order to "hear" the scene for the audience. The hearing of a scene is the aural equivalent of the reading of the scene—that is, sound recordists and mixers provide an aural perception of the action. For example, the sound effects of the noise of an automobile engine might accompany the introduction of a scene in which two characters converse while riding in a car. But after establishing the aural atmosphere through the presence of engine noise, the sound mixer will normally lower these particular sound effects to make the dialogue more intelligible. The same sort of manipulation will take place with the music track during dialogue sequences.

The Musical Score

The musical score of a film, which is written by the film's composer, functions as a commentary on the action. Music serves to direct the audience's attention to specific characters or details, to provide information about the time or place of the action, or to establish mood. Thus characters are frequently associated with or identified by specific musical motifs. In Westerns, for example, Indians are routinely introduced with the familiar ¼ allegretto drumbeat that signifies

"Indian territory." Melodramatic moments are underlined with musical crescendos, and the season of the year is cued by appropriate traditional music, such as Christmas carols, "Auld Lang Syne" (for New Year's), and so forth.

Like camera angle, distance, and movement, the musical score comments on the action without the characters' knowledge. Much as the characters cannot (or pretend they cannot) see the camera, so they cannot hear the underscoring. However, they can obviously hear music that emanates from the space of the drama, such as that from radios, record players, and musical instruments played by characters within the fiction. The musical score provides yet another level of interpretation of the drama in addition to those already built into the mise-en-scène.

Sound and Continuity

Sound is a feature of both mise-en-scène and editing. Sounds occurring within the shot, whether dialogue, sound effects, or music, automatically interact with one another (as do the visual elements of mise-en-scène) to provide narrative information. In other words, sound is not only a part of mise-en-scène but also behaves and functions just as mise-en-scène does. But sound, both as a phenomenon and as an aesthetic category, cannot be as easily confined as is mise-en-scène to the borders of the frame or the limits of the shot. Offscreen sound penetrates the borders of the frame. We see characters react to unseen voices or noises that come from outside the frame. And sound continues over cuts. Dialogue, sound effects, and music extend from one shot to the next. Sound editing becomes an integral aspect of the film-editing process. Thus, much as film editors cut from shot to shot, they also cut from sound to sound; or they use sound to bridge shots and to make cuts between them less visible.

Musical scoring plays a major role in transporting spectators smoothly through highly edited sequences by giving them a melodic line that can carry them over disjunctive edits. In conversation sequences, the dialogue provides a stream of continuous aural information that helps to bridge the cuts from one speaker to another. Sound effects are orchestrated to accomplish a similar goal. In all of these instances, the flow of the sound serves to stabilize the audience, to hold them in place across the visual discontinuities that appear on the screen.

EDITING FROM SCENE TO SCENE

Classical continuity editing serves a purpose similar to that of sound editing. Often referred to as invisible editing, classical editing is designed to render more or less imperceptible the 600 to 800 separate shots that constitute the average feature-length film. The goal of this editing strategy is to disguise the transitions from shot to shot, making the film appear to be a seamless flow of images.

At the same time, invisible editing provides yet another level of interpretation of the onscreen action for audiences by singling out details or making connections from one shot to another. Thus a cut to a close-up proves to be an efficient and relatively unobstrusive way of conveying important plot- or character-related information.

Shortly after the title characters in *Strangers on a Train* (1951) accidentally meet on a train, the film cuts from a medium shot of one character, Bruno (Robert Walker), to a close-up of his lobster-patterned tie and his tie clasp. The unusual pattern of the tie and the tie clasp (which bears his name, Bruno) communicate vital aspects of Bruno's character (his eccentricity and his narcissism), as well as his name, to the audience. The physical juxtaposition of shots could be used to express ideas that cannot be conveyed through the more theatrical means of mise-en-scène. At the beginning of *Modern Times* (1936), for example, Chaplin cut from urban workers entering the subway to a herd of sheep. This simple shot transition establishes the film's dominant metaphor—that modern workers in industrialized society are like sheep.

Transitions

Editing serves as a primary means of organizing the film. On the most basic level of organization, shots are assembled to create a scene. A shot is an unbroken strip of film made by an uninterrupted running of the camera. A scene is the film's smallest dramatic unit; it consists of one or more shots that present an action that is spatially and temporally continuous; that is, an action taking place in a single space at a single time. Certain scenes consist of two or more actions set in two or more spaces and times that are intercut to form a single complex scene. At a larger level of organization, scenes or groups of scenes are assembled to create a sequence of scenes, a large segment, or an entire film. Thus the term "editing" encompasses two different forms of organization— editing within a scene and editing from scene to scene.

Editing from scene to scene provides the fundamental structure for the film as a whole. It employs five basic transitional devices—the cut, the fade, the dissolve, the iris, and the wipe. The cut is a simple break where two shots are joined together. The fade involves the gradual darkening of the image until it becomes black (the fade-out) or the gradual brightening of a darkened image until it becomes visible and achieves its proper brightness (the fade-in). The dissolve is achieved by simultaneously fading out on one shot while fading in on the next so that the first shot gradually disappears as the second gradually becomes visible; during the middle of the dissolve, the two shots will briefly be superimposed.

Though rare in contemporary cinema, the iris-in or iris-out serves as a major transition in the silent cinema; an adjustable diaphragm or iris in the camera or a movable mask placed over the camera lens will gradually open, in an iris-in, to reveal more and more image within an expanding, geometrically shaped frame. Or it will gradually close down, in an iris-out, to narrow the field

of view, which is surrounded by more and more blackness. The wipe, which has also become something of a dated device, is a transition in which the second shot appears to wipe the first shot off the screen.

Cuts figure significantly in both editing from scene to scene and editing within scenes. The other transitions, however, are generally used to signify shifts from scene to scene. The fade, like the lowering or raising of the lights between scenes or acts in the theater, marks a change in time or place. The iris functions like the opening or closing of a theater curtain to designate major transitions. However, the dissolve and the wipe, which communicate similar information, provide a more fluid, less discrete marking of temporal or spatial change.

Editing and Narrative Structure

Editing from scene to scene provides structure for the narrative in a variety of ways. Scenes can be organized in a purely linear fashion, as seen in the journey structure of *Some Like It Hot* (1959) analyzed in the previous chapter. Or they can be narratively linear and structurally circular or symmetrical, as seen in the seven-part, A-B-C-D-C-B-A pattern found in *The Gold Rush* (1925). Or they can be organized into a flashback structure, as in *Citizen Kane* (1941), which commences with Kane's death at his mansion, Xanadu; reviews his life through five flashback interviews with his friends, associates, former wife, and butler; and concludes, roughly a week after the film began, with a return to Xanadu, where the mystery of "rosebud" is solved. Yet again, films can be organized around an alternating pattern that interweaves two or more story lines, as in D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), which cuts back and forth from stories of social intolerance set in four different periods of history, or around the dovetailed pattern of successive stories, such as Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train* (1989), in which three separate plots unfold over the course of a single evening in a Memphis hotel.

Crosscutting or parallel editing provides the structural backbone of countless Hollywood narratives, from the silent cinema of Griffith to the sound films of Hitchcock and George Lucas. Crosscutting or parallel action involves shifting back and forth between two or more characters or stories, which are occurring in two or more separate spaces more or less simultaneously. (*Intolerance* is an exception to this rule in that its events, although thematically parallel, take place in different centuries.) Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* alternates between the exploits of a tennis star and a psychopathic killer, while his *Family Plot* (1976) juxtaposes the actions of two couples, a phony medium and her boyfriend, and a pair of kidnappers/jewel thieves, whose paths repeatedly intersect.

In *American Graffiti* (1973), Lucas's narrative shifts from character to character on a summer night in 1962. Robert Altman perfected this pattern of shifting from character to character in his multicharacter narratives, especially *Nashville* (1976), with its 24 characters; *The Player* (1992); *Short Cuts* (1993), with 22 "main" characters in 10 separate stories; and *Gosford Park* (2002). Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* (2001) takes Altman's multicharacter storytelling pattern and spreads it out geographically; Altman's films tend to be set in a single location, but

Traffic's narrative moves from Mexico to San Diego to Washington, D.C., to Ohio, following the flow of the drug traffic. From Griffith to the present, crosscutting builds toward a climax where the various narrative strands cross and where the dramatic tensions and conflicts they represent are finally resolved.

EDITING WITHIN SCENES

The transitions employed in editing from scene to scene are marked as such; that is, they are necessarily visible, functioning to convey dramatically significant shifts in time or place. Editing within scenes, on the other hand, pursues a strategy of self-effacement that disguises its operations and makes the scene appear to be more or less seamless. This is accomplished through a variety of matching techniques that make transitions from shot to shot smoother. These techniques involve the careful observance of narrative logic in the analytical dissection of dramatic action and the strict adherence to certain rules of thumb that ensure that the space in which the action takes place will be perceived by audiences as coherent and unified. Editing serves the narrative logic; it "reads" the drama in a purely logical and descriptive way. Thus a conversation sequence will cut back and forth from the person speaking to the reactions of those listening and then to the next speaker; the discovery of a safe that has just been robbed might be followed by a shot of the open window through which the burglar has escaped.

Scene dissection tends to follow an orderly pattern. It begins with an establishing or master shot, which is followed by a series of shots (scene dissection) that analyzes the dramatic contents of the space presented in the establishing shot, and it closes with a return to either the master shot or to some other shot marking the ending of the scene. The establishing or master shot, which is frequently a long shot, establishes the space in which the subsequent action will take place. It occasionally also indicates the time of day or year.

In *Shadow of a Doubt*, the shots of kids playing ball in the street and the crane shot up to Uncle Charlie's window serve as establishing shots, informing the viewer where and when the action is taking place. Charlie's conversation with his landlady and his subsequent behavior alone in his room constitute the body of the scene, which concludes with a medium long shot of his open door just after he has left his room to confront the men waiting outside. The interior shot of the door echoes the exterior establishing shot of the window and conveys to audiences that the scene is over.

In more recent years, a number or filmmakers have dispensed with traditional establishing shots, opting to begin scenes more abruptly in the middle of an action or with a close-up of a significant detail. In these instances, the space in which the action will occur is indicated in subsequent shots that are not reserved exclusively for establishing the location but are part of the scene dissection.

Matches

Scene dissection relies on a system of matches to provide continuity for the action. This system involves the matching of shots in such a way that potential discontinuities are cosmetically concealed. Matches include graphic matches, matches on action, and eyeline matches. In a graphic match, major features of the composition in one shot will be duplicated in the next shot, providing a graphic continuity that serves to bridge the edit. The editing of most conversation sequences employs rough graphic matches, in that characters retain their approximate positions in the frame from shot to shot. The introduction of Xanadu during the opening sequence of *Citizen Kane* involves an extremely subtle series of exact graphic matches. Successive shots of the mansion from different perspectives (with different objects in the foreground) are linked by dissolves. They are all united by a common feature—a single window with a light in it—that occupies the same place in each frame of each shot as the editing gradually brings the viewer close and closer to the window.
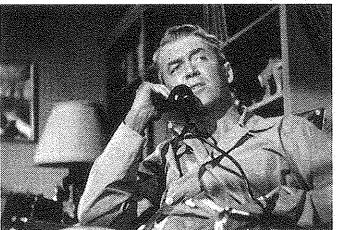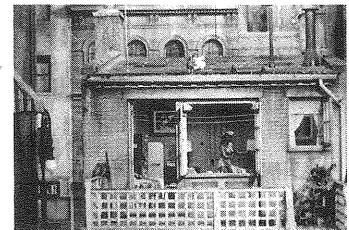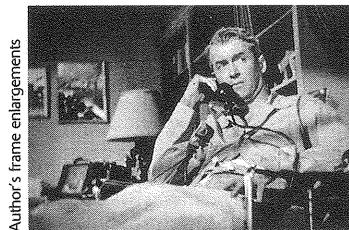
Matches on action use the carryover of physical movement from one shot to the next to conceal cuts. Thus, as a character begins to sit down in medium long shot, an editor often cuts to a closer shot as the action continues. Or as a character opens a door and begins to walk through it, there is often a cut to a different camera position on the other side of the door as the same character walks through the open door and closes it. Yet the cut and the change in camera position are more or less imperceptible, disguised by the continuity of the character's movement.

Eyeline matches and point-of-view editing play crucial roles in the continuity system, serving the interest of character exposition and character psychology. Eyeline matching involves two shots in which a character in the first shot looks offscreen at another character or object. The next shot shows what that character sees from a position that reflects, in its angle, the character's position and direction in which he or she looks, but that remains more or less objective in nature. That is, it does not duplicate that character's actual perspective. In effect, the second shot obliquely answers the first, presenting the space to which the character's eyeline refers or looks from the neutral position of the camera.

Point-of-View Editing

Point-of-view editing is a subset of the eyeline match that involves a series of three separate shots—a shot of a character looking offscreen, a point-of-view shot of what the character sees, and a reaction shot of the character as he or she reacts to the thing seen. Thus in *Rear Window* (1954), Hitchcock cut from a shot of his hero (James Stewart) looking out his window at Miss Torso, one of his neighbors, to a point-of-view shot from his perspective of her dancing in a halter and shorts, and back to a reaction shot of Stewart as he smiles somewhat lecherously. Unlike the second shot in the standard eyeline match, the point-of-view shot duplicates what the character sees, representing his or her actual per-

Author's frame enlargements

Point-of-view editing in *Rear Window:* Jeff (James Stewart) looks, an insert shot of what he sees (Miss Torso), and a shot of Jeff's reaction.
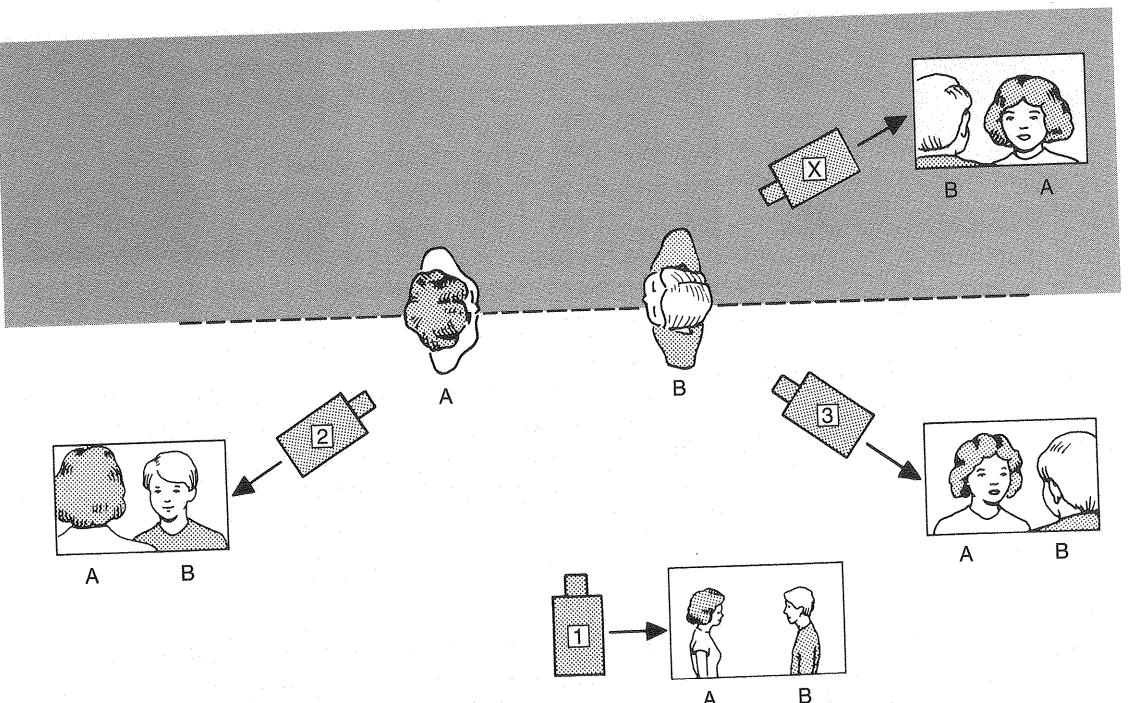
spective. In other words, in point-of-view editing, the second shot is subjective rather than objective. Thus, while the eyeline match describes the character's interactions with others from the outside, point-of-view editing involves the audience in the mental processes of the character and gives them privileged access to character psychology.

The 180-Degree Rule

At the center of the continuity system stands its fundamental principle—the illusion of spatial reality. This illusion is created and maintained in the cinema through the observance of one simple law, which is known as the 180-degree rule. To guarantee matches in screen position and movement and to construct a realistic playing space for the characters, filmmakers film the action from one side of an imaginary line (the axis of action) that runs through the center of the scene's major action. By remaining on one side of this line, the camera ensures that screen direction remains constant. That is, if one character stands on the right of the frame and another on the left, those characters retain their relative screen positions from one shot to the next (unless, of course, they moved).

If, however, the camera crosses the axis of the action after one shot and films the next shot from the other side of the 180-degree line, the original screen position of the characters is reversed in this second shot, making them appear to switch positions as the film cuts from one shot to the next. If there is any onscreen movement from right to left (or vice versa) and the axis of action is crossed, that movement appears to change direction from shot to shot. Certain directors, such as John Ford, repeatedly violate the 180-degree rule; others, such as Howard Hawks, scrupulously obey it. Hawks's respect for and Ford's lack of respect for the rule reflect their different attitudes toward the representation of space, which Hawks conceives of quite physically and Ford quite abstractly.

In observing the 180-degree rule, filmmakers rely extensively on shot/reverse-shot editing. This editing pattern employs paired shots to cover conversations or other actions. The shots alternate back and forth between an angled shot from one end of the 180-degree line and another from the other end. The second shot views the action from the same angle as the first, though that angle is now reversed, that is, the shot is taken from the opposite direction.

Artist's sketch illustrating the 180-degree rule. Camera positions 1, 2, and 3 preserve screen position; X reverses it.

Classical Hollywood style achieves semitransparency by putting itself at the service of film narrative. Elements of mise-en-scène and editing function to advance the narrative or to further character exposition. As a result, the narrative's visibility relegates technique to the status of a facilitating tool. Stylistic invisibility becomes a goal of the system, which its technicians and craftspersons seek to achieve on both a conscious and an unconscious level. Cinematographers, editors, and directors in Hollywood declare that if audiences notice their technique, it is no good, and they immediately set to work to hide it. Ironically, their art consists of its own self-effacement. Yet that art remains visible no matter what they do to hide it. It can be seen in its invisibility, for it is a style and system of conventions that *work* to convince audiences that no work is taking place. And that *work* can never quite disappear. For in making the film legible for audiences, classical Hollywood cinema leaves the marks of this legibility on the film itself. But these marks remain hard to see because classical Hollywood style is not superficially superimposed on the narrative. It cannot be seen as something that is separate from the narrative because it is the means by which that narrative is realized. In other words, it is invisible because it *is* the narrative.

■ ■ ■ SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

Intolerance (1916)	*Red River* (1948)
Bringing Up Baby (1938)	*Strangers on a Train* (1951)
His Girl Friday (1940)	*Rear Window* (1954)
Citizen Kane (1941)	*American Graffiti* (1973)
Shadow of a Doubt (1943)	*Traffic* (2001)
Notorious (1946)	*Gosford Park* (2002)

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