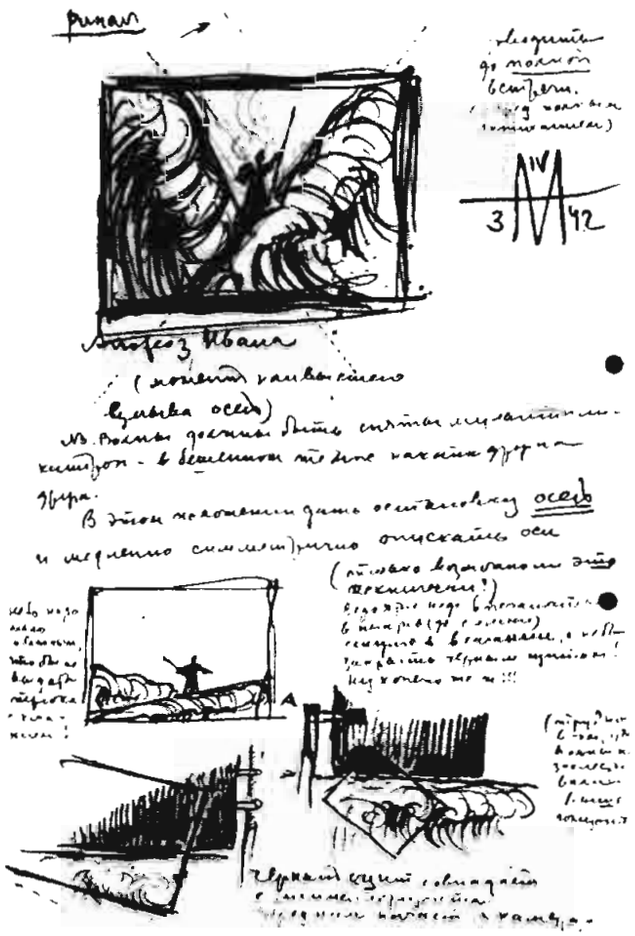
It's Two in the Morning.....

I was working as a set decorator on a non-union feature. It was Friday, and since there was no turnaround time minimum for the actors, we were all being worked far into the night. We were working at a bar location and had been on the set for close to fourteen hours. The second meal of the evening had been lukewarm pizza and nerves were fraying. The director sat at the bar between shots, staring at his script and trying to come up with the next setup of the evening. There wasn't a shot list or storyboard in sight. The director stared. He mumbled. He conferred. We were all tired, hungry, and ready to pull a mutiny. Finally, the key grip couldn't take it anymore. He strode over to the director and laid out the sequence for him. Loudly, with hand gestures. The crew exchanged quiet glances. "Good idea, let's shoot it," said the director.

Inspiration can come from any direction, in any form. But a storyboard and/or a shot list would have shown the crew that the director had done his homework. At two in the morning, any leadership is appreciated.



"It is exactly what we do in cinema, combining shots that are depictive, single in meaning, neutral in content—into intellectual contexts and series."

Sergei Eisenstein
"Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram"
Film Form, 1929

3 Text, Image and Diagram

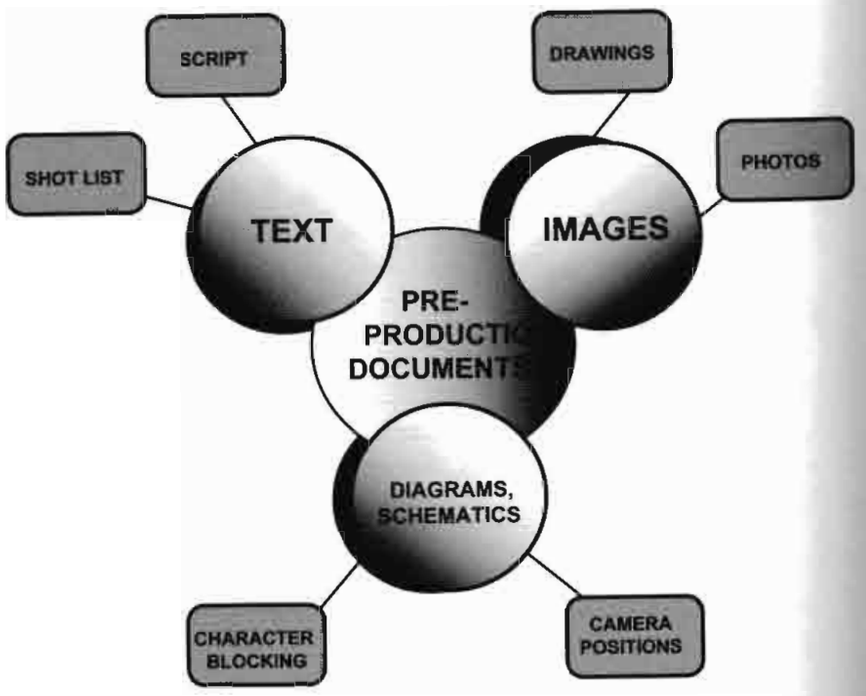
Text, Image and Diagram:

Three Approaches to Communication

3

Many years ago I had lost my keys at a friend's house and stood in his hallway with my eyes closed, silently trying to remember where I had put them. He watched me for a while and then said with astonishment, "You're looking for the keys in your head, aren't you? You're playing back a movie of where you've been in the house and watching the images with your mind's eye."

I was puzzled. "Of course," I said. "How do you find things?" "I make a list," he replied. I was stunned. Making lists to find objects was inconceivable to me.



Then I had one of those "aha" moments: I realized I had made assumptions about the way other people process the world around them.

Some people understand the world primarily through words. Others through images. If we examine the differences between these two approaches, we can uncover valuable information that can be used in strategizing communication within a film crew or any other collaborative project.

The human mind is a complex, multitasking "machine" that is capable of many varieties of thought and expression. The left hemisphere is considered to control logic and language formation while the right hemisphere is credited with creative and intuitive functions. When constructing the storyboard document, we want to acknowledge this variation in thinking and include information that works on multiple levels.

TEXT	*SCRIPT, SHOT LIST*
DIAGRAM	*OVERHEAD, SCHEMATIC* *PLOT PLAN, FLOOR PLAN*
IMAGE	*DRAWING* *PHOTO* *CGI (COMPUTER GRAPHIC IMAGERY)*

Using a combination of text, images, and diagrams acknowledges that people react to these different forms of communication in varying degrees. While some of your collaborators will cull useful information from the overhead diagram, others will head straight to the images.

With this process in mind, this chapter is divided into sections detailing these three types of preproduction documents: the Shot List, the Overhead Diagram, and the Images that accompany and illustrate them.

"I aim to get a complete vision of my film before it goes onto the studio floor. With a first class director the final cutting is a simple job, if he has constructed the scene in his mind in advance and knows what he wants to create."

Hitchcock on Hitchcock

PRODUCTION NAME: rko # 522 No. P. 10333

SC. # 35: INT. BAR. NIGHT DATE SHOT Monday 30 Sept:

SLATES PRINCED	TIME FIRST SETUP GIVEN	TIME CAMERA READY	TIME FIRST TAKE	TIME SCENE COMPLETED	DESCRIPTION OF ANGLES, ACTION AND DIALOGUE
1X-3 50'	7.30	7.45	8.15	8.25 .15	Shot 1: C/U of the bar top with glasses in F.G.
2X-1 60'	8.35	8.55	8.57	8.58 .13	TRACK with bartender as he fills glasses. Med. shot with bar in mirror refection
3X-3 50'	9 (Waiting	9.30 for	10.40 Bill	10.50 .27	Cut to door of bar. full shot, frontal angle. Door opens slowly letting in the light.
4X-1 30'	11 (Waiting	11.5 for	11.15	11.26 .9	Med. shot of Jake scanning the crowd.
5X-2 25'	11.20	11.30	11.35	11.40	POV, PANNING the bar right and left, wide shot.
6X-6 20'	11.58	12	12.3	12.5 .10	Reaction shots of the bar patrons, various angles
T.2.Fair.T.4.Look short.T.5. Sun slow. flicke					
7X-1 30'	1	1.15	1.20	1.25 .9	ECU of Jakes feet as he walks down the bar. TRACK back to follow.
Lunch 1.230 - 1.					

Shot list from *Vertigo* 1958
director: Alfred Hitchcock

The Text: Shot Lists and Terminology

The "text" in this chapter refers to the words of the shot list. The shot list is a written collection of shot descriptions, each containing information on the placement of the camera and the contents of the frame. In order to accurately convey this information, the shot list needs to use precise language that delineates the action of the scene as well as the position of the camera and its movements.

A visually specific shot list needs to include the following information:

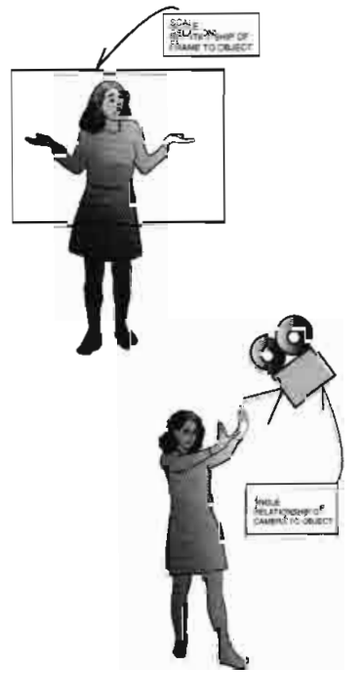
- **Scale**
- **Angle**
- **Camera movement**
- **Blocking (of characters, vehicles, etc.)**
- **Script notations**

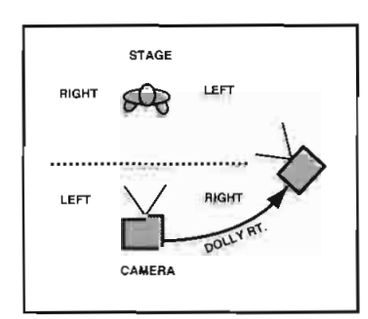
Scale: The relationship of the frame to the objects it presents. The frame crops the world into rectangular-shaped vistas. If the frame crops a human figure just below the shoulders, you have a close-up. If the frame allows the viewer to see an entire village, you've got a wide shot.

Angle: The relationship of the camera's position to the object(s) it is focusing on. The angle describes the position of the camera in terms of height as well as horizontal placement. If the camera is below a window and straight-on, the angle is low and frontal. If the camera is facing someone's head and is located a bit to the side, it is a three-quarter close-up, eye level.

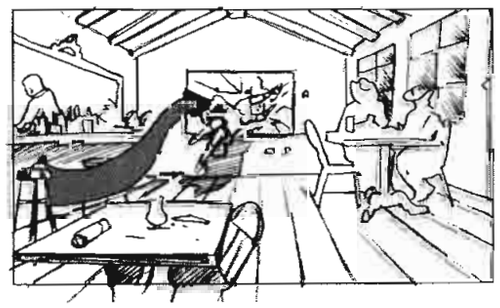
Camera movement: This term refers to the movement of the camera during a shot. It can be as subtle as a slight tilt to keep a character centered in the frame or a swooping crane shot that covers dozens of feet in a few seconds. Each camera move also has a screen direction — the right and left of the camera as seen by someone looking through the lens. The screen direction is the opposite of stage direction: If an actor were to cross to stage left (the actor's left) on a line of dialogue, then the camera would need to move screen right to follow.

Character blocking: Although the shot list primarily gives information on camera placement and movement, there can also be references to the movement of what is being seen inside the frame. This includes actors' entrances and exits from the frame, movement of vehicles, or any other action that could affect the continuity of the sequence.





Camera right and left vs. stage right and left



stripes. Don't you go and get any ideas.
Got it?

His father shakes his head in frustration. Then, as before, the kitchen is quiet, everyone in their own thoughts.

SHOT 16 EXT. SMALL HOUSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

A shovel is thrust into the hard thick dirt. Robbie, sweaty and dirty, digs a hole for his father. His mother steps out from the house carrying a glass of water.

MOTHER
Here you go, honey.

Robbie takes the glass, wipes the sweat from his brow. After taking a sip he hands the glass back to his mother who stands for a moment watching Robbie resume shoveling.

MOTHER
Sometimes I wish we lived in one of those suburb neighborhoods. Course then we'd be just like everyone else. Have the same house, same car, same job. . . same paycheck.

She thinks for a second.

MOTHER
Maybe being different like we are isn't so bad. . . What do you think?

text from student project:
Damon O'Steen

Script notations: In order to keep the storyboard tightly aligned with the script, small sections of dialogue or descriptions of action are sometimes added to the shot list or included in storyboard subtitles. These notations are direct quotes from the script and identify the placement of shots in relation to the action of the screenplay. For instance, a set of storyboard frames describing some over-the-shoulder shots might be accompanied by snippets of dialogue from the script marking the length of each shot.

Shot List Terminology

There is a saying that "a picture is worth 1000 words." But in a shot list you don't have that much space. Familiarity with the language of filmmaking is essential to creating concise descriptions of each shot.

In the pages that follow, terms that apply to the **SCALE**, **ANGLE**, **CAMERA MOVEMENT**, and **CHARACTER BLOCKING** are defined in words, diagrams, and images. This section is an illustrated glossary of film language that can be used to create a precise shot list.

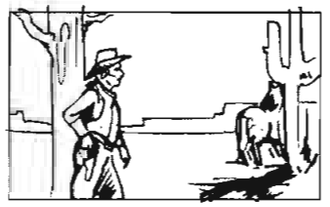
SCALE

Extreme close-up (E.C.U.): A shot with a very narrow field of view that gives the impression that the camera is very close to the subject. For instance, a part of a person's face.

Close-up (C.U.): Same as above, but with a slightly larger field of view. A character's head and shoulders, for example.

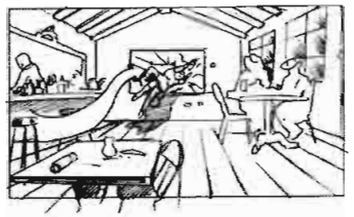
Medium shot (M.S.): A shot in which the field of view is between those of the long shot and the close-up. The camera sees the actor from the waist up.

American shot (also called Hollywood, Cowboy, or Knee shot): A shot that frames a figure from the knees up.



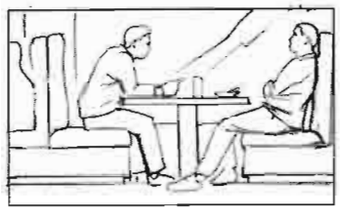
Full Figure: Shot composed around the scale of a full human figure.

Long shot (L.S.): A shot giving a broad view of the visual field; the camera appears to be far away from the subject (the z axis).



Wide shot (W.S.): Shot composed to see a wide vista (the x axis).

Single: A shot with only one person.

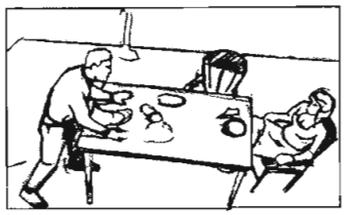


Two shot: The camera frames two characters in a scene.

Insert: Often photographed by the second unit, this shot, frequently a close-up, reveals details not seen in the master shot or missed by the general coverage, i.e., a hand opening a purse and pulling out a gun.

Two-T shot: Not exactly a politically correct term; it means a shot framed from the nipples up.

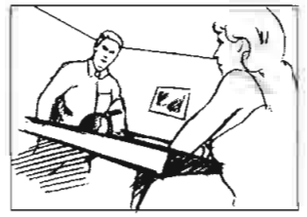
ANGLE



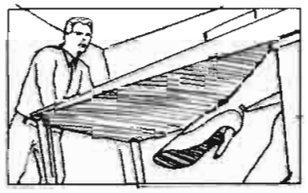
High angle: A shot taken from an angle above the object.

Aerial shot: A very high angle shot, often accomplished with a helicopter or an airplane.

Low angle: A shot taken from the placement of the camera below the object.



High Hat shot: A very low angle shot, positioned as if it were a hat's height off the floor. The name is taken from a piece of equipment called a high hat, which is laid on the floor and is designed to hold the camera.



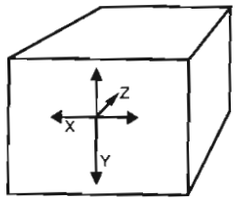
3/4 shot: A shot that is positioned halfway between a frontal angle and a profile. Can be either a front or a back shot.

Profile: Shot from a side angle.

Straight on, or frontal: When the camera is looking directly at an object.

Over the Shoulder shot (O.T.S.): Usually a shot of a character in conversation with a second person, whose shoulder you shoot over.

Canted frame: Also called "dutch" or "chinese" angles. The camera is tilted sideways, setting the objects off the vertical axis.

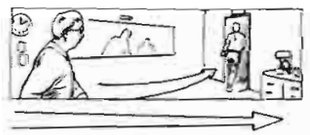


3 dimensions of movement

CAMERA MOVES

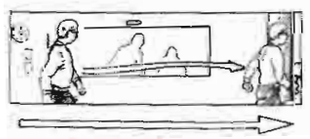
Dolly to follow

Dolly shot: Also called "tracking" or "trucking" shot. Camera travels on dolly tracks. Usually used to describe shots moving on the z axis (pushing in or pulling out).



Pan

Pan: The camera swivels on the horizontal (x) axis, often used to follow the action.



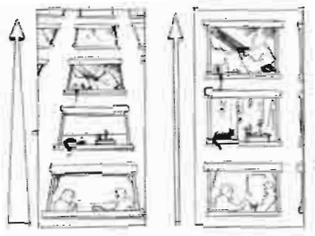
Track

Swish Pan: A very swift pan that blurs the scene in between the starting and ending points.

Tracking shot: Camera moves to left or right. Often used to follow a figure or vehicle.

Tilt: The camera pivots up and down from its base, which does not move.

Boom shot: The camera travels up and down on a boom arm. Often combines with a dolly move.



Tilt Boom

Crane shot: A shot taken from a crane that has the ability to boom down and track in long distances without using tracks.

Car Mount: A shot taken from a camera that is mounted directly onto a vehicle.

Car mount

Static shot: Any shot where the camera specifically does not move.

Steadicam shot: A shot using the Steadicam, a camera that attaches to a harness and can be operated by a single person in handheld situations; the resulting footage will appear to be shot with the smoothness of a tracking shot.

Zoom

Zoom: Refers to the movement of a zoom lens. Usually used in video.

Zolly: A technique in which the camera dollies in and zooms out at same time, or the reverse-zoom in and dolly out simultaneously. Also called a Dolly with counter zoom. See Hitchcock (*Vertigo*), Spielberg (*Jaws*), Scorsese (*Goodfellas*).

Handheld

Smash Zoom: Very fast zoom.

Handheld: Operator braces the camera on the shoulder or at hip height. Often used in point of view shots or in documentary-style footage.

Follow shot: Any moving shot that follows an actor.

Traveling shot: Any shot that utilizes a moving camera body (a dolly is, a pan isn't).

EDITING, TRANSITIONS, AND CAMERA POINT OF VIEW

Objective shot: The camera sees the scene from an angle not seen by a character in the scene.

Subjective shot: A shot taken from the position of someone in the scene. A Point of View (P.O.V.) shot is an example of a subjective shot.

Master shot: Also called a Cover shot. Usually a medium to wide-angle shot of a scene that runs for the duration of the action.

Establishing shot: Often a wide shot of the location. It tells the audience where they are.

Coverage: All the set-ups needed to edit the scene aside from the master shot.

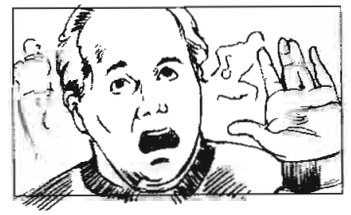
Set-up: Refers to the position of a camera and the lighting of a shot or shots. A "new set-up" means that the camera is moving to a new position, which also requires re-lighting.

"To envision information, and what bright and splendid visions can result, is to work at the intersection of image, word, number, art."

Edward Tufte,
Envisioning Information

Off screen (O.S.): Also called O.C., off-camera. A description of what is heard but not seen on the screen

Reaction shot: Usually a close-up of a character reacting silently to action they have just seen or dialogue they are listening to.



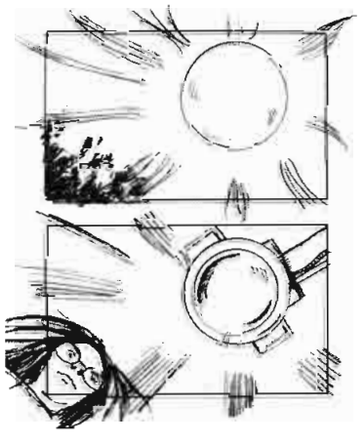
Reaction shot

Cutaway: An editing term concerning a piece of information not seen in the master or previous shot.

Jump cut: Editing term for successive shots that cut in on the same axis. Also, successive cuts that disrupt the flow of time or space.

In-line Edit: Contemporary term for cutting on the same axis.

Match Cut, or Match Dissolve: Cutting or dissolving from one similar composition to another, i.e., from a close-up of a wheel to a shot of a globe of the world, so that both objects fill the same size and position in the frame.



Reverse shots

Point of view shot (P.O.V.): The camera takes the point of view of a character in the scene; it sees what the character sees. Usually follows a shot of the character.

Reverse angle: A shot that is 180 degrees opposite of the preceding shot.

Exercise: Backwards Shot List

Creating a Visually Precise Shot List

When studying an art, whether it be painting, music, or filmmaking, copying the "masters" can be an illuminating and instructive exercise. As you copy a Rembrandt drawing, you are compelled to look very carefully at each decision he made regarding the composition, light, and shadow of the work. In filmmaking you can achieve a similar study by recreating a preproduction document working back from the completed film.

I call this project the "Backwards Shot List," because you take a sequence that has already been shot and edited and create a shot list, working in the opposite of the normal progression.

1. Choose a film that you want to study. It can be one that you've already seen or one that you've always wanted to get to know.

2. Play the film either on VHS, DVD, or laser disc. Try to obtain a letterboxed copy so you will see the frame as it was meant to be seen. Make sure that you can see a clear image on your screen when you pause the film.

3. Watch the entire film and make some general notes on scenes or sequences that you find compelling.

4. You will need a sequence that has between 20 to 30 shots in it. That means separate shots, not counting cut-backs to set-ups that have been previously used.

5. Play the scene you've selected, pausing the film at each cut or other transition. Write down a description of each shot, making sure that you describe the scale, angle, camera movement, and character blocking. (See examples 1 and 2, below.)

6. Number the shots, referring to cut-backs by the number that they were first assigned.

7. Shots that use a moving camera will need to be described twice: once to describe how they appear at the start and a second time for the end of the shot. In addition, describe how the camera has moved to get from the opening position to the ending one.

You will find that this exercise will sharpen your eyes as to the filmmaker's decisions regarding composition and camera angle, as well as editing. And for those of you who are new to the vocabulary of filmmaking, it will give you an opportunity to become familiar with the language.

5 Elements of Visual Shot List

1 – SCALE

2 – ANGLE

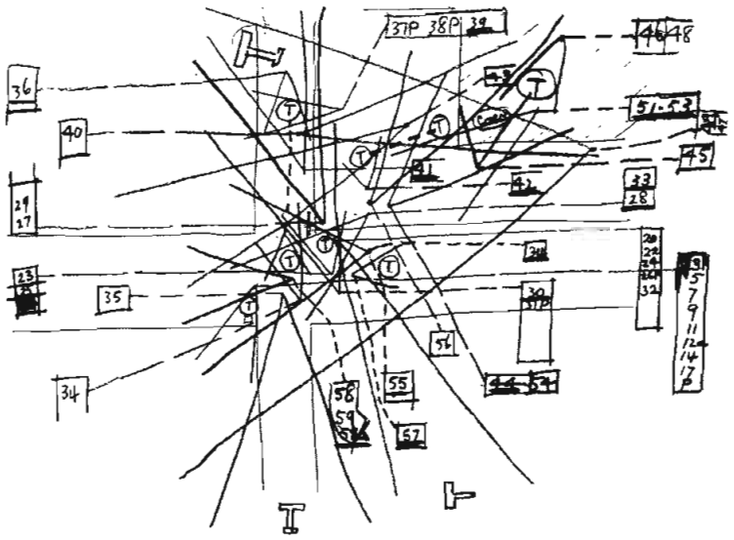
3 – CAMERA MOVE

4 – CHARACTER BLOCKING

5 – DIALOGUE OR ACTION

Ex. 1 Low angle two shot of soldier and guard. Soldier is CU in foreground, guard med. frame left.

Ex. 2 Start shot on a full, 3/4 angle of soldier as he stands and begins to cross camera right. PAN right to follow and TRACK slightly to clear attorney's back. End shot on a profile, full figure of soldier facing judges.



North by Northwest 1958 overhead diagram of the crop duster sequence

Overhead Diagrams

Overhead diagrams are the most powerful, universally communicative documents you can offer to your collaborators. They can sketch out the placement of the camera for different set-ups, the blocking of the actors in relation to their environment, and the position of key set pieces.

The overheads are also referred to as plot plans, floor plans, or schematics. Often the production designer or art director will sketch out each location and set design to scale. Reductions of these large drawings are perfect to use as a basis for planning out camera positions and scene blocking.

Key to understanding these documents is a familiarity with the "visual shorthand" of design. Through the use of well-placed icons, color, line width, and other eye-grabbing devices, you can lead the viewer's attention to crucial information. The following section covers some of the usual strategies for getting the point across.

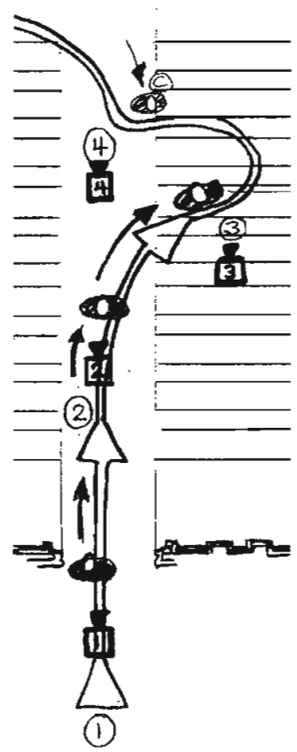
Camera Position and Numbering

Each overhead diagram sets out to plot the blocking of the characters and the positions of the camera or cameras for a scene or sequence of shots. The shots are often listed in an editorial sequence and numbered accordingly. The shot list that may accompany the diagram will also be numbered, and these two documents should agree in their sequencing so that the numbers of the shot list match the numbers that mark the camera positions.

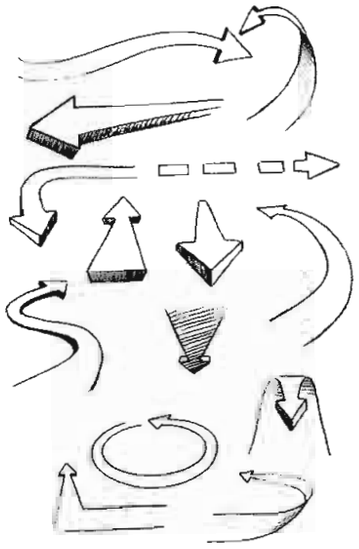
In cases where multiple cameras are being used, each camera needs its own label. You can use letters, numerals, or crew designations, anything that will get across the idea that you are assigning positions to distinctly separate camera crews.

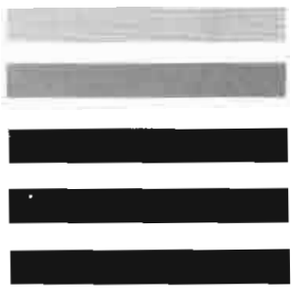
There are times that the information needed on a particular scene or sequence is just too voluminous for a single diagram. In this case, make copies of the floor plan and plot out a portion of the information on one sheet and the rest on a second one. Layering sheets of translucent paper is another solution to the problem of tightly packed information. Using a bottom layer of white paper, start with a floor plan and then layer each scene's blocking and camera-positions on subsequent layers. For reproduction, just use a single overlay and copy with the original floor plan as a back-up sheet.

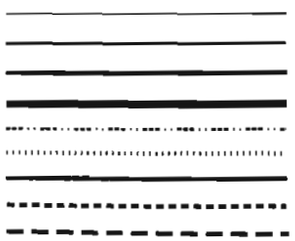
Moving cameras offer another challenge. The camera has a starting point, an ending point, and a path in between. The multiple positions are still part of a single camera move, so the corresponding shot-list number will be the same. To keep things clear, sub-numbering the different positions of the move is a good idea. A Steadicam shot might have four important key frames to hit on its way to its final position. Each of these should be noted on the diagram and, if an illustrated storyboard is being created, then these key positions should also be treated in corresponding frames.



Detail
Overhead diagram
Nuts 1979







Arrows

Big and little, straight and curved, with or without drop-shadows, these symbols denote direction of movement — actors walking, cars riding, or cameras rolling down the road. Arrows are one of the most powerful visual tools that you can use in overhead diagrams. They quickly attract the eye and can be used to guide the reader through the document. In addition, they can be designed to be visually distinct from each other, using dashes, line weight, or other clues to distinguish one character's blocking from another.

Color/Value

Imagine a vast plane of black and white squares and then, over to the right side, a red dot intrudes on the scene. Where does your eye go? Color can dominate the eye when used strategically. When special emphasis is needed, when you want to separate an element of information from the rest, then using color can be key.

Obviously, the color information won't reproduce well on an office copy machine, but if you are creating an overhead to be used by yourself or a small group, then adding color is a smart move, both logistically and economically.

Line Weight and Design

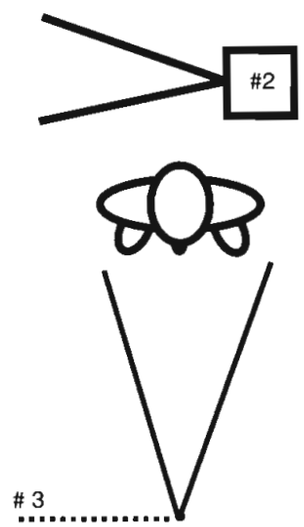
Thick or thin, dashes or dots, wavy or straight, even on a black-and-white document you can communicate a variety of information through simple variations of line weight and the size and shape of your lines and arrows. You can give each character a different line weight or style; you can use thick lines for camera moves and thin for character blocking. There is no industry standard for these choices. Just select a style that works for you and be consistent.

Icons

An icon is a simple representation of an object or idea. A red sign with a picture of a hand held out is an icon for the idea of "stop." In diagramming for film, video, or other media, icons can stand in for the camera, actors, or other objects about which information needs to be communicated to the crew.

The camera icon can be expressed in a number of simple forms. A small box with an angled "v" attached gives the position and a direction for the lens. Some directors do away with the box and simply draw two extended lines to show the camera's orientation. Whatever form appeals to you, use it. Just remember to keep it simple.

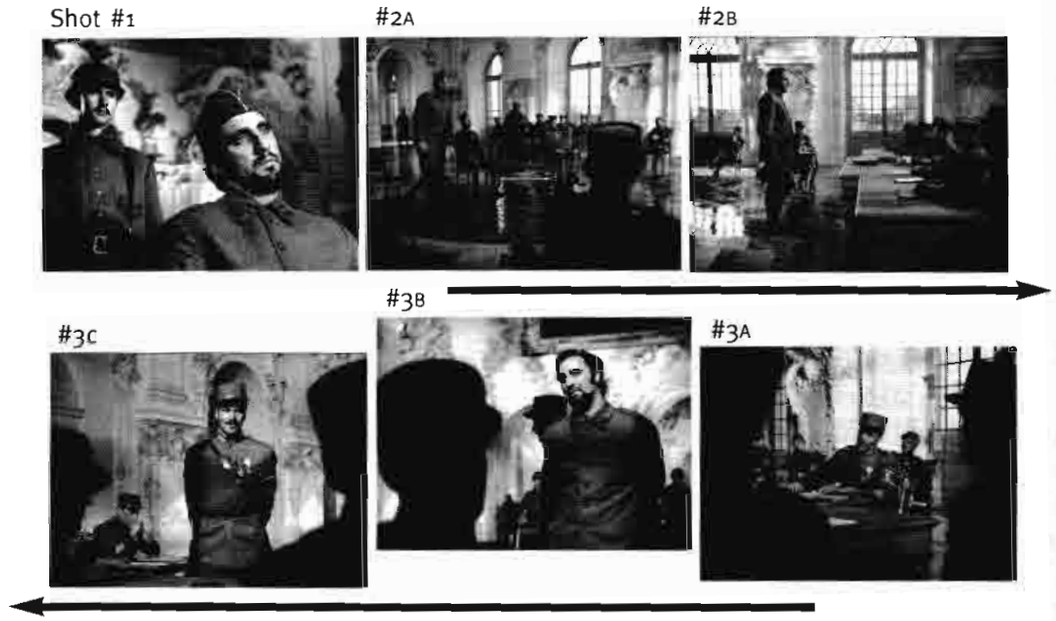
Tracks, pans, Steadicam shots, and other camera moves have their own icons for use in the overhead. Please refer to the diagrams on this page and the next for some additional ideas regarding these and other objects often found in an overhead.



Camera and figure icons for overhead diagrams

Create a Legend

A legend is the key to a diagram's overall interpretation. If you use icons to represent your camera, characters, or their movements, a legend is a helpful guide for the reader to decipher your meaning. The legend can be placed in a corner of the diagram or along the top edge. Just don't let it interfere with the main portion of the information. Since each director, cinematographer, or designer may use his or her own icons for the camera or actors, the legend offers a quick method of identification.



Paths of Glory: Trial Sequence (partial)
Overhead diagrams of camera placement. Compare relationships of camera icons, as numbered, to film frames 1–10.

Exercise: Overhead Diagramming

This project will familiarize you with using icons to map out the positioning of cameras and characters in a scene from a film that has already been shot and edited.

1. Choose a film that you would like to study and know more intimately. You might consider a film directed by Orson Welles, Stanley Kubrick, Alfred Hitchcock, or Jane Campion.

2. Choose a scene from the film that has at least 10 shots. As you watch the scene again, attempt to create a proportional overhead of the environment with all the major walls, doors, furniture, streets, and buildings in place relative to each other.

3. Once this is done, watch the scene a third time, pausing the tape or the disc on each shot. Then, on the diagram, place a camera icon in the appropriate position for each of the shots. If the camera moves during the shot, be sure to indicate both the starting and the ending positions.

Exercise Example: Paths of Glory, the Courtroom Sequence

In the following example, the overhead diagram is accompanied by still frames from *Paths of Glory* (1957), directed by Stanley Kubrick. The geography of the location is revealed in the wide shot at the end of the scene. Examine that image to get a feeling of the room and the actors' placement before exploring the rest of the shot positions in the overhead.

Paths of Glory tells the story of a regiment of French soldiers stationed on the German front in WWI. It is a study in the imbalance of power between the men who actually fight the war and those who make the decisions regarding how it will be fought. The generals are seen living in grand palaces as they decide the fate of soldiers who are dying in the trenches of the battleground.

The commanding officer orders his men to take a German position called "the ant hill." He knows that is an exceedingly difficult if not impossible task, but to further his own political ambitions he sends his men into the battle. They are mowed down before they even get to the German line and the few survivors fall back into the trenches. For failing to achieve this impossible goal, the general orders one man from each group of soldiers to be tried for treason and cowardice. If convicted, they are to be executed.

This scene is from the court martial. Kubrick moves the camera from one subjective position to another, letting us share different points of view, from the defense attorney's desk to the jury box. The overhead diagram is marked with the placement of the few set pieces in the courtroom, the blocking of the characters, and the camera positions numbered in edited shot sequence.

The Image

Storyboard images can come from various sources of inspiration. They can also be expressed in multiple ways. Whether you are an accomplished artist or someone struggling to draw a credible stick figure, there are many techniques that can help you express your vision.

Drawing

There are several highly technical methods to develop imagery these days, but most storyboard images are still created by the old-fashioned method; they're drawn using the familiar tools of paper, pencil, charcoal, and ink. These simple supplies and your mind are all that is necessary to express ideas about composition and camera position to yourself and your collaborators.

Unless you are interested in working as a professional illustrator (which requires a high level of proficiency), creating effective storyboards doesn't necessarily require great drawing skill. There are many simple approaches to drawing that can easily serve those of you who just need a tool for communication.

"Close your eyes and visualize . . ."

Alfred Hitchcock

Lifeboat 1943
director: Alfred Hitchcock

In the following chapters, the perspective and figure notation techniques that will be outlined will enable even a filmmaker with undeveloped drawing skills to sketch understandable, usable storyboard frames. A few days or even hours of investigation will reward you with expanded skills that will help you better communicate visual ideas.

Photograpy, Video and the Computer

I often take a 35mm camera with me when I accompany a director on location, and the zoom lens is my most important attachment. I will frequently pop off shots as I shadow the director and our collaborators around the location. Then it's off to a one-hour photo lab and I have a visual record of the angles suggested on the location scout to work from as I board up the sequences that take place on that set.

Recently I acquired a still digital camera, and that has removed some steps from the process. No buying film, loading, taking to the processing shop, and picking up. Now I simply shoot at a medium resolution (640 by 480 works well) and download straight into the photo manipulation software that came with the camera. These cameras are lightweight and can store over 100 shots on removable storage chips. They are dropping in price each month and there is a real freedom in being "film-free."

Another possibility is to use a video camera to record the angles and then print the images using a video printer or play them through a computer software program that will digitize the imagery. Digital video cameras function much like digital still cameras and can download the frames of your choice into your computer through a cable that most manufacturers supply with the camera.

Digital storyboard (detail) made with Poser and Photoshop

Cliffhanger 1993
drawing: John Mann

Many artists and filmmakers use the computer to organize as well as create original imagery. Software titles such as Adobe Premiere and Adobe After Effects allow the user to import imagery as well as design new frames and place them in an editorial sequence. In Appendix II (page 201) you will find a number of current computer applications. In addition, you may add effects and transitions between shots, such as cross-dissolves or wipes, and then play your scene back in real time. Even audio tracks can be added over the storyboard to increase the presentation's appeal.

Putting It All Together

Whether you choose to develop your imagery by high or low technical methods, keep in mind that the image must agree with the diagram, and they both must be in concert with the shot list. When all elements of the preproduction documents are in agreement, then the readers can easily move from the overhead to the image and from there to the shot list. They can in fact move in any order they care to and have each piece of information build onto the last, rather than having it cause confusion and additional questions.

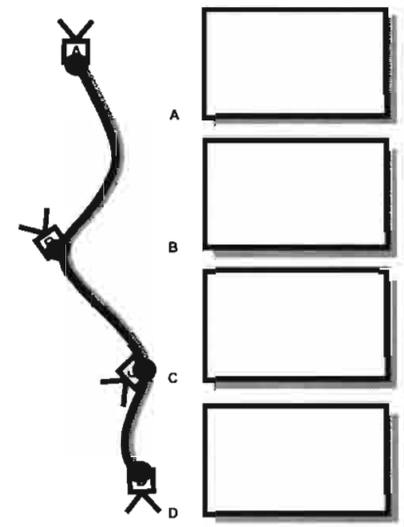
Numbering System

Contemporary shooting scripts in the American film industry are broken down into individual scenes. Each time the script calls for a change in location, it will note that new location with a new scene number. Shots are numbered with a reference to the scenes that they appear in. Often the shot numbers are reset to "1" at the beginning of each scene so that you will have, for instance, Scene 5, shots 1-25, Scene 6, shots 1-26. Scene 7 shots 1-12, and so on. This method eliminates the need to renumber the storyboard if a scene happens to be cut.

The shots should be numbered so that each shot gets a separate designation. Shots that need more than one frame can be then sub-numbered with a lettering system, i.e., shot 5a, 5b, 5c, and so on. When you need to render a cutback, it is useful to just give it the same number that it used when it first appeared in the scene. This way, your storyboard will be numbered according to how many shots are planned rather than by how many cuts are envisioned in the edited sequence.

Sidebar Diagrams

There will be occasions when you plan a complex camera move and would like to include some additional information to clarify your intentions. A diagram included alongside the image can help to pinpoint your idea and eliminate the need to turn back to the overhead, which serves the entire sequence. Either in overhead or side view, this visual aid should have each position that is represented in the images marked with the image number. This way, even complicated Steadicam moves can be boarded using key frames for imagery and camera positions marked in a sidebar diagram for blocking.



Overhead sidebar diagram of movement of Steadicam shot

Text References in the Storyboard

Along with having the shot list accompany the storyboard and overhead as a separate document, it is a good idea to transfer some or all of its information onto the storyboard itself. This usually takes the form of blocks of text that appear beneath or alongside the image. Not having the best handwriting, I take a copy of the shot list, slice it up and then paste the corresponding shot description under each image. This looks neat and makes it easy for someone to find a particular image if they're reading the shot list and want to check an image out on the storyboard.

"I was insecure at first (on *Boxcar Bertha*) because I had been fired from *The Honeymoon Killers* in 1968 after one week of shooting, and for a pretty good reason too. It was a 200 page script and I was shooting everything in master shots with no coverage because I was an artist! ...Of course, not every scene was shot from one angle, but too many of them were, so there was no way of avoiding a film that was four hours long. That was a great lesson. From 1968 to 1972 I was very much afraid that I would get fired again. So when I started *Boxcar Bertha* I drew every scene, about 500 pictures altogether."

Martin Scorsese,
Scorsese on Scorsese

All of this is theoretical until you try it out yourself and see what works for you. The following exercise outlines a short, simple scene, without dialogue, that you can use to practice these ideas.

Exercise: The Storyboard Moment

An Exercise for Creating a Coordinated Shot List, Overhead Diagram, and Storyboard

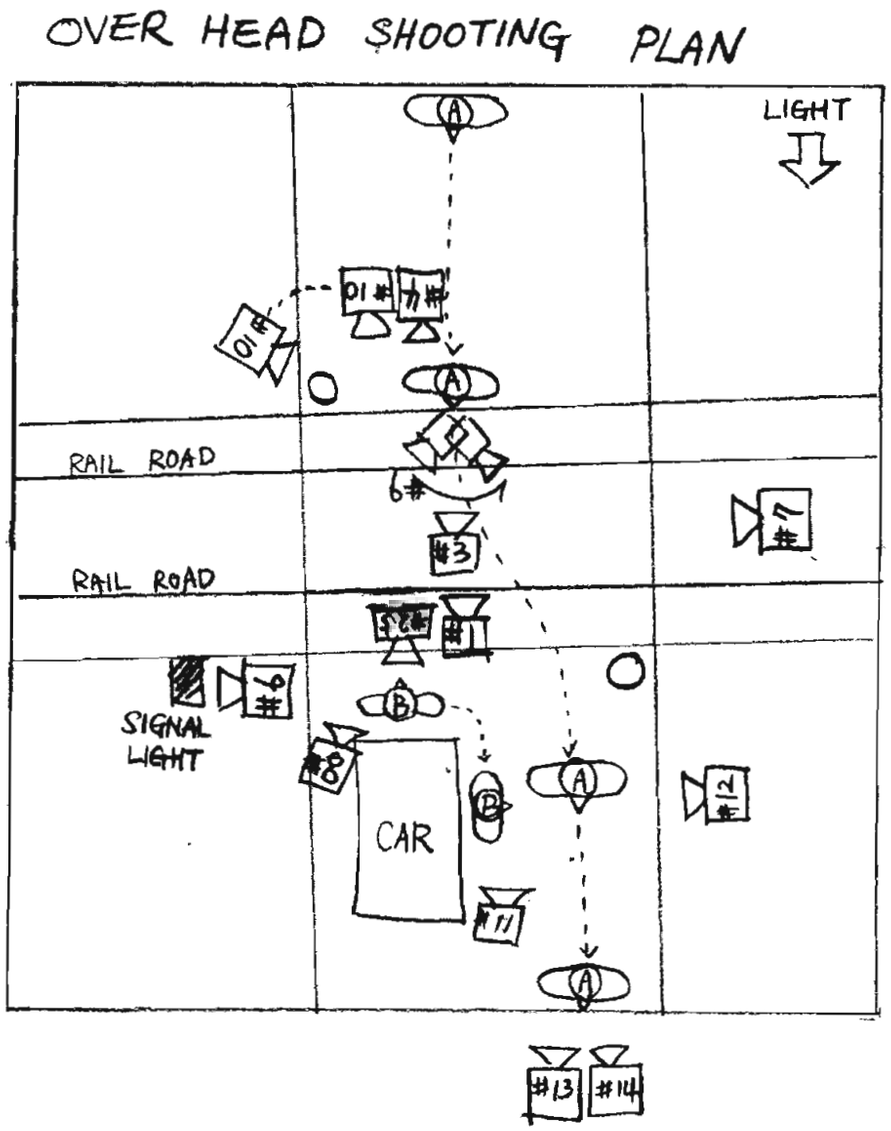
For the following short scene, work out an overhead diagram, a shot list, and images for a 10-14 shot sequence. Mark the camera positions and character blocking on the overhead, and be sure to use the same *aspect ratio* for each of the frames.

1. Exterior, urban street. There is someone standing on a corner.
2. Across the street a door opens and a second person emerges.
3. The second person crosses the street to the first person.
4. They exchange something.
5. They leave, either together or apart.

Notice that the description lacks details. You need to add the story to this. Is it a western? A film noir scene? A romantic comedy? Decide on the gender of the characters, the "something" that they exchange, and feel free to embellish the story's skeletal structure.

Have fun and don't worry about the drawing, just use this exercise to become familiar with the process of working from a shot list and overhead in planning your imagery.

A student example of the Storyboard Moment follows.



Student example:
The Storyboard Moment
project: Roger Lee

Shot List "The Storyboard Moment"

#1 A frontal long shot of a man "A". The man "A" is walking toward the camera.

#2 A frontal Med. low angle shot of a man "B". A man who wears a nice suit is standing in front of a car.

#3 A POV of the man "B". A frontal Med. eye level shot of the man "A".

#4 A O.T.S. of the man "A". A frontal long shot of the man "B".

#5 Shot on a c/u of the man "B". As he turns his head camera PAN right a little. End shot a c/u of the man "B".

#6 A frontal Med. shot of the signal light. light changes from green to red.

#7 A frontal long low angle shot of a train. The train runs toward the camera.

#8 A O.T.S of the man "B". As the train runs across the frame, we cannot see the man "A".

#9 A frontal wide low angle shot of the train. Camera PAN left to show a man in the train who wears the hat. He drops a bottle out of the window.

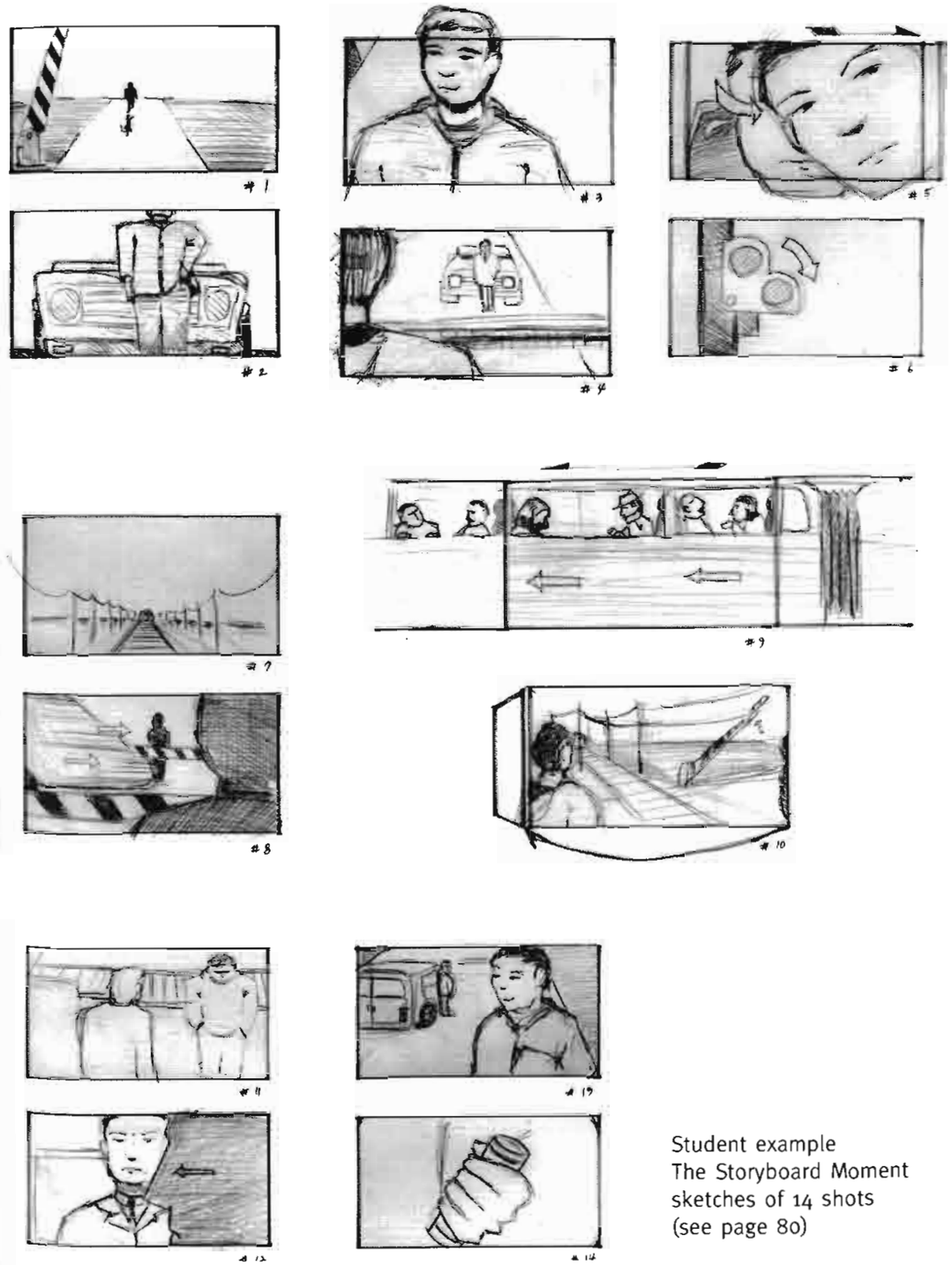
#10 Open shot on a wide rear 3/4 eye level angle of the man "A". the man "A" watch the back of the train. On the right side, we can see the man "B". Camera is TRAVELING to the back side of the man "A". End shot on a O.T.S. of the man "A". A frontal full figure of the man "B".

#11 A frontal high angle of two shot of two men. the man "A"walks toward the camera.

#12 A frontal Med. angle of the man "B". As the man "A" walks into the frame from right side camera changes focus to the man "A". End shot on a profile extreme c/u of the man "A".

#13 A frontal Med. shot of the man "A". On the left side of frame, we also can see the long shot of the man "B". The man "A" put his left hand into his jacket.

#14 A frontal c/u of the man "A"'s hand which holds the bottle.



Student example
The Storyboard Moment
sketches of 14 shots
(see page 80)

Summing Up and Moving On

This chapter has explored the interworkings of Text, Diagram, and Image in the process of preproduction visualization. Each element communicates information by a different method.

- The Text: a shot list which alludes to visual aspects of the frame in words, using a specific vocabulary.

- The Diagram: an overhead view of the set with camera positions and character blocking marked down using icons and arrows. This document is both abstract and concrete in its use of simplified forms and scale drawing.

- The Image: a drawing or photo-based image that describes the composition of the frame. The most concrete of all the storyboard documents, it shows the content of the shot in static or extended frames that refer to movement of the camera.

The next chapter will discuss aspect ratios and outline the technique of extended frames for shots that use a moving camera. The technique of extending frames to show camera movement is a contemporary development in the art of storyboarding that is surprisingly easy to master and adds dynamic movement to your project.

On Fetish Finish...

During my first few months in Los Angeles I was fortunate to get a call from the producer of the first feature on which I had been employed. He asked me if I was available to work on some concept sketches for a project that he was going to pitch at one of the major studios later that month. Although I had a full-time-plus job during the day I leapt at the chance to do some highly creative work. The film was to take place in a variety of locations, ranging from a Las Vegas rock-and-roll heaven to a post-apocalyptic, world-without-music hell. There was lots of room for embellishment. I worked nights and weekends, and when I showed the producer my ideas in rough-sketch form he was delighted. I signed a development contract and was slated to accompany him to the meeting at Columbia Pictures.

Then I began to polish the rough sketches. I took all the drawings and had them transferred to heavy illustration board. Then I spent hours inking and coloring them in a tight, highly rendered style. I then mounted these paintings (they were no longer sketches) and placed them in a new, expensive portfolio I had purchased for my trip to Hollywoodland. Wrong. When I met with the producer a day before our scheduled meeting he took one look at the paintings (of which I was unashamedly proud) and shook his head. "I can't take these into the meeting," he said. "What happened to the drawings?"

I was barely breathing at this point. "I finished them" I offered.

"You killed them" he countered. "I'm pitching a treatment, not a finished project. These paintings make it seem that we've decided how the picture will look. I need to show them suggestions, get them interested in the project, not present them with a finished product."

And with a thanks and a handshake, that was the end of our alliance. The rough sketches had been sacrificed to the icon of tight beauty, and I'd lost out. Then again, the project didn't get funded anyway, but that's not the point. There are times when a loose sketch is simply more appropriate than a heavily rendered image. It's knowing when to suggest a scene quickly rather than carve it out in stone that will save you time and money in the end.

From Word to Image

by
Marcie Begleiter

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and the
Filmmaking
Process

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