over a divan (Fig. 6.87). Then magazines start flying at him from over the top of the frame, from "behind us," as it were (Fig. 6.88). In such ways the director can turn the necessary limitations of the frame edge to advantage.

**ANGLE, LEVEL, HEIGHT, AND DISTANCE OF FRAMING**

The frame implies not only space outside itself but also a position from which the material in the image is viewed. Most often, of course, such a position is that of the camera filming the event, but this need not always be true. In an animated film, the position implied by the drawn frames is not necessarily the same position that the camera occupies during the making of the film; shots in an animated film may be framed as high or low angles, or long shots of close-ups, all of which simply result from the perspective of drawings selected to be photographed. Still, in what follows, we shall continue to speak of "camera angle," "camera level," "camera height," and "camera distance," with the understanding that these terms refer simply to what we see on the screen and need not always conform to what occurred during production.

**Angle.** The frame implies an angle of framing with respect to what is shown. It thus positions us at some angle onto the shot’s mise-en-scene. The number of such angles is infinite, since there is an infinite number of points in space that the camera might occupy. In practice, we typically distinguish three general categories: the straight-on angle, the high angle, and the low angle. The straight-on angle is the most common. Figure 6.89 shows a straight-on angle from Straub and Huillet’s *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*. The high angle positions us “looking down” at the material within the frame, as in Figure 6.90, a shot from *Ivan the Terrible*. The low-angle framing positions us as “looking up” at the framed material (as in Fig. 6.91, again from *Ivan the Terrible*).

**Level.** We can also distinguish the degree to which the frame is “level.” This ultimately bears on the sense of gravity governing the filmed material and the frame. Assume that we are filming telephone poles. If the framing is level, the horizontal edges of the frame will be parallel to the horizon of the shot and perpendicular to the poles. If horizon and poles are at diagonal angles, the frame is canted in one manner or another.
The canted framing is relatively rare, although a few films make heavy use of it, such as Orson Welles’s *Mr. Arkadin* and Carol Reed’s *The Third Man* (see Fig. 6.92). In Christopher Maclaine’s *The End*, a canted framing makes a steep street in the foreground appear level and renders the houses in the background as grotesquely out of kilter (Fig. 6.93).

**Height.** Sometimes it becomes important to indicate that the framing gives us a sense of being stationed at a certain height. Camera angle is, of course, partly related to height: To frame from a high angle entails being at a vantage point higher than the material in the image.

But camera height is not simply a matter of camera angle. For instance, the Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu often positions his camera close to the ground to film characters or objects on the floor (see Color Plates 36, 59, and 60). Note that this is not a matter of camera angle, for the angle is straight on; we still see the ground or floor. Filming from such a low height with a straight-on angle is an important quality of Ozu’s visual style, as we shall see in Chapter 10.

**Distance.** Finally, the framing of the image stations us not only at certain angle and height and on a level plane or at a cant but also with respect to distance. Framing supplies a sense of being far away from or close to the mise-en-scene of the shot. This aspect of framing is usually called camera distance. In what follows, we shall use the standard measure—the scale of the human body—but any other filmed material would do as well. The examples are all from *The Third Man*.

In the **extreme long shot**, the human figure is barely visible (Fig. 6.94). This is the framing for landscapes, bird’s-eye views of cities, and other vistas. In the **long shot**, figures are more prominent, but the background still dominates (Fig. 6.95). The **plan américain** (“American shot”) is very common in Hollywood cinema. Here, as in Figure 6.96, the human figure is framed from about the knees up. This shot permits a nice balance of figure and surroundings. Shots at the same distance of nonhuman subjects are called **medium long shots**.

The **medium shot** frames the human body from the waist up (Fig. 6.97). Gesture and expression now become more visible. The **medium close-up** frames the body from the chest up (Fig. 6.98). The **close-up** is traditionally the shot showing just the head, hands, feet, or a small object.
It emphasizes facial expression, the details of a gesture, or a significant object (Fig. 6.99). The extreme close-up singles out a portion of the face (eyes or lips), isolates a detail, and magnifies the minute (Fig. 6.100).

Note that the size of the photographed material within the frame is as important as any real “camera distance.” From the same “camera distance,” you could film a long shot of a person or a close-up of King Kong’s elbow. We would not call the shot in Figure 6.101 (from La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc) a close-up just because only Jeanne’s head appears in the frame; the framing is that of a long shot because in scale her head is relatively small. (If the framing is simply adjusted downward, her whole body would be visible.) In judging camera distance, the relative proportion of the material framed provides the basic determinant.

Common confusions exist about framing. First, categories of framing are obviously matters of degree. There is no universal measure of camera angle or distance. No precise cut-off point distinguishes between a long shot and an extreme long shot, or a slightly low angle and a straight-on angle. Moreover, filmmakers are not bound by terminology. They rightly do not worry if a shot does not fit into traditional categories. Nevertheless, the concepts are clear enough for us to use them in talking about films. It is not of great importance whether the shot that cuts John Wayne off slightly above his waist is to be called a “true” medium shot or a “true” medium close-up. What is important is that we use the term in ways that enable us to analyze how that framing functions in the particular film and to share our analytical insights with others.

Functions of framing. Another problem is more important. Sometimes we are tempted to assign absolute meanings to angles, distances, and other qualities of framing. It is tempting to believe that framing from a low angle automatically “says” that a character is powerful and that framing from a high angle presents him or her as dwarfed and defeated. Verbal analogies are especially seductive: A canted frame seems to mean that “the world is out of kilter.”

The analysis of film as art would be a lot easier if technical qualities automatically possessed such hard-and-fast meanings, but individual films would thereby lose much of their uniqueness and richness. The fact is that framings have no absolute or general meanings. In some films angles and distances carry such meanings as mentioned above, but in other films—
acceptance. The object thus photographed sometimes gains in reality, and the impression it makes is livelier and more arresting."

Framing may be used for comic effect, as Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Jacques Tati have all shown. We have seen that in Our Hospitality Keaton stages many gags in depth. Now we can see that well-chosen camera angles and distances are also vital to the gags’ success. For example, if the scene shown in Figure 5.90 (p. 176) were shot from the side and in extreme long shot, we would not see so clearly that the two parts of the train are on parallel tracks. Moreover, we could not see the engineer’s unconcerned posture, which indicates his failure to realize what has happened. Similarly, the use of framing to create off-screen space is vital to the gag shown in Figures 5.99 and 5.100 (p. 179). Here the gag is laid out in time rather than space. First Willie tugs on the rope, then an unseen effect of that tug becomes visible as the Canfield son hurtles past and disappears. Finally Willie reacts and is himself dragged down into the abyss below the frameline. Try to imagine these moments and others in Our Hospitality framed in a different way, and you will see how our reaction to Keaton’s humor depends on the careful combination of mise-en-scene and framing.

Similarly, in Tati’s Play Time mise-en-scene and camera position cooperate to create humorous visual patterns. At one point, M. Hulot turns around to discover that a doorman locking a door seems suddenly to have sprouted horns (the door handles; see Fig. 6.114). The visual pun issues from the precisely chosen camera angle and distance. We cannot classify all the nonnarrative functions of framing; we can only suggest that camera distance, angle, height, and level have the constant possibility of sharpening our perception of purely visual qualities.

THE MOBILE FRAME

All of the features of framing we have examined are present in every framed image. Paintings, photographs, comic strips, and other images all furnish instances of aspect ratios, in-frame and out-of-frame relations, angle, height, level, and distance of the frame’s vantage point. But there is one resource of framing that is specific to cinema (and video). In film it is possible for the frame to move with respect to the framed material.

"Mobile framing" means that within the confines of the image we see, the framing of the object changes. The mobile frame thus produces changes of camera height, distance, angle, or level within the shot. Further, since the framing orients us to the material in the image, we often see ourselves as moving along with the frame. Through such framing we may approach the object or retreat from it, circle it or move past it.

Types of mobile framing. We usually refer to the ability of the frame to be mobile as “camera movement.” Very often the term is accurate, for usually mobility of framing is achieved by moving the camera physically during production. The camera, as we know, usually rests on a support while filming, and this support may be designed to move the camera. There are several kinds of camera movement, each one of which creates a specific effect onscreen.
The **pan** (short for “panorama”) movement rotates the camera on a vertical axis. The camera as a whole does not displace itself. On screen, the pan gives the impression of a frame horizontally scanning space. It is as if the camera “turns its head” right or left. In Figures 6.115 and 6.116, shots from Dreyer’s *Ordet*, the camera pans right to keep the figures in frame as they cross a room.

The **tilt** movement rotates the camera on a horizontal axis. It is as if the camera’s “head” were swiveling up or down. Again, the camera itself does not change position. On screen, the tilt movement yields the impression of unrolling a space from top to bottom or bottom to top. François Truffaut’s *The Bride Wore Black* begins a sequence with a tilt down a church (Figs. 6.117, 6.118).

In the **tracking** (or **dolly** or **truck**ing) **shot**, the camera as a whole does change position, traveling in any direction along the ground—forward, backward, circularly, diagonally, or from side to side. Figures 6.119 and 6.120 show two stages of a lateral tracking shot in Erich von Stroheim’s *Greed*. Note how the figures remain in the same basic relationship to the frame as they stroll along a sidewalk, while the front of the house which they hope to buy remains visible behind them.

In the **crane** **shot** the camera moves above ground level. Typically, it rises or descends, often thanks to a mechanical arm which lifts and lowers it. The mourning scene in *Ivan the Terrible* begins with a crane down from a high view of the bier (Fig. 6.121) to a lower position, ending with a framing on Ivan seated at the bier’s base (Fig. 6.122). A crane shot may move not only up and down, like an elevator, but forward and backward or from side to side. At the end of Karel Reisz’s *Morgan*, the camera cranes diagonally up and back to reveal that the hero’s apparently innocuous flower garden proclaims his communist sympathies (Figs. 6.123, 6.124). Variations of the crane shot are helicopter and airplane shots.

Pans, tilts, tracking shots, and crane shots are the most common framing movements, but virtually any kind of camera movement can be imagined (somersaulting, rolling, and so on). Only a few camera movements might be mistaken for each other. The pan resembles a lateral tracking shot, and the tilt resembles a vertical crane shot. But a little practice in viewing makes the differences easy to spot. In both the pan and the tilt, the body of the camera does not change position; it simply swivels left or right, up or down. For example, in Figure 6.115 the framing is fairly close to the central man, showing him in profile. If the camera were tracking along with him, it would remain alongside him—but Figure 6.116 shows him at a greater distance and from behind—indicating that the camera has turned but not moved along with the character. In the lateral tracking shot and the vertical crane shot, the camera moves horizontally or vertically, as if you were gliding along with a character or swooping up over a landscape. As we shall see, though, types of camera movements can be combined.

Camera movements have held an appeal for filmmakers and audiences since the beginnings of cinema. Why? Visually, camera movements have several arresting effects. They often increase information about the space of the image. Objects’ positions become more vivid and sharp than in stationary framings. New objects or figures are usually revealed. Tracking
Editing may be thought of as the coordination of one shot with the next. We need to distinguish how editing is done in production from how editing appears on the screen to viewers. As we have seen, in film production a shot is one or more exposed frames in a series on a continuous length of film stock. The film editor eliminates unwanted footage and joins the desired shots, the end of one to the beginning of another.

These joins can be of different sorts. A fade-out gradually darkens the end of a shot to black, and a fade-in accordingly lightens a shot from black. A dissolve briefly superimposes the end of shot A and the beginning of shot B, as at the beginning of The Maltese Falcon (Figs. 7.1-7.3). In a wipe, shot B replaces shot A by means of a boundary line moving across the screen, as in Seven Samurai (Fig. 7.4). Here both images are briefly on the screen at the same time, but they do not blend, as in a dissolve. In the production process, fades, dissolves, and wipes are “optical effects” and are marked as such by the editor. They are typically executed in the laboratory.

The most common means of joining two shots is the cut. In the production process a cut is usually made by splicing two shots together by means of cement or tape. Some filmmakers “cut” during filming by planning that the film will emerge from the camera ready for final showing. Here the
physical junction from shot to shot is created in the act of shooting. Such “editing in the camera,” however, is rare; editing after shooting is the norm. Today some editing is done by means of video transfers stored on videotape or disc, so that the cuts (or edits, in video terminology) can be made without touching film. Nevertheless the final version of the film will be prepared for printing by cutting and splicing the negative footage.

As viewers, we perceive a shot as an uninterrupted segment of screen time, space, or graphic configurations. Fades, dissolves, and wipes are perceived as gradually interrupting one shot and replacing it with another. Cuts are perceived as instantaneous changes from one shot to another.

Consider an example of cutting, four shots from the first attack on Bodega Bay in Alfred Hitchcock’s film *The Birds* (see Figs. 7.5 through 7.8):

1. **Medium shot, straight-on angle.** Melanie, Mitch, and the Captain standing by the restaurant window talking. Melanie on extreme right, bartender in background (Fig. 7.5).

2. **Medium close-up.** Melanie looking to screen left by Captain’s shoulder. She looks to right (out of screen window) up, as if following with eyes. Pan right with her as she turns to the window and looks out (Fig. 7.6).

3. **Extreme long shot.** Melanie’s point of view. Gas station across street, phone booth in left foreground. Birds dive-bomb attendant, right to left (Fig. 7.7).

4. **Medium close-up.** Melanie, profile. Captain moves right into shot, blocking out bartender; Mitch moves right into extreme foreground. All in profile look out window (Fig. 7.8).