“Movies,” “motion pictures,” “moving pictures”—all these phrases suggest the central importance of motion in the art of film. Cinema derives from the Greek word for “motion,” as do the words kinetic, kinesthesia, and choreography—terms usually associated with the art of dance. Yet oddly enough, filmgoers and critics give surprisingly little consideration to movement per se as a medium of communication, as a language system. Like the image itself, motion is usually thought of in terms of gross subject matter. We tend to remember “what happens” only in a general sense. If we were to describe a sequence from a ballet in such vague terms, our discussion would certainly strike the sophisticated dance enthusiast as naive. Yet cinematic sequences—which can be choreographed with just as much or even greater complexity—are seldom appreciated for their kinetic richness and beauty.

Kinetics

Like images, motion can be literal and concrete or highly stylized and lyrical. In the kinetic arts—pantomime, ballet, modern dance—we find a wide variety of movements, ranging from the realistic to the formally abstract. This stylistic spectrum can also be seen in movies. For example, a naturalistic actor like Bruce Willis uses only realistic movements, the same sort that can be observed in actual life. Willis moves so simply in his films that he hardly seems to be acting. Pantomimists are more stylized in their movements. Chaplin, for example, tended to use motion more balletically, more symbolically. A swaggering gait and a twirling cane symbolized Charlie’s (usually fleeting) arrogance and conceit.

Even more stylized are the movements of performers in a musical. In this genre, characters express their most intense emotions through song and dance. A dance number is seldom meant to be taken literally: It’s a stylized convention that we accept as a symbolic expression of certain feelings and ideas. In Singin’ in the Rain, for example, Gene Kelly does an elaborate dance routine in a downpour. He twirls around lampposts, splashes through puddles like a happy idiot, and leaps ecstatically through a pelting rain—literally nothing can dampen the exhilaration of his love. A wide gamut of emotions is expressed in this sequence, with each kinetic variation symbolizing the character’s feelings about his girl. She can make him feel dreamy, childlike, erotically stimulated, brave and forthright, dopey and moonstruck, and finally wild with joy. In some kinds of action genres, physical contests are stylized in a similar manner. Samurai and kung fu films, for example, often feature elaborately choreographed sequences.

Ballet and mime are even more abstract and stylized. A great mime like Marcel Marceau was not so much concerned with expressing literal ideas (which is more properly the province of pantomime) as the essence of an idea, stripped of superfluities. A twisted torso can suggest an ancient tree, bent elbows its crooked branches, fluttering fingers the rippling of its leaves. In ballet, movements can be so stylized that we can’t always assign a discernible content to them, though the narrative context generally provides us with at least a vague sense of what the movements are supposed to represent. On this level of abstraction, however, movements acquire self-justifying characteristics. They are lyrical: That is, we respond to them more for their own beauty than for their function as symbolic expressions of ideas.

In dance, movements are defined by the space that encloses the choreography—a three-dimensional stage. In film, the frame performs a similar function. However, with each setup change, the cinematic “stage” is redefined. The intrinsic meanings associated with various portions of the frame are closely related to the significance of certain kinds of movements. For example, with vertical movements, an upward motion seems soaring and free because it conforms to the eye’s natural tendency to move upward over a composition. Movements in this direction often suggest aspiration, joy, power, and authority—those ideas associated with the
In the contemporary Hollywood cinema, movement still reigns supreme. Directors often kineticize their action scenes by using several techniques simultaneously. In this shot, for example, Batman is rushing manfully toward the camera, an aggressive motion. Surrounding him, hundreds of birds flap and flutter in the air, as though an awesome force of nature is about to explode. Swirling with this kinetic vortex, the camera moves backward swiftly, trying to keep the whirlwind figure in frame. This is a movie that really moves. (Warner Bros./DC Comics)
Stasis and motion—two different worldviews. The image from Temptress Moon portrays a static world of frozen possibilities, where women are expected to be subservient, silent, and still. The world of professional football portrayed in Any Given Sunday is a breathless blur of motion, where the whirling camera is hardly able to keep the (mostly male) characters in focus.
superior portions of the frame. Downward movements suggest opposite ideas: grief, death, insignificance, depression, weakness, and so on.

Because the eye tends to read a picture from left to right, physical movement in this direction seems psychologically natural, whereas movement from right to left often seems inexplicably tense and uncomfortable. The sensitive filmmaker exploits these psychological phenomena to reinforce the dramatic ideas.

Movement can be directed toward or away from the camera. Because we identify with the camera's lens, the effect of such movements is somewhat like a character moving toward or away from us. If the character is a villain, walking toward the camera can seem aggressive, hostile, and threatening, for in effect, he or she is invading our space. If the character is attractive, movement toward the camera seems friendly, inviting, sometimes seductive. In either case, movement toward the audience is generally strong and assertive, suggesting confidence on the part of the moving character (3–31).

Movement away from the camera tends to imply opposite meanings. Intensity is decreased and the character seems to grow remote as he or she withdraws from us. Audiences feel safer when villains move away in this manner, for they thereby increase the protective distance between us and them. In some contexts, such movements can seem weak, fearful, and suspicious. Most movies end with a withdrawal of some sort, either of the camera from the locale or of the characters from the camera.

There are considerable psychological differences between lateral movements on the screen and depth movements—that is, movements toward or away from the camera. A script might simply call for a character to move from one place to another, but how the director chooses to photograph this movement will determine much of its psychological implications. Generally speaking, if the character moves from right to left (or vice versa), he or she will seem determined and efficient, a person of action. Unless the camera is at extreme long shot range, these movements are necessarily photographed in brief takes—shots lasting only a few seconds. Lateral movements tend to emphasize speed and efficiency, so they are often used in action movies (3–6d).

On the other hand, when a character moves in or out of the depth of a scene, the effect is often one of slowness. Unless the camera is at close range or an extreme wide-angle lens is used, movements toward or away from the camera take longer to photograph than lateral movements. With a telephoto lens, such movements can seem hopelessly dragged out. Furthermore, when depth movement is photographed in an uninterrupted lengthy take, the audience tends to anticipate the conclusion of the movement, thus intensifying the sense of tedium while we wait for the character to arrive at his or her destination. Especially when a character's physical goal is apparent—the length of a long corridor, for example—audiences generally grow restless if they are forced to view the entire movement (4–13).

Most classical filmmakers would photograph the action in several different setups, thus compressing the time and space from the inception of the movement to its conclusion. Classical filmmakers also tend to stage movement diagonally, to create a more dynamic trajectory of motion.

The distance and angle from which movement is photographed determine much of its meaning. In general, the longer and higher the shot, the slower the movement tends to appear. If movement is recorded from close and low angles, it seems more intense, speeded up. A director can photograph the same subject—a running man, for example—in two different setups and produce opposite meanings. If the man is photographed in an extreme long shot from a high angle, he will seem ineffectual and impotent. If he's photographed from a low angle in a medium shot, he will seem a dynamo of energy. Although the subject matter in each setup is absolutely identical, the true content of each shot is its form.

Even film critics (who should know better) are often ignorant of these perceptual differences, thinking of movement only in terms of story and gross physical action. The result has
The function of the choreographer is to translate feelings and ideas into movement, sometimes dreamlike and surreal (a), sometimes exquisitely lyrical (b), other times vibrantly energetic (c).

**3–3a OKLAHOMA!** (U.S.A., 1955)
chooreography by Agnes de Mille, directed by Fred Zinnemann.

Though primarily a stage choreographer, Agnes de Mille revolutionized the American musical by introducing lengthy ballet sequences. Often these ballets developed the story and deepened the characterization. This famous “dream ballet,” a faithful translation of her choreography for the landmark 1943 stage musical by Rodgers and Hammerstein, is a projection of the heroine’s anxieties. Like many dreams, it combines concrete realistic details with symbolic stylizations into a surrealist space that’s both familiar and strange. Agnes de Mille exerted an enormous influence on film choreography, especially the work of Gene Kelly. (Magna)

**3–3b AN AMERICAN IN PARIS**
(U.S.A., 1951) with Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron, choreography by Kelly, score by George Gershwin, directed by Vincente Minnelli.

Kelly worked in a broad range of dancing styles—tap, ballroom, modern, and ballet. He was usually at his best in muscular, gymnastic styles, with an emphasis on virile trajectories and bravura leaps. But he was also charming in nonchalant styles, to which he usually added a characteristic swagger. He often incorporated lengthy ballet sequences in his movies, generally a dream sequence or a fantasy. Kelly’s dancing is sexy, with an emphasis on pelvic movements, tensed loins, twisting torsos, and close-to-the-floor gyrations. He usually wore close-fitting clothes to emphasize his well-muscled body. He also allowed his personality to shine through, breaking the formality of the choreography with a cocky grin or an ecstatic smile that’s as hammy as it is irresistible. (MGM)

**3–3c SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS**

Unlike such important film choreographers as Busby Berkeley, Gene Kelly, and Bob Fosse, the versatile Michael Kidd had no signature style. He could work his magic in a variety of idioms. For example, his choreography in this classic musical is athletic and pumped up with testosterone. Kidd also choreographed the romantically ethereal “Dancing in the Dark” number from The Band Wagon, with Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse gliding lyrically through New York’s Central Park like enraptured apparitions. It is one of the all-time great dance numbers in the history of movies. In 1996, Michael Kidd was given an honorary Academy Award for lifetime achievement in film choreography. (MGM)
been a good deal of naive theorizing on what is “intrinsically cinematic.” The more movement
is perceived as extravagant in real life, they argue, the more “filmic” it becomes. Epic events and
exterior locations are presumed to be fundamentally more suited to the medium than intimate,
restricted, or interior subjects. Such views are based on a misunderstanding of movement in
film. True, one can use the terms epic and psychological in describing the general emphasis of
a movie. Even on this general level, though, arguments about intrinsically cinematic subjects
are usually crude. No sensible person would claim that Tolstoy’s War and Peace is intrinsically
more novelistic than Dostoyevsky’s Crime and Punishment, although we may refer to one as an
epic and the other as a psychological novel. In a similar vein, only a naïve viewer would claim
that Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling is intrinsically more visual than a Vermeer painting
of a domestic scene. They’re different, yes, but not necessarily better or worse, and certainly
not through any intrinsic quality. In short, there are some good and bad epic works of art, and
some good and bad psychological works. It’s the treatment that counts, not the material per se.

Movement in film is a subtle issue, for it’s necessarily dependent on the kind of shot used.
The cinematic close-up can convey as much movement as the most sweeping vistas in an ex­treme long shot. In fact, in terms of the area covered on the screen’s surface, there is actually
more movement in a close-up showing tears running down a person’s face than there is in an
extreme long shot of a parachutist drifting fifty feet (3–8).
3–5b THE AVENGERS

Action-adventure films are among the most kinetic of genres, emphasizing motion and speed above all other qualities. The Avengers escalates the thrills by providing multiple protagonists, the Marvel Comics superheroes: Iron Man, the Incredible Hulk, Thor, Captain America, Hawkeye, and the Black Widow. The Irish author Samuel Beckett once famously described the task of the modern artist: “To find a form that accommodates the mess.” Writer-director Joss Whedon managed to find a form by tweaking the Grand Hotel formula (see 8–7a) for this enormously successful action-adventure fantasy. Of course it cost him a huge fortune ($220 million) to create all those special effects cosmic crashes and explosions. But the public responded with enthusiasm. Marvel Comics book fans “will have multiple orgasms,” film critic David Edelstein predicted. The movie raked in over $1.5 billion and is one of the highest grossing films in history. (Paramount Pictures/TM & © 2012 Marvel & Subs. www.marvel.com. Courtesy of Marvel Studios.)
Movement is also dependent on the camera's lens. For example, note the tremendous sense of speed, even in this still photograph. The wide-angle lens exaggerates distances, making normal footstrides seem gigantic. (Canal+/Orly Films/TF1. Photo: Peter Mountain)
Our emotional response to movement can be strongly affected by whether it's staged from the depth of the shot toward the camera, as in 3–6c, or whether the desperate protagonist is photographed running laterally (3–6d) from right to left (or vice versa) in the frame. The in-depth movement seems slower, more frustrating, because it takes a long time to run from the distant "rear" of the scene to where the camera is patiently waiting. The lateral movement seems more decisive and powerful, because moving from one side of the frame to the other takes only a few split seconds. She whizzes past the camera. (Arte/WDR/X-Filme. Photo: Bernd Spauke)
Confining an explosive situation within a small space is almost always thrilling because the characters have nowhere to hide. Most of *Red Eye* takes place on a jet liner, where a young woman (McAdams) is terrorized by a cunning thug (Murphy) who threatens to have her father killed if she doesn’t do as she’s told. Notice how tightly the two actors are confined (3–7a), while director Craven lines up a shot in his video monitor. When the heroine secretly tries to leave a message in the restroom, the menacing villain blocks the narrow aisle, curtailing her movements (3–7b). Exasperated with her repeated efforts to foil his plot, he finally invades her space with more concrete threats (3–7c). In confined scenes such as these, movement is expressed primarily by close shots and by the editing, which energizes an otherwise static-looking space. (Dreamworks)
Unlike movement in dance or the live theater, cinematic movement is always relative. Only gross movements are likely to be perceived in an extreme long shot, whereas the flicker of an eye can rivet our attention in a close-up. In these photos, for example, the path of the boy’s tear covers more screen space than the pilot’s fall from the sky.

Epic and psychological movies use movement in different ways, with emphasis on different shots. Epic movies usually depend on the longer shots for their effects, whereas psychological films tend to use the closer shots. Epics are concerned with a sense of sweep and breadth, psychological movies with depth and detail. Epics often emphasize events, psychological films the implications of events. One stresses action, the other reaction.

Two filmmakers can approach the same story and produce totally different results. Hamlet is a good example. Laurence Olivier’s film version of this play is essentially an epic, with emphasis on the longer shots. Franco Zeffirelli’s version is primarily a psychological study,
dominated by close and medium shots. Olivier's movie emphasizes setting. There are many **long shots**, especially of the brooding castle of Elsinore. Much is made of Hamlet's interaction with this moody locale. We're informed at the beginning of the film that the story is about "a man who could not make up his mind." The long shots are used to emphasize this interpretation visually. Most of them are **loosely framed**, suggesting that Hamlet (played by Olivier) has considerable freedom of movement, freedom to act. But he refuses to use this freedom, preferring to sulk in dark corners, paralyzed with indecision. When he does move, the motion is generally recorded from long distances, thus reinforcing the impotence of the protagonist in relationship to his environment.

Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (with Mel Gibson) is usually photographed in **tightly framed** close and medium shots (3-9). Unlike Olivier's indecisive Hamlet, Gibson's is impulsive and rash, a man who often acts before he thinks. Imprisoned by the confining close shots, the tortured hero virtually spills off the edges of the frame into oblivion. The unstable handheld camera can barely keep up with him as he lunges hyperkinetically from place to place. If the same movements were photographed from a long-shot range, of course, the character would seem to move more normally.

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When the camera is close to the action, as in this photo, even small gestures seem magnified and highly kinetic. Gibson's portrayal of Shakespeare's tragic hero is volatile, exploding with energy—a far cry from the contemplative and indecisive Hamlet made famous in Laurence Olivier's 1948 film version of the play.  (Warner Bros./Icon)
Astaire's dancing style is the epitome of cool—elegant, debonair, effortless. He influenced such classical choreographers as Jerome Robbins and George Balanchine, and such dancers as Rudolf Nureyev, who described Astaire as "the greatest dancer in American history." Balanchine believed that Astaire was the greatest dancer of the twentieth century. His range was extraordinarily broad, encompassing the wit and speed of tap, the airy romanticism of ballroom styles, and later in his career, the ethereal lyricism of modern dance. He insisted on artistic control over his dance numbers. A perfectionist, he also insisted on a six-week rehearsal period before production began. In his nine RKO musicals, he and Hermes Pan worked out the choreography, then taught the steps to Ginger Rogers, who usually came in shortly before production. An irate feminist once pointed out that Rogers did everything Astaire did, only backwards, and in high heels—and with a mere few days of rehearsal. She deserves more credit. The camera is essentially functional: It records the movements of the dancers in lengthy takes, at full-shot range, panning and tilting after them as unobtrusively as possible. Their dance numbers are actually love scenes: He woos his lady kinetically. In fact, they rarely even kiss on screen. She is usually reluctant, cool to his verbal advances, but once the music begins, their bodies undulate and sway in rhythmic syncopation, and soon she's a lost creature, yielding completely to her kinesthetic destiny. (RKO)
In the live theater, these two interpretations would have to be achieved through other means. Although the drama is in part a visual medium, the "frame" size (the confines of the set or the proscenium arch) remains the same for the duration of the play. The live theater, in short, is restricted to "long shots," where such distortions of movement are virtually impossible.

If there is a great deal of movement in the closer shots, its effect on the screen will be exaggerated. For this reason, filmmakers tend to use these ranges for relatively static scenes. The animation of two people talking and gesturing, for example, has enough movement to prevent most medium shots from appearing static.

Hackneyed techniques are almost invariably the sign of a second-rate filmmaker. Certain emotions and ideas—like joy, love, hatred—are so prevalent in the cinema that serious artists are constantly searching for new methods of presentation, methods that transform the familiar into something fresh and unexpected. For example, death scenes are common in movies. But because of their frequency, they are often presented tritely. Of course, death remains a universal concern, one that can still move audiences if handled with any degree of originality and imagination.

One method of avoiding staleness is to convey emotions through kinetic symbolism. Like the choreographer, the filmmaker can exploit the meanings inherent in certain types of movements. Even so-called abstract motions tend to suggest ideas and feelings. Some movements strike us as soft and yielding, for example, whereas others seem harsh and aggressive. Curved and swaying motions are generally graceful and feminine. Those that are straight and direct strike us as intense, stimulating, and powerful. Furthermore, unlike the choreographer, the filmmaker can exploit these symbolic movements even without having people perform them.

If a dancer were to convey a sense of grief at the loss of a loved one, his or her movements would probably be implosive, withdrawn, with an emphasis on slow, solemn, downward movements. A film director might use this same kinetic principle but in a totally different physical context. For instance, in Walter Lang's The King and I, we realize that the seriously ailing king...
Filmmakers often exploit negative space to anticipate action that has not yet occurred. In this photo, for example, the anticipatory camera seems to be waiting for something to fill in the empty space on the right. The unsuspecting protagonist doesn't know that he will soon be threatened by a careening auto that will almost run him down. But we have already been forewarned of the impending action by Polanski's framing. Anticipatory setups like these are especially common in thrillers. They are a kind of warning to the viewer to be prepared: Art as well as nature abhors a vacuum. (Warner Bros.)

Anticipatory setups can suggest a sense of predestination: The camera almost seems to invite the character to climb the stairs because it is waiting for him to fulfill his spatial destiny. The high-angled camera and closed form of the image both reinforce the sense of an awaiting Fate. (Opus Pictures)
(Yul Brynner) has died when we see a close-up of his hand slowly slipping toward the bottom of the frame, disappearing finally off the lower edge into darkness.

In Eisenstein's *Old and New* (also known as *The General Line*), a valuable stud bull dies, and its death has disastrous consequences for the agricultural commune that has purchased the animal. These consequences are expressed through two parallel shots emphasizing the same kinetic symbolism. First, Eisenstein shows us an extreme close-up of the dying bull's eye as it slowly closes. The mournful lowering of the eyelid is magnified many times by the closeness of the shot. Eisenstein then cuts to a shot of the sun lowering on the horizon, its streaming shafts of light slowly retracting as the sun sinks below the earth's rim. Trivial as a bull's death might seem, to the hardworking members of the commune it suggests an almost cosmic significance. Their hopes for a better future die with the animal.

Of course, context is everything in movies. The kind of symbolism in *Old and New* would probably seem pretentious in a more realistic movie. However, the same kinetic principle can be used in almost any kind of context. In Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*, for example, the beheading of the rebel hero (played by Gibson) exploits downward movements in several ways. As the executioner's ax sweeps down toward the hero's neck, we see a close-up of Princess Isabelle, a tear slowly rolling down her face. Just as the ax strikes his neck, we see a handkerchief (a memento of his dead wife's love) fall from his hand to the ground in slow motion—a poetic symbol of his release from life.

In Charles Vidor's *Ladies in Retirement*, these same kinetic principles are used in a totally different context. An impoverished housekeeper (Ida Lupino) has asked her aging employer for financial assistance to prevent the housekeeper's two retarded sisters from being put away in an asylum. The employer, a vain, selfish woman who acquired her wealth as the mistress of a rich man, refuses to help her employee. As a last resort, the desperate housekeeper decides to kill the old woman and use her isolated cottage as a refuge for the good-naturedly dotty sisters. The murder scene itself is conveyed through kinetic symbolism. We see the overdressed dowager playing a ditty at her piano. The housekeeper, who plans to strangle the woman from behind, slowly creeps up while she is singing. But instead of showing us the actual strangulation, Vidor cuts to a medium close shot of the floor, where, one by one, the dowager's pearls drop to the floor. Suddenly, a whole clump of pearls splatter near the old lady's now motionless feet. The symbolism of the dropping pearls is appropriate to the context, for they embody not only the woman's superfluous wealth, but her vanity and selfishness as well. Each falling pearl suggests an elegantly encrusted drop of blood: Drop by drop, her life ebbs away until the remaining strands of pearls crash to the floor and the wretched creature is dead. By conveying the murder through this kinetic symbolism, Vidor prevents us from witnessing the brutal event, which probably would have lost the audience's sympathy for the housekeeper.

In each of these instances, the filmmakers—Lang, Eisenstein, Gibson, and Vidor—were faced with a similar problem: how to present a death scene with freshness and originality. Each director solved the problem by exploiting similar movements: a slow, contracting, downward motion—the same kind of movement that a dancer would use literally on a stage.

Kinetic symbolism can be used to suggest other ideas and emotions as well. For example, ecstasy and joy are often expressed by expansive motions, fear by a variety of tentative or trembling movements. Eroticism can be conveyed through the use of undulating motions. In Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, for example, the provocative sexuality of a woman is suggested by the sinuous motions of her silk veil—a movement so graceful and tantalizing that the protagonist (Toshiro Mifune) is unable to resist her erotic allure. Since most Japanese viewers regard overt sexuality in the cinema as tasteless—even kissing is rare in their movies—sexual ideas are often expressed through these symbolic methods.

Every art form has its rebels, and cinema is no exception. Because movement is almost universally regarded as basic to film art, a number of directors have experimented with the idea of stasis. In effect, these filmmakers are deliberately working against the nature of their
Kurosawa’s movies are rich in symbolic kinetic techniques. He often creates dramatic tensions by juxtaposing static visual elements with a small but dynamic whirlpool of motion. In this scene, for example, the greatly outnumbered protagonist (Toshiro Mifune) prepares to do battle with a group of vicious hoodlums. In static visual terms, the samurai hero seems trapped by the enclosing walls and the human wall of thugs that block off his space. But surrounding the protagonist is a furiously whipping wind (the dominant contrast of the shot), which symbolizes his rage and physical power. (Toho Company)
Expansive outward movements and sunburst effects are generally associated with explosive emotions, like joy or terror. In this shot, however, the symbolism is more complex. The scene occurs at the climax of a furious chase sequence in which the protagonist (Gene Hackman, with gun) finally triumphs over a vicious killer by shooting him—just as he seems on the verge of eluding the dogged police officer once again. This kinetic outburst on the screen symbolizes not only the bullet exploding in the victim's body, but a joyous climax for the protagonist after his humiliating and dangerous pursuit. The kinetic "ecstasy of death" also releases the dramatic tension that has built up in the audience during the chase sequence: In effect, we are seduced into sharing the protagonist’s joy in the kill. (20th Century Fox)
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medium, stripping it of all but the most essential motions. Such filmmakers as Bresson, Ozu, and Dreyer have been described as minimalists because their kinetic techniques are so austere and restrained. When virtually nothing seems to be moving in an image, even the slightest motion can take on enormous significance. In many cases, this stasis is exploited for symbolic purposes: Lack of motion can suggest spiritual or psychological paralysis, as in the movies of Antonioni, for example.

One of the most interesting experiments in restricted movement is found in Buried, which audaciously confines the hero (Ryan Reynolds) to a buried coffin. Reynolds plays a contractor in war-torn Iraq. He has been kidnapped and is being held for ransom. He has roughly ninety minutes of oxygen left, the running time of the movie. Using his cell phone to call for help, and a lighter to see what else is in the coffin—a snake, among other things—the protagonist is in a life-or-death struggle with time. Everyone he calls is either not responsive or unavailable. Director Rodrigo Cortés manages to build suspense with virtually none of the usual techniques available to filmmakers. The entire action takes place in the coffin in real time. It is a triumph of minimalism.

The Moving Camera

Before the 1920s, filmmakers tended to confine movements to the subject photographed. There were relatively few who moved their cameras during a shot, and then usually to keep a moving figure within the frame. In the 1920s, such German filmmakers as F. W. Murnau and E. A. Dupont moved the camera within the shot not only for physical reasons but for psychological and thematic reasons as well. The German experiments permitted subsequent filmmakers to use the mobile camera to communicate subtleties previously considered impossible. True, editing—that is, moving the camera between shots—is faster, cheaper, and less distracting. But cutting is also abrupt, disconnected, and unpredictable compared to the fluid lyricism of a moving camera.

A major problem of the moving camera involves time. Films that use this technique extensively tend to seem slow-moving, since moving in or out of a scene is more time consuming than a straight cut. A director must decide whether moving the camera is worth the film time involved and whether the movement warrants the additional technical and budgetary complications. If a filmmaker decides to move the camera, he or she must then decide how. Should it be mounted on a vehicle or simply moved around the axis of a stationary tripod? Each major type of camera movement implies different meanings, some obvious, others subtle. There are seven basic moving camera shots: (1) pans, (2) tilts, (3) dolly shots, (4) handheld shots, (5) crane shots, (6) zoom shots, and (7) aerial shots.

Panning shots—those movements of the camera that scan a scene horizontally—are taken from a stationary axis point, with the camera mounted on a tripod. Such shots are time consuming because the camera's movement must ordinarily be smooth and slow to permit the images to be recorded clearly. Pans are also unnatural in a sense, for when the human eye pans a scene, it jumps from one point to another, skipping over the intervals between points. The most common use of a pan is to keep the subject within frame. If a person moves from one position to another, the camera moves horizontally to keep the person in the center of the composition. Pans in extreme long shots are especially effective in epic films where an audience can experience the vastness of a locale. But pans can be just as effective at medium and close ranges. The so-called reaction shot, for instance, is a movement of the camera away from the central attraction—usually a speaker—to capture the reaction of an onlooker or listener. In such cases, the pan is an effective way of preserving the cause-effect relationship between the two subjects and of emphasizing the solidarity and connectedness of people.
Movement is not always an automatic dominant. In this scene, for example, a young married couple are reunited at the conclusion of World War II. The husband has made his way back home from a prisoner-of-war camp. While unimportant characters wave and cheer in celebration, the couple cling to each other like survivors of a horrific storm, barely moving while the surrounding characters are blurred into an undulating sea of irrelevance. What matters for these two is the here and now in each other's arms. The rest of the world seems very far away. (Gaylene Preston Productions)
Reverse dolly shots such as this are more unsettling than conventional traveling shots. When we dolly into a scene, we can usually see where we’re headed, to a geographical goal of some sort. But when the camera moves in reverse, sweeping backward as it keeps the running protagonist in frame, we have no sense of a final destination, just the urgent, desperate need to flee. (Paramount Pictures)

The **swish pan** (also known as a flash pan and a zip pan) is a variation of this technique and is often used for transitions between shots—as a substitute cut. The swish pan involves a whirling of the camera at a speed so rapid that only blurred images are recorded (3–2b). Although they actually take more time than cuts, swish pans connect one scene to another with a greater sense of simultaneity than cuts can suggest. For this reason, flash pans are often used to connect events at different locales that might otherwise appear remote from each other.

Pan shots tend to emphasize the unity of space and the connectedness of people and objects within that space. Precisely because we expect a panning shot to emphasize the literal contiguity of people sharing the same space, these shots can surprise us when their realistic integrity is violated. In Robert Benton’s *Places in the Heart*, for example, the final shot of the movie connects the world of the living with the dead. The film is a celebration of the simple Christian values that bind a small Texas community together during the troubled times of the 1930s depression. The final shot takes place in a church. The camera begins to pan the congregation in a slow, sweeping motion down each row of pews. Interspersed among the surviving characters are several that we know to be dead, including a murderer and his victim, worshipping side by side. Though the rest of the movie is realistically presented, this final shot leaps to a symbolic level, suggesting that the unified spirit of the community includes all its members, deceased as well as living.

**Tilt shots** are vertical movements of the camera around a stationary horizontal axis. Many of the same principles that apply to pans apply to tilts: They can be used to keep subjects within frame, to emphasize spatial and psychological interrelationships, to suggest simultaneity, and to emphasize cause–effect relationships. Tilts, like pans, can also be used subjectively in **point-of-view shots**: The camera can simulate a character’s looking up or down a scene, for instance. Since a tilt is a change in angle, it is often used to suggest a psychological shift within a character. When an eye-level camera tilts downward, for example, the person photographed suddenly appears more vulnerable.
Dolly shots, sometimes called trucking or tracking shots, are taken from a moving vehicle (dolly). The vehicle literally moves in, out, or alongside a moving figure or object while the action is being photographed. Tracks are sometimes laid on the set to permit the vehicle to move smoothly—hence the term tracking shot. If these shots involve long distances, the tracks have to be laid or withdrawn while the camera is moving in or out. Today, any vehicular movement of the camera can be referred to as a dolly shot. The camera can be mounted on a car, a train, even a bicycle.

Tracking is a useful technique in point-of-view shots for capturing a sense of movement in or out of a scene. Moving the camera enhances three-dimensional space: it seems to put the spectator into the space. If a filmmaker wants to emphasize the destination of a character's movement, the director is more likely to use a straight cut between the initiation of the movement and its conclusion. If the experience of the movement itself is important, the director is more likely to dolly. Thus, if a character is searching for something, the time-consuming point-of-view dolly helps to elongate the suspense of the search. Similarly, the reverse dolly and the pull-back dolly are effective techniques for surprising the audience with a revelation (3-17, 3-21). By moving back, the camera reveals something startling, something previously off-frame.

3-18 CABARET (U.S.A., 1972) with Joel Grey, choreographed and directed by Bob Fosse.

A former dancer, Fosse was the foremost stage choreographer-director of his generation, winning many Tony Awards for his Broadway musicals. He also directed a half dozen or so movies, including this classic musical, his greatest work on film. Fosse’s dancers are rarely elegant or lyrical. Rather, they are more likely to scrunch their shoulders, hunch up their back, or thrust out their pelvis. Fosse also loved glitzy/tacky costumes—usually accompanied by hats, which were integrated into his dance numbers. He is also the most witty of choreographers, with his dancers snapping their fingers in unison, mincing to a percussive beat like cartoon characters, or locking their knees and pointing their toes inwardly. He often incorporated hand work, in which these appendages seem to have a mind of their own, mocking the sentiments of the rest of the dancer’s body. Above all, Fosse’s dance numbers are sexy—not the wholesome, athletic sex appeal of a Gene Kelly choreography, but something funkier, more raffish, and down-and-dirty. His mature style is uniquely cinematic, not merely an objective recording of a stage choreography. In Cabaret, for example, he intercuts shots from the musical numbers with shots of the dramatic action and vice versa. In some numbers, he cuts to an avalanche of colliding shots to create a choreography that could not exist in the literal space of a theatrical stage. (ABC/Allied Artists)
**3–19 CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON** (Hong Kong/Taiwan/U.S.A., 2000) with Michelle Yeoh (on ground), choreography by Yuen Wo Ping, directed by Ang Lee.

Action and adventure films are among the most kinetic of genres, stressing physical movement above all other qualities. Though the genre is dominated by Americans, the influence of Hong Kong martial arts movies has been enormous. The foremost martial arts choreographer in the world, Yuen Wo Ping (best known for his work in *The Matrix* trilogy and the *Kill Bill* films) makes frequent use of special effects in his choreographies, lending his action sequences a dreamy, surrealistic extravagance. His style is a blending of traditional Hong Kong martial arts, acrobatics, special effects, Chinese opera, and Hollywood dance musicals. His warrior/dancers frequently “vault”—fly or swoop up walls, slither up tall trees, or flit across rooftops like graceful flying creatures. Like Gene Kelly, Yuen Wo Ping frequently incorporates the camera’s movements into his choreographies. He also likes to use women in his action sequences, fusing the erotic with the acrobatic. See also *Planet Hong Kong* by David Bordwell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), a discussion of Hong Kong action genres.  

(Columbia Pictures. Photo: Chan Kam Chuen)

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**3–20 SINGIN’ IN THE RAIN**  
(U.S.A., 1952) with Cyd Charisse and Gene Kelly, choreographed by Kelly, directed by Kelly and Stanley Donen.

Cyd Charisse, tall, elegant, and gorgeous, was the foremost female dancer during MGM’s golden age of musicals, the 1950s. Trained in ballet rather than tap, she was usually at her best in classy numbers. However, she could also convey a sizzling eroticism in such torrid dance numbers as this, and those from *It’s Always Fair Weather* and *The Band Wagon*. Stage choreography is always viewed from a stationary position. Film choreography can be more complex. In movies, the camera can be choreographed as well as the dancers. Kelly’s choreographies often feature lyrical crane shots in which the camera’s swirling motions are dreamily counterpointed by the motions of the dancers, a virtual *pas de trois*.  

(MGM)
A common function of traveling shots is to provide an ironic contrast with dialogue. In Jack Clayton's *The Pumpkin Eater*, a distraught wife (Anne Bancroft) returns to an ex-husband's house, where she has an adulterous liaison with him. As the two lie in bed, she asks him if he had been upset over their divorce and whether or not he missed her. He assures her that he wasn't upset, but while their voices continue on the soundtrack, the camera belies his words by slowly dollying through his living room, revealing pictures and mementos of the ex-wife. The shot is a kind of direct communication between the director and audience, bypassing the characters. These techniques are deliberate authorial intrusions (see also 3-24). They are favored by filmmakers who view their characters with skepticism or irony—Lubitsch and Hitchcock, for example.

One of the most common uses of dolly shots is to emphasize psychological rather than literal revelations. By slowly tracking in on a character, the filmmaker is getting close to something crucial. The movement acts as a signal to the audience, suggesting, in effect, that we are about to witness something important. A cut to a close-up would tend to emphasize the rapidity of the discovery, but slow dolly shots suggest a more gradual revelation. For example, in Clive Donner's *The Caretaker* (also known as *The Guest*), this technique is used several times. Based on Harold Pinter's play, the movie concerns two brothers and an old tramp who tries to set one brother against the other. The dialogue, as is often the case in a Pinter script, is evasive and not very helpful in providing an understanding of the characters. The brothers are different in most respects. Mick (Alan Bates) is materialistic and aggressive. Aston (Robert
“Dance is the activity where the sexual connection is most explicit,” Michael Malone has pointed out, “which is why movies use it to symbolize sex and why skillful dancing is an invariable movie clue to erotic sophistication, a prerequisite for the lover.” Eroticism underlies virtually all dances centered on the couple, whether the style is a sizzling flamenco with bodies literally pressed together as in Strictly Ballroom, or a sexy, pulsating Latin-American number as in Take the Lead, or a formalized 1820 English dance in Vanity Fair, which still allows for some body-on-body contact as well as flirtatious smiles and smoldering eyes. In each, the male courts his partner with sinuously seductive urgency. See Michael Malone, Heroes of Eros: Male Sexuality in the Movies (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979).
Shaw) is gentle and withdrawn. Each brother has a crucial speech in which the camera slowly tracks from a long range to a close-up. Neither of the speeches is really very informative, at least not on a literal level. However, the juxtaposition of the dialogue with the implications of the dolly shot helps the audience to feel that it has finally “arrived” at an understanding of each character.

A stationary camera tends to convey a sense of stability and order, unless there is a great deal of movement within the frame. The moving camera—by its very instability—can create ideas of vitality, flux, and sometimes disorder. Orson Welles exploited the mobile camera to suggest the title character’s dynamic energy in Othello. Early in the movie, the confident Moor is often photographed in traveling shots. In the ramparts scene, he and Iago walk with military briskness as the camera moves with them at an equally energetic pace. When Iago tells him of his suspicions, the camera slows down, then comes to a halt. Once Othello’s mind has been poisoned, he is photographed mostly from stationary setups. Not only has his confident energy drained away, but a spiritual paralysis invades his soul. In the final shots of the movie, he barely moves, even within the still frame. This paralysis motif is completed when Othello kills himself.

When the camera literally follows a character, the audience assumes that it will discover something along the way. A journey, after all, usually has a destination. But traveling shots are often symbolic rather than literal. In Federico Fellini’s 8 1/2, for example, the moving camera is used to suggest a variety of thematic ideas. The protagonist, Guido (Marcello Mastroianni), is a film director who’s trying to put together a movie near a bizarre health spa. Everywhere he turns, he’s confronted by memories, fantasies, and realities more fantastic than anything he can imagine. But he is paralyzed by indecision. What, if anything, from all this copious flux will he select for his movie? He can’t use it all, for it won’t fit together—the materials are too sprawling. Throughout the film, the camera wanders restlessly, prowling over the fantastic locale, compulsively hoarding images of faces, textures, and shapes. All are absorbed by Guido, but he is unable to detach them from their contexts to form a meaningful artistic structure. Until the triumphant final scene, which takes place in his imagination.

Handheld shots are generally less lyrical, more noticeable than vehicular shots. Handheld cameras, which are usually mounted with a harness on the cinematographer’s shoulder, were perfected in the 1950s to allow camera operators to move in or out of scenes with greater flexibility and speed. Originally used by documentarists to permit them to shoot in nearly every kind of location, these cameras were quickly adopted by many fiction film directors as well. Handheld shots are often jumpy and ragged. The camera’s rocking is hard to ignore, for the screen exaggerates these movements, especially if the shots are taken from close ranges.

Crane shots are essentially airborne dolly shots. A crane is a kind of mechanical arm, often more than twenty feet in length. In many respects, it resembles the cranes used by a telephone company to repair lines. It can lift a cinematographer and camera in or out of a scene. It can move in virtually any direction: up, down, diagonally, in, out, or any combination of these.

The Steadicam is a camera stabilizing device that was perfected in the 1970s. It allows cinematographers to move smoothly through a set or location without shaking or bobbing. The Steadicam enables filmmakers to eliminate the need for such expensive devices as cranes and dollies, which can restrict camera movements considerably. The Steadicam also reduced the need for extra crew members to activate the cumbersome old technology of tracks, hand-operated dollies, and many types of cranes. Perhaps the most impressive use of the Steadicam during the 1970s was in Kubrick’s horror classic, The Shining, where the camera was able to follow a young boy’s tricycle as he eerily peddled down empty hotel corridors.

Zoom lenses don’t usually involve the actual movement of the camera, but on the screen their effect is very much like an extremely fast tracking or crane shot. The zoom is a combination of lenses, which are continuously variable, permitting the camera to change from close wide-angle distances to extreme telephoto positions (and vice versa) almost simultaneously.
In film as in the other arts, subject matter usually determines technique. This scene portrays an antiwar protest rally during the Vietnam War era. The scene is deliberately shot in a ragged manner, with shaky handheld shots, fragmentary editing, and open-form asymmetrical compositions that look like newsreel footage captured in the midst of the chaos. A stable, aesthetically balanced shot would be more beautiful, but such a composition would be completely at odds with the essence of the subject matter. (Universal Pictures)

At the opposite end of the kinetic spectrum is stasis—no movement. The ultimate lack of freedom was the institution of slavery, such as this re-creation of a famous slave revolt in 1839. (Dreamworks)
3-24 GANGS OF NEW YORK

The effect of the zoom is a breathtaking sense of being plunged into a scene, or an equally jolting sense of being plucked out of it. Zoom shots are used instead of dolly or crane shots for a number of reasons. They can zip in or out of a scene much faster than any vehicle. From the point of view of economy, they are cheaper than dolly or crane shots since no vehicle is necessary. In crowded locations, zoom lenses can be useful for photographing from long distances, away from the curious eyes of passersby.

There are certain psychological differences between zoom shots and those involving an actual moving camera. Dolly and crane shots tend to give the viewer a sense of entering into or withdrawing from a set: Furniture and people seem to stream by the sides of the screen as the camera penetrates a three-dimensional space. Zoom lenses foreshorten people and flatten space. The edges of the image simply disappear on all sides. The effect is one of sudden magnification. Instead of feeling as though we are entering a scene, we feel as though a small portion of it has been thrust toward us. In shots of brief duration, these differences are not significant, but in more lengthy shots, the psychological differences can be pronounced.

Aerial shots, usually taken from a helicopter, are really variations of the crane shot. Like a crane, the helicopter can move in virtually any direction. When a crane is impractical—usually on exterior locations—an aerial shot can duplicate the effect. Such shots can be much more extravagant, of course, and for this reason they can occasionally be used to suggest a swooping sense of freedom (3-25).
Most aviation movies have been directed by pilots, including Wings (1927), the first winner of the Best Picture Academy Award. It was directed by William Wellman, a veteran of the Lafayette Flying Corps during World War I. Tony Bill has been flying planes since the age of 14, and the aerial footage in Flyboys is spectacular. The movie, set in 1916, is loosely based on fact, and centers on the American volunteers who joined the famous French Escadrille Unit during World War I. The aerial dogfights (pictured) are lyrical as well as heart-poundingly exciting. The footage was captured by the film's cinematographer, Henry Braham, who observed: “The men were flying basically in wicker baskets, completely open. There's a strong element of exposure and human frailty that you don't get in modern action and war movies anymore.” (Electric/Skydance)

Mechanical Distortions of Movement

Movement in film is not a literal phenomenon but an optical illusion. Present-day cameras record movement at twenty-four frames per second (fps). That is, in each second, twenty-four separate still pictures are photographed. When the film is shown in a projector at the same speed, these still photographs are mixed instantaneously by the human eye, giving the illusion of movement. This phenomenon is called the persistence of vision. By simply manipulating the timing mechanism of the camera and/or projector, a filmmaker can distort movement on the screen. There are five basic distortions of this kind: (1) animation, (2) fast motion, (3) slow motion, (4) reverse motion, and (5) freeze frames.

There are two fundamental differences between animation and live-action movies. In animation sequences, each frame is photographed separately, rather than continuously, at the rate of twenty-four frames per second. Another difference is that animation, as the word implies, doesn't ordinarily involve the photographing of subjects that move by themselves. The subjects photographed are generally drawings or static objects. Thus, in an animated movie, thousands of frames are photographed separately. Each frame differs from its neighbor only to an infinitesimal degree. When a sequence of these frames is projected at twenty-four fps, the illusion is that the drawings or objects are moving and, hence, are “animated.”

A popular misconception about animated movies is that they are intended primarily for the entertainment of children—perhaps because the field was dominated for so many years by Walt Disney. In actuality, the gamut of sophistication in the genre is as broad as in live-action fiction films. The works of Disney and the puppet films of the Czech Jiří Trnka appeal to both children and adults. A few of these films are as sophisticated as the drawings of Paul Klee.
Even today, many filmgoers regard animation as a children's genre, but in fact, serious subjects are often explored by contemporary animators. For example, this movie is based on the best-selling series of graphic novels by Marjane Satrapi. Loosely autobiographical, it centers on an upper-middle-class Iranian girl who grew up in Tehran, suffered through the repressive and puritanical Islamic revolution, and then the brutal Iran-Iraq war. She eventually moves to Vienna and Paris, where she encounters a lot of anti-Muslim prejudice. A heart-breaking love affair with a Western boyfriend ends badly when he dumps her. "I survived revolution and war, but a banal love story almost killed me," she confesses. The movie is in black and white, and features a simple style of drawing. Satrapi claimed she was more influenced by German Expressionism and Italian neorealism than by contemporary computer animation. The movie won the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, and in America was nominated for an Oscar as Best Animated Feature. (247 Films/Diaphana Films/France 3 Cinéma)

The Green Wave is also by an Iranian artist, and combines documentary footage with animation. It deals with the repressive regime of his native country and how the theocratic government stifles all dissent. The good ayatollahs even sanctioned the torture and killing of their own citizens—all in the name of God, of course. We're a long way from the reassuring affirmations of Walt Disney and company. (Arte/WDR)
There are even some X-rated animated films, most notably Ralph Bakshi's *Fritz the Cat* and *Heavy Traffic*. An early animated film was *Ballet Mécanique* (France, 1924), directed by Fernand Léger, who is best known for his cubist paintings, but he also dabbled in the avant-garde cinema of his era. In this short film, he created many striking kinetic effects by choreographing ordinary objects, like crockery, dishes, and machine gears, which dance wittily, thanks to the stop-motion animation.

Another popular misconception about animated movies is that they are simpler than live-action films. The contrary is more often the case. For every second of screen time, twenty-four separate drawings usually have to be photographed. Thus, in an average ninety-minute feature, over 129,600 drawings are necessary. Furthermore, some animators use transparent plastic sheets (called *cels*), which they layer over each other to give the illusion of depth to their drawings. Some single frames consist of as many as three or four layers of cels. Most animated films are short precisely because of the overwhelming difficulty of producing all the necessary drawings for a longer movie. Feature-length animated movies are usually produced in assembly-line fashion, with dozens of artists drawing thousands of separate frames. Of course, today many animated movies are created entirely on computers (see 3-27).

Technically, animated films can be as complex as live-action movies. The same techniques can be used in both forms: traveling shots, zooms, angles, various lenses, editing, *dissolves*, etc. The only difference is that animators *draw* these elements into their images. Furthermore, animators also can use most of the techniques of the painter: different kinds of paints, pens, pencils, pastels, washes, acrylics, and so on.

Robert Zemeckis is a modern pioneer in the field of animation. In *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, he combined live-action characters with animated characters within the same frame without disjunctions in style. In *The Polar Express*, he used a technique called "performance capture." A live actor, such as Hanks (who plays six characters in the film) is wired up with glass beads so that his gestures and facial movements can be translated to a computer, which then plasticizes the image into a character who seems both real and animated. (*Castle Rock Entertainment*)

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**3-27a THE POLAR EXPRESS**
By the time he made *Beowulf*, Zemeckis had refined the performance capture technique considerably. The movie features images that are more realistic, less cartoonish, yet still stylized, otherworldly, and mysterious. Over 450 graphic designers contributed to the film's dazzling CGI effects. The movie is a loose adaptation of an eighth-century Old English heroic saga. The film version is as violent and primitive as the original, but far more erotic, thanks to the slithery sexiness of Angelina Jolie, who plays Grendel's mother. She's a villainess far more treacherous than the rather bland characterization in the poem. The movie grossed over $196 million worldwide. (Paramount Pictures/Shangri-La)

One of the most successful instances of combining live action with animation is *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, directed by Robert Zemeckis. Richard Williams was the director of animation for the project, which involved over 320 animators. Nearly 2 million drawings were made for the movie. Some single frames were so complex that they required two dozen drawings. The integration of real details with cartoon characters is startling. A cartoon rabbit drinks from a real coffee cup, which rattles. Cartoon characters throw real shadows on the set. They bump into live people, knocking them down.

Fast motion is achieved by having events photographed at a slower rate than twenty-four fps. Ordinarily, the subject photographed moves at a normal pace. But when the sequence is projected at twenty-four fps, the effect is one of acceleration. This technique is sometimes used to intensify the natural speed of a scene—one showing galloping horses, for example, or cars speeding past the camera. Early silent comedies were photographed before the standardization of cameras and projectors at twenty-four fps, and therefore their sense of speed is exaggerated at present-day projector speeds. Even at sixteen or twenty fps, however, some of these early directors used fast motion for comic effects.
A number of commentators have referred to the contemporary animation scene as a golden age, encompassing a broad spectrum of styles and techniques from all over the world. Tim Burton's distinctive animated style employs stop-action techniques to bring his puppets and settings to life. *Corpse Bride* features characters who are only about twenty inches high in miniature sets. Stop-action animation is a technique that harks back to Méliès's time in the late nineteenth century. *(Warner Bros.)*

There's hardly a primary color in all of *Chicken Run*, a clay-animation fable of infinite subtlety, not only in its color spectrum, but its sophisticated script and witty dialogue as well. Note the elongated shadows and sculptural sidelighting. The image looks as though it was photographed in the "magic hour." Of course, in a studio, any time can be the magic hour. *(Dreamworks/Pathé/Aardman Animation)*
According to the French aesthetician Henri Bergson, when people act mechanically rather than flexibly, comedy is the result. People, unlike machines, can think, feel, and act reasonably. A person's intelligence is measured by his or her ability to be adaptable. When behavior becomes machinelike and inflexible, we find it laughable. One aspect of machinelike behavior is speed: When a person's movements are speeded up on film, he or she seems unhuman, ridiculous. Dignity is difficult in fast motion, for acceleration robs us of our humanity. The Upton Inn mixup in Richardson's *Tom Jones* is funny precisely because the fast motion captures the machinelike predictability of all the characters: Tom flies from Mrs. Waters's bed, Mr. Fitzpatrick flies off the handle, Squire Western screams for his daughter, and the servants scream for their lives (3–30).

**3–29 SHREK** (U.S.A., 2001) special effects by Pacific Data Images, directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson.

Winter of the first Oscar given for Best Animated Feature, *Shrek* combines computer animation with heightened (i.e., computer-enhanced) reality. The F/X wizards produced characters of striking sculptural roundedness, as though the images were in 3-D. The creatures (voiced by Eddie Murphy and Mike Myers) almost seem real. (*Dreamworks*)

**3–30 TOM JONES** (Britain, 1963) with George Cooper, Albert Finney, and Joyce Redman; directed by Tony Richardson.

Richardson uses fast motion in this movie when he wishes to emphasize the machinelike behavior of the characters—especially of the horny hero (Finney) whose sex drive often overpowers his judgment. In the famous Upton Inn mixup (pictured), Tom is rudely interrupted in his nocturnal amours by the hot-tempered Mr. Fitzpatrick. The sequence is shot in fast motion to heighten the comedy: The drunken Fitzpatrick flails at our besieged hero as his terrified paramour screams for her life, thus waking all the inhabitants of the inn, including Sophie Western, the only woman Tom truly loves. (*Woodfall*)
Slow motion is often used in movies about athletic events. The technique can prolong the balletic grace of an athlete’s movements. In other cases, such as this, the slow motion heightens the agonized strain in every muscle of an athlete’s body as he hurlts himself against the finish wire. (Warner Bros. Photo: Linda R. Chen)

Slow motion, of course, prolongs time—sometimes unbearably, as in this shot. The hero is racing to the rescue of the woman he loves, who is under attack during a sudden Indian ambush. A weapon in each hand, photographed at the aggressive full-front position, with the foreground and background an irrelevant blur, Hawkeye (Day-Lewis) is totally focused on his enemy, but the slow-motion photography seems to hold him back—as an agonizing eternity transpires. (20th Century Fox/Morgan Creek. Photo: Frank Connor)
Violence as dance. The great Japanese master, Akira Kurosawa, sometimes used slow motion to convey violence, especially in scenes of battle. Zwick also uses this technique, paradoxically converting a scene of brutality and bloodshed during a famous Civil War battle into a mesmerizing ballet of blasted limbs and flying trajectories of debris. Zwick also used slow motion in many of the battle scenes of The Last Samurai (2003). (Tri Star)

Slow-motion sequences are achieved by photographing events at a faster rate than twenty-four fps and projecting the filmstrip at the standard speed. Slow motion tends to ritualize and solemnize movement. Even the most commonplace actions take on a choreographic gracefulness in slow motion. Where speed tends to be the natural rhythm of comedy, slow, dignified movements tend to be associated with tragedy. In The Pawnbroker, Sidney Lumet used slow motion in a flashback sequence, showing the protagonist as a young man on an idyllic country outing with his family. The scenes are lyrical and otherworldly—too perfect to last. When violent scenes are photographed in slow motion, the effect is paradoxically beautiful. In The Wild Bunch, Sam Peckinpah used slow motion to photograph the grisliest scenes of horror—flesh tearing, blood spattering, horses toppling, an almost endless variety. By aestheticizing these scenes of ugliness, Peckinpah demonstrates why the men are so addicted to a life of violence when it seems so pointless. Violence becomes almost an aesthetic credo, somewhat as it's portrayed in the fiction of Hemingway. Slow-motion violence became virtually a trademark in the works of Peckinpah (4–37).

Reverse motion simply involves photographing an action with the film running reversed. When projected on the screen, the events run backward. Since Méliès's time, reverse motion has not progressed much beyond the gag stage. In The Knack, Richard Lester used reverse motion
Slow motion etherealizes movement, lending it a dreamy, otherworldly grace. Throughout this musical, slow motion is used in the dance numbers to emphasize the individuality rather than the uniformity of the dancers. Twyla Tharp's choreography is organic to the story, which deals with the freewheeling lifestyle of some 1960s hippies. The dance numbers are loose and spontaneous, with each dancer doing his or her own thing—like jiggling links in a chain. (United Artists)

as a comic choreographic retake for a quick laugh when an egg "returns" to its shell. One of the most expressive uses of reverse motion—combined with slow motion—is in Jean Cocteau's Orpheus. The protagonist has taken a journey into Hell to regain his lost wife. He makes a serious blunder while there and expresses a wish to return to his original point of decision to correct his mistake. Magically, he is whisked into the past before our eyes, as the previous sequence unfurls backward in slow motion—to the physical setting where the fateful decision was made. The reverse motion in this sequence is a good instance of how space can be temporalized and time spatialized in the cinema.

A freeze frame suspends all movement on the screen. A single image is selected and reprinted for as many frames as is necessary to suggest the halting of motion. By interrupting a sequence with a freeze shot, the director calls attention to an image—offering it, as it were, for our delectation. Sometimes, the image is a fleeting moment of poignancy that is over in a fraction of a second, as in the final shot of Truffaut's The 400 Blows. Directors also use freeze frames for comic purposes. In Tom Jones, Richardson freezes the shot of Tom dangling on a noose while the off-screen narrator urbaneley explains to the audience why Tom should not hang until his tale is finished.

In other instances, the freeze frame can be used for thematic purposes. The final image of Richardson's The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner is frozen to emphasize the permanence of the protagonist's status at the end of the picture. Freeze frames are ideal metaphors for dealing with time, for in effect, the frozen image permits no change. Near the end of the
This notorious freeze-frame parody of Leonardo’s Last Supper is only one example of Buñuel’s savage assault on the Catholic Church, sentimental liberalism, and middle-class morality. His sardonic wit is often shocking, blasphemous. For example, the context of this freeze frame is a drunken orgy of beggars who pose for a group photo to the accompaniment of Handel’s Messiah (the Christ figure in the center is a blind man). A woman reeling in boozy stupor “snaps” the picture not with a camera but her genitals. This raucous gesture throws the “disciples” into paroxysms of laughter. Though a nonbeliever, Buñuel was able to infuse these sacrilegious jokes with a sense of scandal. “Thank God I am still an atheist,” he once sighed. (Films 59/Alatriste/UN/NCI)

western True Grit, for example, Henry Hathaway froze a shot of the protagonist (John Wayne) and his horse leaping over a fence. By halting the shot at the crest of the leap, Hathaway creates a metaphor of timeless grandeur: The image suggests a heroic equestrian statue, immune from the ravages of time and decay. Of course, the total absence of movement is often associated with death, and Hathaway’s freeze frame also implies this idea. Perhaps a more explicit metaphor of death can be seen in the conclusion of the western Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, where the two heroes (Paul Newman and Robert Redford) are “frozen” just before they are shot to death. The freeze frame suggests an ultimate triumph over death.

Most of these mechanical distortions were discovered by Méliès. For many years after, they were largely ignored by the majority of commercial filmmakers until the late 1950s, when the French New Wave directors revived them. Since then, these techniques have become part of every filmmaker’s artistic arsenal.

In watching a movie, we ought to ask ourselves why a director is moving the camera during a scene. Or why the camera doesn’t move. Does the director keep the camera close in to the action, thus emphasizing motion? Or does he or she de-emphasize movement through the use of longer shots, high angles, and slow-paced action? Are the movements in a scene naturalistic or stylized? Literal or symbolic? Are the camera’s movements smooth or choppy? Lyrical or disorienting? What are the symbolic implications of such mechanical distortions as fast and slow motion, freeze frames, and animation?

Movement in film is not simply a matter of “what happens.” The director has dozens of ways to convey motion, and what differentiates a great director from a merely competent one is not so much a matter of what happens, but how things happen—how suggestive and resonant are the movements in a given dramatic context? Or, how effectively does the form of the movement embody its content?