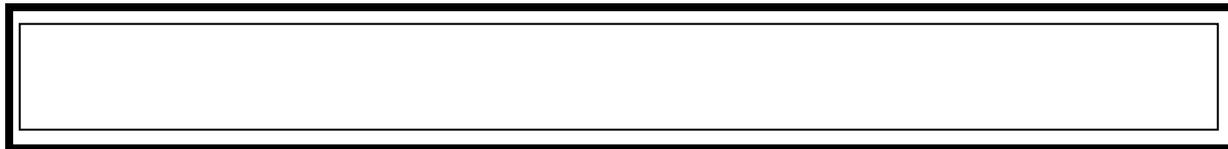


The Language of Movies



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Introduction

If present trends continue, people who are now beginning their business careers will spend their working lives in a world of falling literacy rates and increasing fixation on images. In such a world, effective business leadership will require a sophisticated understanding of the powers of visual communication, together with a commitment to use those powers responsibly. With that goal in mind, this survey of visual language will describe and analyze the major visual techniques through which the creators of images seek to influence the attitudes and emotions of their viewers. The first half of this discussion will deal with techniques that are used in the composition of individual images. The second half will look at what happens when images are juxtaposed in the process of editing. Under the heading of visual composition, we will examine the following techniques: (1) camera angles, including low, high, and overhead views; (2) camera orientation, including direct and indirect views; (3) camera distance, including long shots, medium shots, and close-ups; and (4) lighting and cinematography. Under the heading of editing, we will consider: (1) editing speed; (2) the symbolic connections between images; (3) visual analogies; (4) visual contrasts; and (5) visual generalizations.

In experiments conducted over the years, inexperienced film makers are given cameras and invited to make movies about their lives or about other assigned topics. These experiments have produced a recurring finding: People who haven't made movies before often find it quite easy to appear in front of the camera as

narrators or even as actors. But they rarely find it so easy to do the behind-the-scenes work that is involved in composing shots effectively and editing them in a professional manner. Even though we all have expert knowledge of film language as audience members, few of us are able to make the leap from viewing movies to creating them skillfully, without quite a bit of additional trial and error. These notes are an introduction to some of the principal techniques of effective film making, illustrated with examples from major Hollywood movies, from documentary films, and from TV commercials. Many of the examples are from movies dealing with the business world and, in particular, the rewards of success and the meaning of failure.

Visual Composition

(1) Camera Angle

When teachers try to explain the concept of film language to people who are unfamiliar with it, the first example they use is often camera angle. A low camera angle, with the lens pointing up, makes people look more powerful. A high camera angle, with the lens pointing down, makes people look weaker. The concept is simple, and the idea behind it is intuitively easy to grasp and probably doesn't require much explanation. In real life, height is often associated with strength, and vice versa. So camera angle has become a convenient example of the way in which film technique, or "language," can be used to influence the viewer's responses. But the simplicity of the technique can be misleading. Its actual use in most movies and TV commercials is not as

straightforward as might be imagined from this basic description.

As a first illustration of how camera angle works in practice, let us take a look at what may seem to be a textbook case of high and low angles, a classic Japanese movie called “High and Low” (1963) by the highly respected director Akira Kurosawa. This movie also happens to be an enduringly important portrayal of a business person facing a major moral dilemma. The movie’s story line is built around two contrasting situations. High above the city of Kobe, on a hill that marks the crest of the horizon line, sits an imposing mansion, the property of Kingo Gondo, an executive at National Shoe Company. In a notable departure from the negative portrayal of business people found in many fictional movies, Gondo is shown to be dedicated to quality and to producing value for his customers. Disgusted at the shoddiness of the company’s product, he is planning a hostile takeover and has gone into debt, including a mortgage on his home, to raise the huge amount of money that he will need to achieve his goal. Meanwhile, however, down below the hilltop mansion, in one of the tightly packed, tiny dwellings that house the city’s poorer residents, someone is watching Gondo and planning a nasty surprise. At a critical point in Gondo’s confrontation with the company’s directors, he receives an anonymous phone call. His son has been kidnapped, the caller tells him. Unless he pays up, the boy will die. But, moments later, it turns out that Gondo’s son is safe. The kidnapper has accidentally abducted the son of Gondo’s chauffeur. When he discovers his mistake, will the villain insist on getting Gondo’s money anyway? And, if so, will Gondo pay, even

though the sum of money that the kidnapper has asked for will wipe Gondo out financially and destroy his takeover plans? These questions set in motion the suspenseful tale that follows.

As this brief description suggests, “High and Low” contains a number of standard examples of the uses of high and low angles. From the windows of Gondo’s spacious living room, we repeatedly catch bird’s-eye-view glimpses of the teeming city below. From the phone booth used by the kidnapper, we get an exaggerated perspective of Gondo’s abode towering above us. But the function of these shots is not entirely straightforward. Although Gondo is the movie’s protagonist and the kidnapper is the villain, the high and low camera angles may actually serve to undermine those positions. By emphasizing the kidnapper’s lowly social status, the high angles may encourage the viewer to feel more sympathetic toward him, or at least to empathize with his motives. Conversely, by demonstrating how thoroughly Gondo’s house dominates the skyline, the low angles may lead the viewer to share some of the resentment felt by the residents of the low-income neighborhoods that crouch under its looming profile. These themes are clearly present in a scene in which two police detectives try to determine which phone booth the kidnapper has used for his calls to Gondo. After deciding that one particular booth is too close to Gondo’s house, the detectives comment about the way the kidnapper must feel to be living under the house’s shadow: “The kidnapper’s right. That house gets to you. As if it’s looking down at us.” Then the detectives walk away, but the camera lingers on the scene, titling down to give us a view of a drainage canal

running parallel to the road the detectives have taken. In the canal's garbage-infested waters, we see the murky reflection of a man hurrying along in the opposite direction from the detectives. This turns out to be our first view of the kidnapper: upside down, seen from above, reflected in sewage. The contrast with the house overhead could not be sharper.

The Ambiguity of Low and High Angles

The ambiguous effects of camera angle haven't received much attention from people who write about film language, but experienced film makers are well aware of them. Although low angles are often referred to as "hero shots," they are much more likely to be used in depictions of villains. By the same token, directors with a really good understanding of visual vocabulary will occasionally use a slightly high angle when depicting a powerful protagonist, in order to make him or her appear more sympathetic in the eyes of the viewer. Excellent demonstrations of both of these principles are contained in the famous 1941 movie "Citizen Kane." Two-thirds of a century after its premiere, "Citizen Kane" is still regarded by many as the greatest American movie of all time, and its creator, the late Orson Welles, is a regular occupant of the top spot in best-director polls. Somewhat ironically, the theme of this all-American movie can be described as a very skeptical depiction of the American Dream. The movie's protagonist, business tycoon Charles Foster Kane, achieves great wealth and power, but he loses the affection of all his friends and associates, and he ends up dying a lonely, unlamented death. This theme is very much in line with the anti-business sentiments that have always been present in Hollywood cinema, but it is worth

noting that the movie is a marked distortion of the real-life persons and events on which it was based. As is well known, Charles Foster Kane was a heavily fictionalized portrayal of newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst. By all accounts, the real Hearst was a highly sociable, gregarious person, who – in contrast to "Citizen Kane" – enjoyed a close, affectionate relationship with his "mistress," actress Marion Davies. Still, whatever his lapses may have been as a chronicler of the lives of the rich and famous, Orson Welles was an undeniable master of visual effects, and "Citizen Kane" could serve as a virtual encyclopedia of cinematic devices. For our purposes, two scenes tie directly into the topic of high and low camera angles.

In the first scene, early in the movie, Charles Foster Kane is on the first rungs of his ascent to fame and power. Having inherited an immense fortune from his mother, he has decided to enter the newspaper business. Despite his lack of any previous experience in publishing, he succeeds in generating huge amounts of publicity by adopting a reckless, scandal-mongering style. He is confronted angrily by his financial adviser, W.P. Thatcher (a character that may have been based on real-life financier J.P. Morgan), who is outraged at Kane's muck-raking attacks on the unethical practices of the capitalist elite, including Thatcher's own Wall Street cohorts. But Kane is unfazed, and he responds to Thatcher with a memorable declaration: "It's ... my pleasure to see to it that decent, hard-working people in this community aren't robbed blind by a pack of money-mad pirates!"

Fast forward to the second scene, much later in the story. Having reached the apogee of his power, Kane is now on his way down. Forgetting his commitment to the community, he has squandered his fortune on extravagant purchases and alienated everyone around him through his selfish, arrogant actions toward them. In this scene he has a sad meeting with his closest friend, who announces that he can no longer tolerate Kane's behavior and is going to move to another city in order to get away from Kane's malignant presence. At first Kane tries to dissuade him, but then he bows to the inevitable and proposes a fair-well toast: "A toast, Jedediah, to love on my terms. Those are the only terms anybody ever knows - his own." Two scenes, two very different images of Charles Foster Kane: in one scene, he is Kane the champion of the masses; in the other, Kane the pathetic outcast. A film maker who went by the book would use low angles in the first scene and high angles in the second. But Welles does the exact opposite. He shoots the dynamic, idealistic Kane from a slightly elevated perspective, corresponding to the perspective of Kane's indignant financial adviser. Conversely, the scene in which Kane is rejected by his best friend is filmed with the camera pointing very dramatically upward.

Over the years, film makers and creators of advertising images have come to the same conclusion that Orson Welles came to in his use of camera angles in these two scenes. Low angles tend to be used in a negative sense, to make characters appear arrogant, overbearing, or menacing, while high angles are commonly enlisted as means of eliciting sympathy. In other words, image makers have concluded that viewers are more likely to resent power than to

feel obsequious toward it. Conversely, they have also concluded that viewers are often more receptive to characters to whom they can feel somewhat superior. In contemporary print and Web advertising, extreme high angles – such as those found on the Web portal of Legal Placement Services, a Wisconsin legal agency -- have become a standard technique for making product spokespeople appear more appealing or trustworthy. As for the negative use of low angles, one need look no further than "1984," the famous TV commercial that Apple used to launch the Macintosh line of personal computers. This commercial was directed by film maker Ridley Scott, who had previously made "Blade Runner" (1982), a classic example of "dystopian" science-fiction, in which the world of the future is being oppressed by a tyrannical corporation.

As it happens, the Apple commercial also features a tyrannical corporation. The commercial depicts a totalitarian society in which rows of downtrodden citizens are being harangued by a dictator whose image looms above them on a giant video screen. This oppressive order is upended by a young female athlete who charges onto the scene and throws a hammer at the dictator's face, smashing the screen and obliterating his image. At the time that this commercial was created, the world of personal computers was dominated by IBM, so a knowledgeable viewer would presumably have been able to infer that the dictator in the commercial was meant to be a symbol of that company, while the young athlete was supposed to represent Apple. The dictatorial portrayal of IBM is reinforced by director Scott's use of camera angles. There are several different shots of the big face on the screen,

and, as the commercial progresses, the face gets larger and the angle gets lower. The low angles are in part a simple reflection of the scene's physical layout, since the dictator's screen image is positioned higher than his audience. However, on an emotional level, the low angles contribute significantly to the menacing atmosphere that the commercial is intended to evoke.

The Power of Overhead Angles

Before we leave the topic of camera angle, one final example will serve to underscore the power of high angles as subtle means of influencing the viewer's sympathies. This example comes from "The Pursuit of Happyness" (2006). Based on real-life events described in a book by the same title, this movie tells the inspirational story of Chris Gardner (portrayed by Will Smith), who rose from poverty to become a hugely successful stockbroker. Both the book and the movie emphasize Gardner's dedication to his son (played wonderfully by Smith's own son, Jaden), whom he raised mostly by himself despite going through a period of extreme financial hardship. The low point in Gardner's time of troubles comes one night when he and his son find themselves homeless, after having been evicted from their apartment and a motel because of his inability to pay his debts. Seeking shelter in a subway station, Gardner engages his son in a fantasy game, pretending that they have been transported back to the age of dinosaurs and that they need to take cover in a cave. Father and son then lock themselves in the station's washroom. This is where they will spend the night, lying on the bare floor. Gardner cradles his son in his arms, and the child sleeps. But Gardner cannot sleep. Trying vainly to shut out

the sounds of other people wanting to use the washroom, he is overcome by grief, and a tear rolls down his cheek. This emotionally wrenching scene is filmed partly in close-up, so that we can see Gardner's face clearly. But then the camera goes up above the scene, and we get an extreme high angle – in fact, a direct overhead view – of the father and son huddled together in the tiny space of the washroom. The pathos of this downward-pointing shot is overwhelming, as is the wave of sympathy that washes over the viewer at that moment.

(2) Camera Orientation: Direct vs. Indirect

Although high and low angles often seem to get the lion's share of attention in research on film language, there is another type of angle that has not been studied as thoroughly but is arguably more important. This type of angle is not a matter of looking up or down. Rather, it has to do with the following question: How directly is the camera facing the person(s) in the shot? Is this a direct, face-to-face view? Is it a three-quarters view? Is it a side view or a rear view? And so forth. The most significant aspect of this type of camera angle is the difference between a face-to-face shot, looking straight into someone's eyes, and an indirect shot, in which the camera is slightly to one side. The best way to get a sense of why this distinction matters is to look at an example in which the camera switches from one orientation to the other in the space of a single shot.

This kind of transition can be found in a scene from "JFK" (1991), director Oliver Stone's movie

about the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The movie's protagonist is Jim Garrison, the New Orleans District Attorney who pursued an investigation into the possibility that JFK's death was the result of a conspiracy. In the movie's climactic scene, Garrison (played by Kevin Costner) addresses the jury at the conclusion of the only case that was actually brought to trial. Speaking with great emotion, he tells the jurors that it is their responsibility to uphold American values of justice and freedom of information. His concluding words are: "It's up to you." Throughout most of his speech, Costner is filmed from a slight side view, which is in fact the standard view for dialogue scenes in most fiction films. However, right before he utters the scene's final words, his gaze shifts, and he looks straight into the camera. To a viewer who is really involved in the emotions of this scene, the effect of this switch can be electrifying. Suddenly, the viewer is being addressed directly, as if Costner had reached into the space of the movie theater or TV room. The direct view makes his words more engaging, more personally relevant, perhaps even more persuasive.

A more extended demonstration of direct camera views can also be found in "Intern" (2000), a movie about the enduringly popular theme of a young woman's first steps in the fashion business. As an intern at a fashion magazine, the movie's protagonist, played by Dominique Swain, has been assigned the task of conducting a tour of the magazine's offices for the benefit of a visiting videographer. This lengthy scene serves as the introduction to the movie's main characters, as well as to the protagonist herself, who is on-camera almost continuously, and who unflinchingly looks directly

into the lens as she tells us about her job and her colleagues. Her direct orientation, coupled with a self-deprecating tone, draw us into her world and make us care about her story.

Experimental Effects of Camera Orientation

These effects of direct camera shots have been demonstrated more systematically in an inventive experiment by Stanford Professor Jeremy Bailenson. The basic set-up of the experiment was as follows: Two people, A and B, listen to a third person, X, delivering a persuasive message. The people's interactions with each other take place entirely in a computer-controlled virtual environment. In other words, they are equipped with virtual-reality goggles and can only see each other's computer-generated avatar, not their real selves. This set-up allows the experimenter to have total control over how directly the speaker's avatar addresses each of the two listeners. In one version of the experiment, X's computer-generated avatar shifts his gaze equally and regularly between A and B. However, in another version of the experiment, each of the listeners gets a direct view of X's avatar 100 percent of the time. (Since they are interacting in computer-generated virtual space, there are no physical constraints on their location vis a vis each other.) As our discussion of the scene from "JFK" would have led us to expect, when A and B get a continuous direct view, they feel more involved and are more receptive to X's arguments than when they only get a direct view 50 percent of the time.

If direct views are more engaging and compelling, is there any reason to use indirect views instead? There are at least two kinds of

situations in which the latter may indeed be more appropriate. The first of these two situations arises in non-fiction contexts (for example, a press conference, a TV interview, or a political debate), when an on-camera speaker is talking to an interviewer and/or an audience. According to some findings from research on political communication, when a speaker shifts her/his gaze from the real-life interviewer or audience to the camera, there is a danger that she/he will be seen as too slick and manipulative. In other words, what the speaker gains in terms of greater immediacy and engagement may be counterbalanced by a perceived loss of authenticity. This point should be kept in mind by politicians, business leaders, or any other public figures when they are being interviewed or giving a speech while being recorded by a camera.

A second situation in which indirect views may be more appropriate than direct ones is best introduced by comparing two examples that differ with regard to this variable. Both examples are TV commercials, and both are parodies of a scene from Stanley Kubrick's "The Shining" (1980). In the original scene, a little boy pedals his tricycle through the empty hallways of an immense resort hotel that has been closed down for the winter. The only other people in the hotel are the boy's parents, who are there as off-season caretakers. Suddenly, as the boy pedals around the corner from one corridor to another, he comes face to face with an apparition of two little girls who had been murdered in that hotel by their insane father. This eerie scene is replicated fairly closely in one of our two parody examples, a Swedish on-line ad soliciting donations for the improvement of children's hospitals (from the

Web site barnsjukhuset.nu). We see a little boy pedaling a tricycle through the empty corridors of an ominous-looking building, we see the boy looking fearfully at a fleeting glimmer of light behind a door, and then we see the boy's encounter with the ghostly figures of two little girls, one of whom holds out her hand to him beseechingly. The boy covers his eyes in horror, but then the image of the girls dissolves, and the boy resumes his pedaling. As he moves away from us down a grim, dimly-lit corridor, the ad's message appears on the screen: "Help us create better hospitals for children."

Our second parody of "The Shining" is less closely tied to the theme of the original movie. It occurs in a 2008 Verizon Wireless ad that is part of Verizon's "Dead Zones" campaign. A man walks down a corridor with a laundry basket in his hands. Suddenly two boys, dressed in antique style, loom ahead of him. They speak to him in unison, in affectless voices: "Hey, mister, are you going to the laundry room?" "I was," he says warily. "It's a dead zone," they warn. "Reception is terrible, and calls go away for all eternity." "I have the Verizon network," the man counters, and, as he speaks, the camera cuts to a team of Verizon technicians who reassure him that all is well. Immediately the boys retreat. "See you around," they say to the man, and the ad's message appears on the screen as they walk away: "Don't be afraid of dead zones." In terms of camera placement during the encounter in the corridor, the Verizon ad is somewhat similar to the Swedish hospital ad. Stanley Kubrick was well known for his direct, head-on compositions, and both ads follow his style in their presentation of the pair of children. The boys in the Verizon ad are shot head-on, and so are the girls in the Swedish

hospital corridor. But the two ads differ crucially in their handling of the other side of the encounter.

The Verizon ad retains Kubrick's direct style in the shots of the man with the laundry basket. However, in the Swedish ad, the close-ups of the little boy as he looks at the girls are taken from an indirect view, somewhat to the side of his face. The Swedish ad has clearly been directed with considerable care, so it is very unlikely that this use of an indirect camera orientation was an accident. What might be the reason for showing the boy from the side, and why might such a view be superior to a direct shot in this context? The answer to these questions comes from studies of audiences' identification with characters in movies. When the protagonist of a movie is interacting with other characters, audiences' feelings of identification with the protagonist are strengthened if the other characters are shown "through the protagonist's eyes" – in other words, if they are shown in direct, head-on views. However, identification with the protagonist is actually *diminished* if we also view him or her directly, because then we are being placed in the position of the other characters in the scene (we are "seeing through their eyes"). Consequently, directors who are concerned about maximizing identification – for example, Alfred Hitchcock – tend to use frequent direct shots of secondary characters but to avoid direct views of the protagonist. And that is the logic that we see being played out in the Swedish ad, whose impact depends on generating a maximum amount of identification and sympathy for the little boy in the scary hospital.

(3) Close-Ups, Medium Shots, and Long Shots

Aside from deciding how directly to aim the camera, and whether to shoot high, low, or neither, a film maker must always make one other crucial decision about camera placement: how close to go to the person or action that is being filmed. The choice of a close-up, medium shot, or long shot depends on at least three major factors: (1) the need to match the shot to the scale of the information that has to be conveyed, ranging from intimate details to vast panoramas; (2) the shot's desired emotional impact, which – other things being equal – is generally intensified by moving in for close-ups; and (3) the shot's potential effect on viewers' identification with the people in the movie, who may elicit greater concern when shot more intimately. The second of these factors is illustrated succinctly in a humorous BBDO ad for Mountain Dew (2008), featuring a man who has trained a rhinoceros to fetch a ball. Before we have any clue as to what is supposed to be going on in the ad, we see the rhinoceros charging at the man as he nonchalantly sips from a can of Mountain Dew. The first view of the charging beast, heading strait into the camera, is an extreme long shot. In other words, the rhinoceros occupies a very small part of the image, and seems quite far away. There is a cut to a long shot of the man, and then a cut back to the rhinoceros (with the Mountain Dew can visible in the foreground). This time, however, the rhinoceros is shown in a much closer shot that becomes even closer as it continues its charge. This sudden juxtaposition between a long shot and a closer one gives the unsuspecting viewer a major emotional jolt and ratchets up the suspense that is generated by the ad's surreal content.

A less dramatic, but more typical, example of the emotional impact of close-ups can be found in a brief snippet from Marry Mazzio's documentary "Lemonade Stories" (2003), an intriguing look at the relationship between seven successful entrepreneurs and their mothers. This scene also illustrates the third factor mentioned above, namely, the use of closer shots to enhance the viewer's concern for the characters in a movie. The opening scene of "Lemonade Stories" tells the story of Arthur Blank, co-founder of The Home Depot, and his mother, Molly Blank. Both of them speak on-camera, but, as with many documentaries, the interview footage is supplemented by various archival images, including many family photographs. The scene begins with Arthur Blank introducing himself and saying a few words about his business accomplishments and his ownership of the Atlanta Falcons. Then he starts to speak about his mother, and we get a series of five quick shots: four photographs of mother and son, followed by an interview shot of Blank continuing his narration. In all five of these shots, the camera performs a quick zoom-in, bringing us closer to Blank and his mother. This visual strategy goes by so fast that most viewers probably don't even notice it on a conscious level. Nonetheless, its effect is unmistakable. It cues us in immediately to the fact that the focal point of this story is going to be the mother-son relationship, rather than the Falcons or The Home Depot per se.

Camera Distance and Interpersonal Space

The factors mentioned above give us fairly clear guidelines as to when and why we should move the camera closer, or pull it back. However,

they don't tell us exactly how much closer, or further back, to go. When we want to magnify a scene's emotional impact, is a tight close-up always better than a medium close-up? If not, why not? When we want to distance the viewer from a certain character in order to make him/her less sympathetic, is a long shot always better than a medium shot? If not, why not? These questions have occupied film scholars for some time. In recent years, a number of theorists – most prominently, Joshua Meyrowitz, of the University of New Hampshire – have come to the conclusion that our responses to camera distance in movies are determined by our cultural rules for interpersonal space in real-life interactions. As anthropologist Edward Hall was the first to demonstrate, the distances between people in various kinds of social situations follow a set of fairly uniform rules or conventions. As with many other cultural practices, we conform to these rules without much conscious reflection, but we may suddenly become uncomfortably aware of them when they are violated. If Meyrowitz and his colleagues are correct, our reactions to movies are conditioned by these same cultural conventions. In other words, from the film maker's perspective, these conventions should serve as a guide regarding the appropriate type of shot to use for various types of scenes. For example, just there are times in real life when a certain interpersonal distance may overstep the bounds of intimacy, so too there are situations in a movie when going too close may violate the type of mood that the filmmaker is aiming for.

Hall and other people doing research on interpersonal space have actually calculated precise measurements of the appropriate

ranges within which various kinds of social interactions typically occur. However, for our purposes, rather than going into further detail on this issue, it may be more instructive to look at a scene in which a director deliberately violated our expectations of interpersonal space in order to make a point about the scene's main character. The director in question is the legendary Alfred Hitchcock, famous for his expert deployment of the visual vocabulary of motion pictures. The film is "Shadow of a Doubt" (1943), a typical Hitchcockian thriller that the director at one point named as his personal favorite among his own movies. The story-line of "Shadow of a Doubt" centers on young woman (Teresa Wright) who is dissatisfied with her small-town, middle-class existence. She longs for glamour and for broader horizons, and one day her wishes seem to be fulfilled, when Uncle Charlie, her mother's handsome, wealthy, world-traveling brother (played by Joseph Cotten), comes to spend some time with the family. Of course, anyone who is familiar with the formulas of Hollywood cinema will know that a rich, cosmopolitan character is likely to be a bad person, and Uncle Charlie turns out to be very bad indeed, having married and then murdered a number of wealthy women for their money.

But the movie's suspense comes from the gradual way that the niece begins to put together the clues that finally lead her to a realization as to her uncle's true identity. One of the most unsettling insights into Uncle's Charlie's hidden character comes from a conversation at the family dinner table, in which he expresses his views about women who have inherited money from their husbands. He speaks of them contemptuously,

claiming that all the big cities he has visited were full of wealthy widows squandering their husbands' hard-earned riches on food, drink, jewelry, and gambling. He calls them "Horrible, faded, fat, greedy women." "They're human beings," his niece cries out in protest. He turns and faces her, and suddenly the camera moves in for a huge close-up. "Are they?" he says. That super-size close-up is not just a means of emphasis. It is an intrusion into our personal space, a violation of the boundaries of civilized behavior. As surely as the words that he has been uttering, it marks Uncle Charlie as a defective human being.

(4) Lighting and Cinematography

Clearly, camera placement is one of the most vital ingredients in the art of effective film making. With that point in mind, it is interesting to take a look at a couple of photographs of film makers at work, in the actual process of deciding where to put the camera for their next shot. These photographs both came from *American Cinematographer*, a professional publication representing people who hold titles such as Director of Photography or Director of Cinematography – in other words, the people in charge of the camerawork in Hollywood movies. The first photograph shows Oscar-winning director Steven Soderbergh lining up a shot for his 1999 movie "The Limey." Soderbergh stands behind a man who is hand-holding the camera, and he is accompanied by two other men, all of them absorbed in the task at hand. Way off in the background of the photograph, sitting on a bench and not seeming all that involved in the process, is another man. That man is the movie's Director of Cinematography, Ed Lachman. In the second photograph, another

Oscar-winning director, Martin Scorsese, composes a shot for “Bringing Out the Dead” (1999). With a “stand-in” (actually, a man sitting down) taking the place of the actor who will appear in the shot, Scorsese himself manipulates the camera. Behind him are ranged a whole group of people observing his actions. But none of those people is the film’s Director of Cinematography, Robert Richardson. Instead, Richardson is the “stand-in,” patiently sitting in front of Scorsese’s camera with his back to the lens. What is going on in these two photographs? If camera placement is such an important part of film making, why is neither of these distinguished Directors of Cinematography handling the process himself?

The answer to this question is that cinematographers on big-budget shoots actually have a whole other function to keep them busy, namely, lighting the shot. Because consumer video cameras now do a fairly good job of adjusting exposure automatically, it is easy to underestimate the critical role that lighting plays in obtaining the highly controlled look of a Hollywood movie. In fact, as far as technical expertise is concerned, lighting is probably the most complex and demanding component of studio film making. A detailed analysis of lighting technique is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, a pair of contrasting examples may serve to impart at least some appreciation of its potential effects. Both examples come from movies about the automobile industry.

The first of these movies, “Tucker: The Man and His Dream” (1988), was directed by Francis Ford Coppola (creator of “The Godfather” series, and

now the owner of a successful winery, as well as a pasta factory). Closely based on a true story, Coppola’s movie chronicles a largely forgotten episode in the history of American car manufacturing. As the movie’s title suggests, Preston Tucker was a dreamer who wanted to do big things. In the years after World War II, he tried to launch a new car company that would produce a highly innovative vehicle of his own design. In the end he failed miserably, but the movie convincingly celebrates his ingenuity, his vision, and his adventurous spirit. The scene that concerns us here is the unveiling of the first car to come out of his factory. This event took place on June 19, 1947, in front of a large audience, and was accompanied by much hoopla. Tucker was concerned with aesthetics as much as with automotive technology, and the first Tucker car was a beautiful creation. It is instructive to compare the images of Coppola’s movie with archival pictures of the car. Even in the somewhat faded photographs of more than half a century ago, it looks really attractive. All the same, its appearance is taken to a whole different level in the hands of Coppola’s expert cinematographer, Vittorio Storaro. As it revolves slowly on a rotating platform beneath Storaro’s meticulously placed spotlights, the car’s chrome gleams, its curves glow brightly, and its surfaces beam out an even-changing pattern of sparkling reflections. It is a dazzling spectacle, and a perfect expression of Coppola’s vision of Tucker as an artist and showman.

Before we move on to our second, contrasting case of the portrayal of cars in movies, it may be instructive to take a brief look at a recent TV commercial that is very similar to the scene from “Tucker” with regard to its masterful use of lighting. Created for the 2008 Super Bowl by

Goodby, Silverstein & Partners, this commercial for Hyundai Genesis is a very good example of a car ad based almost entirely on visual appeal. As in the Tucker-launch scene, this commercial displays Hyundai's car on a revolving platform, and it emphasizes the way the car's surface reflects the shifting patterns of color and light that surround it on every side as it moves through a tunnel. Almost as an afterthought, the ad includes some technical specifications that appear in small white text on a black background. But the main message seems to be contained in the following words, spoken in a confident tone by a male voice-over artist: "We're not sure what the *USA Today* Ad Meter will think of this commercial tomorrow. But we're pretty sure Mercedes, BMW, and Lexus aren't going to like it very much." What stands out in this statement is the fact that it refers to the Hyundai *commercial* rather than the car itself. The ad seems to be emphasizing the importance of visual appearance, and in that regard it serves as unusually direct testimony to the powers of cinematographic lighting.

At the other end of the spectrum of visual appeal, a scene from a recent documentary, "Who Killed the Electric Car" (2006), contains a rare example in which unattractive lighting was – allegedly – used as a deliberate means of squelching consumer demand for a product. The movie's general argument is that the Detroit auto industry, together with the oil industry and various government agencies, actively opposed the development and commercialization of battery powered cars, even though at least one viable model of such a car – General Motors' EV1 -- was already in production in the 1990s. One piece of evidence that the film maker, Chris Paine, uses in support

of this argument is a TV commercial for the EV1 produced by GM in 1996. The commercial's narration actually does a pretty good job of implying that the car really works and fills a real need: "How does it go without gas and air? How does it go without sparks and explosions? How does it go without pistons or transmission? How does it go, you ask yourself? And then you will ask, how could we have possibly gone so long without it? The electric car. It isn't coming ... it's here." But the ad's visuals seem to be delivering a different message. To the accompaniment of mournful, dirge-like music, we get an indistinct, black-and-white view of dark shadows on a grainy gray pavement. At times the shadows appear to represent a family group of parents and children, but at other times they are little more than dark splotches. When we finally get a glimpse of the electric car at the conclusion of the ad, its colors seem faded or washed out, and it too casts a big black shadow. The overall effect is vaguely ominous and creepy. Whatever the merits of the movie's other claims may be, it is hard to look at this dark, drab, moody commercial without at least some skepticism about its ultimate aims: was the real goal to sell this car, or to make people not want to buy it?

Editing

(1) Editing Speed

If camerawork is one of the two major components of the visual language of film, editing is the other. Our major goal in this part of our discussion is to illustrate the ways in which film makers are able to create visual arguments or symbolic connections – e.g.,

comparisons or contrasts – through the juxtaposition of images. However, we will begin our examination of editing with a look at the effects of sheer editing speed – in other words, how long each shot is held on the screen before the editor cuts to another shot. There are several systematic studies concerning this aspect of film language, but, even without the research, the basic effect of editing speed is probably intuitively obvious to anyone who pauses to analyze her or his reactions to visual media. Faster editing speeds – i.e., shorter shots – tend to make scenes appear more dynamic and action-packed, while slower editing speeds are associated with calmer, more tranquil moods. One research finding that may *not* be so self-evident is the fact that editing speed produces these effects regardless of the actual content of the images. In experiments with various types of content, it was found that even abstract shapes could be made to appear more active or more tranquil by simply varying the speed of the editing. An additional aspect of editing that has also been investigated in these studies is the nature of the transition between one shot and the next. Direct transitions (i.e., “cuts,” in which one shot immediately replaces another) tend to be seen as more active or dynamic than “fades” or “dissolves,” in which the transition between one shot and the next is more gradual.

The effects of fast editing are illustrated very impressively in a TV commercial for Pirelli Tires, featured the track-and-field champion Carl Lewis, winner of nine gold medals in the 1984, 1988, and 1992 Olympics Games. Although this commercial was created in 1995 (and includes poignant background images of the World Trade Center), its average shot length is just

under one second – a rate considerably faster than even the most rapid editing in today’s action movies. The commercial’s surreal visuals show Lewis sprinting across the waters of New York harbor and running up the side of the Statue of Liberty. When he gets to the top, he takes a flying leap and ends up on the Chrysler Building in down-town Manhattan. Perched on one of the Chrysler’s famous eagle-shaped gargoyles, he checks the sole of his foot, and we see that it has a Pirelli tread on it. Then he flies off into space again, and the ad’s only words appear on the screen: “Pirelli tires. Power is nothing without control.” The overall effect, as intended, is one of tremendous speed and agility. To someone who hasn’t seen the ad yet, it may seem that there was little need of fast editing to create such an impression. When an ad contains the world’s fastest sprinter, are any technical effects needed in order to convey a sense of speed? And yet, if one looks at the ad carefully, one notices that editing is indeed an important part of it. The reason for this is that the majority of the shots of Lewis are actually in slow motion. If the music had been less propulsive and the shots had been held on the screen longer, the mood might have been very different: instead of speed, the ad might have conveyed a feeling of gliding or floating smoothly across space. It is the break-neck pace of the editing that gives the images their extra charge and ensures that speed prevails over slow-motion in our final impressions of the ad.

Should all ads that aim for excitement employ fast editing? The answer to this question will depend on the amount of information that the ad intends to convey. As we have seen, the Pirelli ad contained only two lines of text (aside from the Pirelli logo), and no other verbal

information or technical details about the product. The ad's main goal was to create a sensation of power and traction. However, one can readily imagine a different type of tire ad in which technical specifications might figure more prominently. Similarly, many other kinds of advertisements, for products such as medical treatments, financial services, or information technology, often attempt to convey substantial amounts of factual content, either through words or through images. In such cases, fast editing may be counterproductive, because it may distract the viewer and prevent the ad's information from coming across adequately. In advertising experiments in which the same images were edited in two different versions, fast-paced vs. slow-paced, viewers' ability to absorb an ad's informational content was significantly higher when they were shown the slow-paced version of the ad.

(2) Symbolic Connections between Images

In the long history of the movies, there are several famous scenes that are considered prime examples of the powers of editing. One of the simplest of these editing sequences is also, arguably, the most fundamental. It occurs in "At Land" (1944), a short movie by the experimental film maker Maya Deren, who has been called "the mother of the avant garde." The sequence features Deren herself, and consists of just two shots. In shot number one, Deren, a trained dancer, leaps into the air. In shot number two, she come down again – but in a totally different location. Even though it is transparently clear that the two shots were taken in two different places, the viewer sees

the sequence as one continuous action. What this sequence demonstrates is our minds' strong tendency to impose continuity and meaning on our visual experiences. In one way or another, most of the editing techniques that film makers employ to sway their audiences' beliefs and emotions are based on that underlying fact of perceptual psychology. While the goal of Deren's movie was to create a sense of physical linkage between the two shots by blending her two different dance movements into a single action, the "Deren effect" is also at work when film makers use editing for purposes of making more symbolic connections between images. An excellent illustration of this point is provided by the opening sequence of "Barbarians at the Gates" (1993), a movie based on the best-selling business book of the same name.

Visual Analogy

The movie is a dramatization of the 1988 leveraged buy-out of RJR Nabisco, an event that, until very recently, held the record for the most expensive corporate buy-out of all time. The Nabisco LBO had been preceded by an acrimonious bidding war between financier Henry Kravis, the eventual winner, and the company's CEO, F. Ross Johnson, who is actually both the movie's and the book's central character. In the book, Johnson's early years are recounted in more than a dozen pages packed densely with information. The movie gives us Johnson's back-story in three short scenes that play under the opening credits. First we get a snippet of text: "IN A FAR AWAY WORLD BILLIONS AND BILLIONS OF DOLLARS AGO..." An Alarm bells rings, and we see a young boy getting out of bed and wheeling his bicycle out for his newspaper route. A caption informs us

that this is Winnipeg, Canada, in 1940. On a suburban street where we see him making his deliveries, the boy stops to chat with one of his customers, an avuncular older man. The boy tries to sell him a magazine subscription, but the man isn't interested. The boy persists. He is willing to give the man the first month free. The man hesitates. The boy says he will also give him a week of free newspapers. With an admiring chuckle, the man capitulates. "Ross Johnson," he says, "you could sell ice to an Eskimo."

As the boy rides off, the movie cuts to a close-up of a bicycle wheel. For an instant, we assume that this is just a continuation of the same scene. But the camera tilts up, and we see that the rider is now a young man of about twenty. He pulls up in front of another suburban house, and, with an eager-beaver expression on his face, he strides up to the front door and rings the bell. A woman with a baby in her arm answers. The young man holds up his card. "Mrs. Vitaliano ... F. Ross Johnson, Peerless Child Photographers." The woman is not interested in having her baby photographed. But the young man persists. He tells her that, even though he sees babies all day long, hers is an exceptionally beautiful child. "Can I ask her name?" he says. "Marvin," the woman replies. The young man is unfazed by his faux pas. "What can I tell you," he says. "He's pretty enough to be a girl." That being the case, he adds, he is prepared to give the woman six pictures plus a five-dollar walnut frame for only 2.98. The woman hesitates. The young man turns to the baby: "Tell your mom you want your picture taken, Marvin." The baby gurgles with pleasure. The woman smiles appreciatively and gives in to the young man's sales pitch.

Up to this point in the sequence, the crucial edit, for our purposes, is the cut to the bicycle wheel that takes us out of the first scene into the second. On one level, this cut is very similar to Maya Deren's "At Land" edit. It is meant to create an illusion of physical continuity between the two scenes. But, on another level, the edit has a broader, more metaphorical or symbolic purpose. It emphasizes the similarity between the young Ross Johnson and his older self, a point that is also evident in the very similar structures of the two scenes: the eager salesman, the reluctant customer, the salesman's insistence, the customer's ultimate capitulation. As a symbolic device, the cut between these two scenes can be seen as a *visual comparison or analogy*.

Visual Contrast

Now let us move on to the third scene in the movie's opening sequence. As Johnson and the mother walk into the house to make arrangements for the baby's pictures, the movie goes into another major transition. It is now night, and a limousine with an escort of several other cars is making its way through the streets of a big city. Inside the limousine is a middle-aged man and his glamorous, younger-looking wife. The man is speaking on the phone, and he announces – in case the viewer might be in any doubt – that he is Ross Johnson. He also asks the person on the phone to "keep the Senator's glass full." Johnson has clearly come up in the world. When the limousine reaches its destination, at a fancy hotel, Johnson and his wife are surrounded by a crowd of admirers. As they ride the elevator up to the party they are attending, Johnson's wife makes a small adjustment to his tie. "Not bad for a newspaper

boy from Winnipeg, eh?" he says to her. Simultaneously, a caption informs us that this is Atlanta, Georgia, in 1988.

As Johnson's words suggest, the purpose of this scene – and of the cut that led into it – is quite different from the scene that preceded it. Yes, this is still the same Ross Johnson who started out as a newspaper boy in Winnipeg, but everything about the scene – the limo, the big-city surroundings, the glamour, the fact that he is on his way to meet a Senator of the United States -- is designed to emphasize how different his life is now from the way it was then. And the cut from day to night that took us from the previous scene to this one is one more graphic illustration of this point. If the previous scene change was a case of a visual analogy, this one is obviously intended as a *visual contrast*. Both of them, however, are examples of a more general editing strategy, namely, the use of shot changes and scene transitions for the purpose of making a symbolic point.

Visual Generalization

As a further illustration of this use of editing, let us now examine an amusingly inventive scene from "The Devil Wears Prada" (2006). Movies about women are often referred to dismissively as "chick flicks," but, if this is a chick flick, it is still very different from almost all other movies of that genre. The typical chick flick has one overriding theme, namely, the woman's romantic life. In this movie, however, the main theme is the protagonist's job, and the movie's central focus is on the relationship between the protagonist and her boss. Unfortunately, the boss, Miranda Priestley (played by Meryl Street), seems to relish making life difficult for

her underlings. As Miranda's new assistant, the movie's protagonist, Andy Sachs (played by Anne Hathaway), soon finds herself assaulted by a never-ending barrage of commands and complaints. A sequence that takes place early in the movie provides a perfect encapsulation of her employer's personality.

It is morning in the offices of the magazine. Miranda strides in and dumps her coat and bag on Andy's desk. "Oh, good morning, Miranda," Andy says. "Get me Isaac," Miranda says abruptly, with no acknowledgement of Andy's greeting. Cut to the next scene. It is morning again, Miranda walks in again, she dumps her stuff on Andy's desk again, and she issues another demand: "I don't see my breakfast here. Are my eggs here? Where are my eggs?" Cut to Andy frantically running through the streets of New York with a take-out order of eggs. Cut to the next scene. Morning, Miranda entering, coat and bag landing on Andy's desk, and Miranda demanding, "Pick up the Polaroids from the lingerie shoot." Cut to Andy desperately looking for the Polaroids. Cut to another morning, Miranda dumping stuff on Andy's desk, saying, "Have the brakes checked on my car." Cut to Andy trying to navigate New York traffic in a silver convertible. Cut to another morning, Miranda dumping stuff on Andy's desk, asking, "Where's that piece of paper I had in my hand yesterday morning?" Cut to another morning, Miranda dumping stuff on Andy's desk, saying, "The girls need new surf boards, or boogie boards, or something, for Spring Break." Cut to Andy in the street with surf boards, as she gets a call from Miranda's other assistant: "The twins also need flip-flops." Cut to another morning, Miranda dumping stuff on Andy's desk, saying, "Pick up my shoes from

Blahnik ... and then go get Patricia.” Cut to Andy whispering “Who’s that?” to the other assistant. Cut to Andy straining to keep up with a huge dog on a leash. Cut to one or two more images of Miranda and then a flurry of shots of coats and bags landing on Andy’s desk as Miranda’s commands begin to go by in a blur: “Get me that little table that I liked at that store on Madison Avenue.” “Get us a reservation for dinner tonight at that place on...” “Get me Isaac.” All of this is very reminiscent of Maya Deren’s editing, especially during those parts of the sequence in which the cuts take us seamlessly from one shot of Miranda to another, without any intermediate inserts of Andy carrying out her wishes. But, on a symbolic level, the point of this sequence goes beyond making a comparison between each scene and the next. Rather, when we have multiple similar shots or scenes, as we do here, the function of the editing is to make a *visual generalization*. The rapid succession of scenes is a vivid announcement that life is always like this when one is working for Miranda Priestley.

(3) Visual Analogies in Persuasive Contexts

As we have seen, then, editing can be used to convey visual analogies, visual contrasts, and visual generalizations. Since the illustrations we have just looked at were drawn from fictional movies, we will discuss further example of each of these in order to get a sense of how they work in more explicitly persuasive contexts, including advertising and documentary film. Our advertising examples of visual analogy come from Saab’s “Born from Jets” campaign, created by Lowe New York. This advertising campaign

for Saab cars is based on the fact that Saab was originally a manufacturer of aircraft, before branching out into the automotive industry. The most literal visualization of the campaign’s slogan is probably the 2005 TV commercial in which a Saab jet morphs into a car. However, as far as editing is concerned, the campaign’s most effective use of visual analogy may have occurred in its 2006 commercial in which a Saab Gripen fighter jet and a Saab 9-5 Sedan face off on an otherwise empty highway. As they race towards each other and the distance between them decreases, rapid cross-cutting between car and jet increases the suspense, but it also enhances the sense of equal power, equal speed, and equal aerodynamic efficiency – in short, the visual analogy between one Saab and the other. At the very last minute before the Gripen and the 9-5 meet, the jet takes off, and the ad’s visual analogy is underscored by a voice-over: “The aerodynamic principles that keep a Saab jet in the air help the Saab 9-5 remain firmly on the ground.” Incidentally, it is worth noting that visual analogies are also very common features of print advertising, including several Saab ads in which images of cars are juxtaposed with images of aircraft.

A very notable example of visual analogy in a documentary film comes from “Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room” (2005), written by Bethany McLean, Peter Elkind, and Alex Gibney (who was also the producer/director), based on McLean’s and Elkin’s best-selling book about the collapse of the Enron corporation. One of the movie’s most dramatic sequences examines the behavior of Enron’s West-Coast energy traders as they manipulate prices in the California market by temporarily moving electricity off-state or by cutting off the supply

from power stations. On the movie's sound track, we hear excerpts of audio recordings in which Enron's traders discuss these shenanigans in extremely cynical language. Then the movie tries to explore the reasons for their behavior. Did their huge bonuses blind them to the ethical implications of their deeds, or were other factors involved as well? One of the movie's major points is that there was indeed one important additional factor, namely, Enron's corporate culture, which encouraged the traders' misbehavior and gave them to understand that they were not personally responsible for its consequences. In making its case, the movie tries to draw an analogy between what the traders did and what happened in the famous studies of obedience to authority performed in the 1960s by social psychologist Stanley Milgram.

The basic question that Milgram had tried to answer was, "How far are people willing to go if an authority figure tells them to commit a harmful act that may go against their own conscience?" As most people who have taken an introductory psychology course know, Milgram explored this question by setting up a fake experiment, whose subjects were asked to administer electric shocks to an unseen person for the alleged purpose of investigating the effects of electrical stimulation on memory. Despite the fact that the unseen zappee reacted with increasingly loud protests and sounds of distress as the voltage was increased, more than half of Milgram's subjects obediently kept zapping him all the way up to the maximum voltage required of them. In the Enron movie, this compliant behavior is compared with the actions of Enron's traders. Just as Milgram's subjects were willing to zap a screaming man

when told to do so by the researchers conducting the experiment, so too – according to the movie – were Enron's employees willing to harm the people of California at the behest of their corporate leaders. This point is stated explicitly in the movie, but it is also presented graphically in a shocking sequence of images that cut back and forth between the original Milgram experiment and Enron's exploits in California.

This sequence begins with a clip from a newscast: "California's electric utilities may have to pull the plug on millions of customers." Cut to an excerpt of a discussion between Enron traders. Their words appear on-screen at the same time that we hear them on the sound track: "It's the f-- coolest thing I've done in a long time." "Yeah, holy f--, yeah!" "You've got to love the West." Cut to a subject in the Milgram experiment announcing an increase in voltage: "Four hundred and thirty-five volts." Then he presses the zapping button. Cut to California fire crews trying to free people trapped in an elevator that has stalled because of a power outage. Cut to more dialogue by Enron traders: "All that money you guys stole from those poor grandmothers in California." (laughter) "Yeah, Grandma Millie, man. She's the one who couldn't figure out how to f-- vote on the butterfly ballot." "Now she wants her f-- money back for all the power you've charged right up her ass." (laughter) Cut to the subject in the Milgram experiment: "Four hundred and fifty volts." He presses the zapper. Cut to a traffic light that has stopped functioning because of a power outage. Cut to a traffic accident. Cut to the Milgram experiment. The experimenter urges the reluctant subject to keep zapping. He complies. Cut to the Enron

traders: “It’s kinda hard to say we shouldn’t do this even though it’s allowed, ‘cause ... you know, I mean, that’s what we do.” Even though the movie’s argument has already been spelled out very clearly by a journalist who speaks on-camera before this whole sequence begins, the impact of the visual sequence itself is devastating. As a demonstration of the powers of visual analogy, it is unquestionably highly compelling. All the same time, it would be irresponsible not to add a word of caution about sequences such as this. Note that, despite the emotional impact of what appears on-screen, technically speaking the sequence is not actually proof of the connection it is trying to make. Top-level Enron executives may well have given directives that were analogous to the instructions in the Milgram experiment. But we don’t see that on-screen.

(4) Visual Contrast in Persuasive Contexts

The second item on our list of symbolic connections between images is visual contrast. For a non-fiction example of this type of editing we will look at an excerpt from one of the most successful documentaries of recent years, Al Gore’s “An Inconvenient Truth” (directed by Davis Guggenheim and released in 2006). Based on Mr. Gore’s illustrated lectures, this Oscar-winning movie is an exploration of the relationship between human activity, climate change, and the state of the global environment. Gore marshals a wide array of evidence in support of the argument that humans have been causing the planet to heat up, with potentially devastating consequences. Much of this evidence consists of numbers,

graphs, and expert opinion. However, the most impressive single piece of evidence may be a short visual sequence about the changes that have been taking place in various glaciers around the world. The sequence is extremely simple. Gore just puts up pairs of images: the glacier as it was in the past; the glacier as it is now. This juxtaposition allows us to see with our own eyes what has been happening. The ice is melting, and the glaciers are shrinking. Mountainsides that at one time were covered with rivers of ice are now turning into scarred earth and rubble. For any viewer who may entertain doubts about the existence or extent of global warming, this sequence is likely to be particularly persuasive.

Visual contrasts are also very common in advertising, both print and video. An outstanding application of this visual technique can be found in “Side by Side Corporation” (2008), a commercial for Optimum Lightpath (a networking system), created for Cablevision Systems Corporation by Gardner Nelson & Partners. As in Al Gore’s lecture on glaciers, this commercial makes extensive use of split-screen comparisons between two different images. However, whereas Gore’s split-screens involved pairs of still photographs, the Optimum Lightpath ad is much more complicated. This ad’s basic concept is a comparison between two companies, one of which uses Optimum Lightpath technology while the other does not. In a side-by-side split screen display, we witness a number of parallel incidents from the daily activities of each company’s employees. Each pair of incidents begins with a close match between the contents displayed on the two sides of the screen, implying that both companies face similar goals and challenges.

However, in each case, the outcomes of the incidents diverge sharply. At the Optimum Lightpath client, everything appears to be running smoothly. At the other company, every single incident ends in some kind of mishap.

This visual strategy is illustrated very effectively in the Optimum Lightpath commercial's opening sequence. At the outset, we see a close-up of hands typing on a keyboard. Then we hear the sound of a phone call, and the screen splits in half. On both sides, we see company representatives answering the phone in a call center. Their dialogue is identical, and their words overlap: "Customer service. Yes, ma'am. Let me call up your account." But then things go badly for the company on one side of the screen. Whereas the Optimum Lightpath client has evidently gained immediate access to the caller's data ("OK, it says here you've recently moved..."), the other company is clearly having problems. "Network's slow today... I apologize," the company representative says, with an exasperated look on his face. This contrast is immediately spelled out by a voice-over statement accompanied by text on the screen: "What you see here is the difference your network makes." The commercial then continues with a number of similar juxtapositions. But the point has been made quite convincingly from the very beginning, as soon as we see the different outcomes of the customer calls. What makes this ad's use of visual contrast especially effective is the careful synchronization of the first few images and words in each of the juxtaposed incidents. Each time, we begin with similarity and end with sharp difference, and this strategy makes the overall sense of contrast that much more vivid.

(5) Visual Generalization in Persuasive Contexts

The Optimum Lightpath ad and the glacier sequence from Al Gore's movie are also good example of visual generalizations, since they consist of whole series of paired scenes, rather than just a single contrasting pair. As a persuasive technique, visual generalization can be one of the most effective applications of the visual resources of the cinema, because it brings together two different ingredients of persuasive communication. On the one hand, there is good evidence that people tend to find vivid examples more persuasive than abstract arguments or verbal generalizations. On the other hand, however, when a movie presents only a single visual example in support of the point it is trying to make, skeptical viewers may well dismiss that example as an exception. It is not so easy to dismiss a whole series of similar images, and, in that sense, visual generalization can be said to offer the best of both worlds to film makers in search of tools for persuasion.

The persuasive powers of visual generalization are displayed somewhat humorously in a scene from "Warren Buffet: Woodstock for Capitalists" (2003), an entertaining look at the annual stockholders meeting of Berkshire Hathaway, the Omaha company run by famous investor Warren Buffet. Made by Ian Darling, an Australian investment manager, the movie is warmly admiring in its presentation of Buffet and his philosophy. The movie's many images of Berkshire Hathaway shareholders give the strong impression that they, too, feel the same way. One evening the film maker brings us

along as he has dinner at Goret's, which we are told is Buffet's favorite restaurant. Sure enough, the menu choices include an item labeled "Warren's Buffet's Favorite," consisting of a T-bone steak and hash-brown potatoes. Our narrator and his companion decide that that is what they will have. Then the camera takes a brief tour of the other tables, occupied by people in town for the stockholders' meeting, and we eavesdrop as they place their orders. At one table after another, people ask for "Warren Buffet's favorite."

A final example of visual generalization in a TV commercial will serve to bring this discussion of editing techniques to a close. First shown during the 2002 Super Bowl broadcast, this Pepsi commercial features Britney Spears and a large group of back-up artists, singing and dancing in front of a neon-lit entrance to a drive-in. Drive-in movie theaters are associated primarily with an earlier time in American life, and the commercial's images have a somewhat retro look from the very beginning. However, about half way through Britney Spears's song, the lyrics make an explicit reference to the past: "Come feel the joy all around, Each generation has found, they've got their own kind of sound." At the same time, the images on the screen are transformed into a series of vignettes from the past. The characters' clothing and hairstyles, as well as the scene's setting, take us back and forth to a number of earlier decades, from the 1940s to the 1980s. Taken together, these images add up to a graphic visual generalization: Every generation is a Pepsi generation.

Final Word

We have examined a variety of cinematic devices, including camera techniques as well as editing strategies. But, in conclusion, it may be instructive to end with a brief scene that doesn't really involve any particularly inventive technical strategies. This scene comes from a NOVA documentary called "Battle of the X-Planes" (2003), an illuminating look at the workings of the US defense industry. The movie chronicles the competition between two major defense contractors, Boeing and Lockheed Martin, to develop the Joint Strike Fighter, a combat plane that would simultaneously meet the needs of the US Air Force, Navy, and Marines. The stakes were high: the contract to build the fighter was expected to be the largest ever in military history, and the contest was winner-take-all. Through extensive footage of the two development teams at work, NOVA's documentary crew paints a detailed picture of the project's daunting technical demands and staggering complexity. As the five-year development process reaches its culmination and the Department of Defense prepares to deliver its verdict, the viewer gets a good sense of the tensions felt by the team leaders, whose reputations are on the line. Finally the day of the decision arrives, and members of the two teams assemble in their respective headquarters to witness the announcement on television.

Lockheed Martin wins, and jubilation erupts at their end. Then we cut to the leader of Boeing's effort, Program Manager Frank Statkus. It is clear that he has been dealt a stunning blow. For a second or two, there is silence in the

room, but it is broken by a phone call from Boeing's CEO: "Frank, tell your team they did an unbelievably good job. I could not have asked for more." A moment later, another Boeing executive, Vice-Chairman Harry Stonecipher, offers Statkus his hand: "You did a great job." "I'm sorry," Statkus replies. "No, you did a great job." There is no fancy camerawork in this brief exchange, and, apart from the visual contrast between the Boeing and Lockheed Martin teams, the scene does not contain any noteworthy editing devices. All the same, this little episode is a significant demonstration of the potential value of visual images as means of information and sources of inspiration. In contrast to some of the negative portrayals of the business world that we have encountered elsewhere, this little scene shows us people treating each other with dignity, respect, and compassion, even in the face of defeat. It is an image we can all aspire to.