

Topic 97

Camera Movements

Camera Movement

A director may choose to move action along by telling the story as a series of cuts, going from one shot to another, or they may decide to move the camera with the action. Moving the camera often takes a great deal of time, and makes the action seem slower, as it takes several second for a moving camera shot to be effective, when the same information may be placed on screen in a series of fast cuts. Not only must the style of movement be chosen, but the method of actually moving the camera must be selected too. There are seven basic methods:

1. Pans

A movement which scans a scene horizontally. The camera is placed on a tripod, which operates as a stationary axis point as the camera is turned, often to follow a moving object which is kept in the middle of the frame.

2. Tilts

A movement which scans a scene vertically, otherwise similar to a pan.

3. Dolly Shots

Sometimes called TRUCKING or TRACKING shots. The camera is placed on a moving vehicle and moves alongside the action, generally following a moving figure or object. Complicated

dolly shots will involve a track being laid on set for the camera to follow, hence the name. The camera might be mounted on a car, a plane, or even a shopping trolley (good method for independent film-makers looking to save a few dollars). A dolly shot may be a good way of portraying movement, the journey of a character for instance, or for moving from a long shot to a close-up, gradually focusing the audience on a particular object or character.

4. Hand-held shots

The hand-held movie camera first saw widespread use during World War II, when news reporters took their windup Arriflexes and Eyemos into the heat of battle, producing some of the most arresting footage of the twentieth century. After the war, it took a while for commercially produced movies to catch up, and documentary makers led the way, demanding the production of smaller, lighter cameras that could be moved in and out of a scene with speed, producing a "fly-on-the-wall" effect. This aesthetic took a while to catch on with mainstream Hollywood, as it gives a jerky, ragged effect, totally at odds with the organized smoothness of a dolly shot. The Steadicam (a heavy contraption which is attached a camera to an operator by a harness. The camera is stabilized so it moves independently) was debuted in *Marathon Man* (1976), bringing a new smoothness to hand held camera movement and has been used to great effect in movies and TV shows ever since. No "walk and talk" sequence would be complete without one. Hand held cameras denote a certain kind of gritty realism, and they can make the audience feel as though they are part of a scene, rather than viewing it from a detached, frozen position.

5. Crane Shots

Basically, dolly-shots-in-the-air. A crane (or jib), is a large, heavy piece of equipment, but is a useful way of moving a camera - it can move up, down, left, right, swooping in on action or

moving diagonally out of it. The camera operator and camera are counter-balanced by a heavy weight, and trust their safety to a skilled crane/jib operator.

6. Zoom Lenses

A zoom lens contains a mechanism that changes the magnification of an image. On a still camera, this means that the photographer can get a 'close up' shot while still being some distance from the subject. A video zoom lens can change the position of the audience, either very quickly (a smash zoom) or slowly, without moving the camera an inch, thus saving a lot of time and trouble. The drawbacks to zoom use include the fact that while a dolly shot involves a steady movement similar to the focusing change in the human eye, the zoom lens tends to be jerky (unless used very slowly) and to distort an image, making objects appear closer together than they really are. Zoom lenses are also drastically over-used by many directors (including those holding palm-corders), who try to give the impression of movement and excitement in a scene where it does not exist. Use with caution - and a tripod!

7. The Aerial Shot

An exciting variation of a crane shot, usually taken from a helicopter. This is often used at the beginning of a film, in order to establish setting and movement. A helicopter is like a particularly flexible sort of crane - it can go anywhere, keep up with anything, move in and out of a scene, and convey real drama and exhilaration — so long as you don't need to get too close to your actors or use location sound with the shots.