

Includes Interactive
Online 3D Storyboards

film directing
cinematic motion

2ND EDITION

steven d. katz

Author, Film Directing Shot by Shot

“*Cinematic Motion* is invaluable help for the director’s trickiest and most central job: blocking the actors to the camera. I recommend it highly.”

**Judith Weston, Author, *Directing Actors* and
*The Film Director’s Intuition***

“The presence of some of the most legendary mentors of the film world and the real-world set situations lift the written workshops in this extremely useful reference and instruction manual off the page and into the studio. Both Digital Video aficionados and students will find this information especially handy to add feature-film level design and polish to their staging.”

**Anezka Sebek, Fulltime Faculty and
Coordinator, Animation and Broadcast Design
at the Parsons School of Design, a division of
New School University**

“There are a precious few ways to learn the subtleties of filmmaking and challenges of cinematography: watch great movies repeatedly; go to a great film school; read Steven D. Katz’s *Film Directing: Shot by Shot* and *Cinematic Motion*. The practical and pragmatic information is balanced by the insights of great filmmakers Allen Daviau, Ralph Singleton, and John Sayles. *Cinematic Motion* is the definitive workbook for both the aspiring as well as the accomplished filmmaker.”

**John McIntosh, Chair, Computer Art, School
of Visual Arts, New York City**

“One of a handful of scrupulous tomes on the subject, *Cinematic Motion* gracefully sidesteps the quicksand of marketing hype and plots a course on the solid ground of craft and methodology.”

**Scott Billups, Filmmaker and Author, *Digital
Moviemaking 2nd Edition***

“Although budding filmmakers soon learn to toss around terms such as ‘mise en scene’ — with a vague sense of what that means — in *Cinematic Motion* Katz gives you the real thing: He succeeds in breaking down the daunting tasks that a director faces when choreographing actors and the camera on set. Interviews with leading directors, production managers, and others add crucial examples to the book’s lessons.”

Dan Ochiva, *Millimeter* magazine

“There are few authors or books that reach ‘must read’ status. The works of Steven Katz have achieved this appellation. *Cinematic Motion* is a remarkable tutorial for any aspiring or working director. Clear, practical, and wise, the book is an essential guide to understanding and implementing staging for the motion picture medium.”

Sam L Grogg, Ph.D., Dean, AFI Conservatory

cinematic motion

film directing

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a workshop for staging scenes

2nd edition

by
steven d. katz

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for my parents



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Many thanks to my friends at Virtus Corporation for creating Virtus Walk Through, a magical visualization tool that allowed me to create illustrations that would otherwise have been impossible. I am particularly indebted to Alan Scott at Virtus for his technical support.

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NOTES ON THE NEW EDITION

Cinematic Motion was written in 1991, a very long time ago in technology years. Over the past decade the computer, or, more accurately, desktop production, has changed the way movies are made and the way filmmakers work. While the purpose of the book, illustrating staging solutions and their practical implications, is still the same, it was necessary to add a chapter on how digital technology can be used to visualize scene and staging design.

As a counterbalance to the chapter on technology a second new chapter has been added that covers script breakdown, a critical process that owes nothing to technology and everything to storytelling and character development. So, while the chapter on digital film design points to the future, the foundation for using the new tools is firmly rooted in timeless concepts. This balance between science and art has been part of filmmaking since the turn of the century and continues to define the craft of a director.



INTRODUCTION

Cinematic Motion started out as a reference manual for filmmakers. It was described to the publisher as “A collection of blocking strategies covering a wide range of dramatic situations and camera styles, an easily-accessed resource for directors at every level.”

This would be fun to write, I thought, with lots of opportunities for dreaming up camera moves and complex sequence shots. Naturally, I wouldn't have to worry about overtime or meal penalties because in the story-board panels of my imaginary movie, the budget was unlimited. On this best of all possible sets, the sun would shine through perfect clouds, the crew would never grumble about lunch and magic hour, when needed, would last for as long as there was film.

But before many pages were typed, I realized something was missing from the staging examples. They were too easy to create. Perhaps I should add a few practical words about equipment failure or some comments about the long hours required for rigging lights and, Oh, let's not forget about shooting in 105 degree heat... .

As reality crept into the designing of the staging diagrams, my role became that of a production manager. Like the muse in reverse, I found myself pointing out the potential difficulties of each staging strategy and asking whether all that coverage was really necessary. At last, I began to appreciate the production manager's unenviable task of giving the director all he wants—at a price the producer can afford.

This is how the reference manual on staging became a survival guide for filmmakers. In its final form, the primary focus of the book remains the staging ideas chosen for their artistic merit, but now there are practical evaluations of the staging examples so that directors can better develop a sense of what is the right solution for any given situation.

Hopefully, this is a fairer book. Fairer because, by including the cost in time and artistic energy attached to any staging approach, a filmmaker will not place impossible demands on himself or his collaborators. In the movies, it is important that your artistic aims be true as well as high.

None of this would matter if the staging examples in this book were formula solutions for simple coverage. They're not. This book is for risk-takers. Some of the staging examples are technically simple, others require substantial choreography. But the underlying assumption is that the filmmaker wants to explore the dramatic potential of the camera to the fullest.

Every day on the set a director asks himself, “How can I best stage this scene?” And every day the production manager asks the director, “Can you get all this shot by the end of the day?” The success of any movie is greatly dependent on how these questions are resolved and ultimately it is up to the director to find the right answers. Knowing how to get all your camera setups within the day's

shooting schedule comes from experience, experience which ultimately affects a director's creative success.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Even though storyboards have been the accepted way of illustrating shot-flow design in the movies for nearly sixty years, there is no standard system of notation. Each production illustrator develops his own way of representing the complex moving action in a shot using arrows, panels within panels, multiple positions of moving figures, written description and any other technique that makes a sequence clear.

Oftentimes, 4 or 5 separate panels are required to describe just a few seconds of action and there is always the danger that the overall feeling of a scene is lost when too much description is used. Even so, the prime purpose of a storyboard is to convey specific and technically-accurate descriptions of cinematic technique. While every storyboard artist hopes that his work “reads” well, it is often necessary to look over the panels more than once to understand the choreography, which brings us to the notational method used in this book.

For the sake of clarity, every storyboard in this book is accompanied by a diagram of the scene space. The story-boards show what the audience will see on the screen, while the diagrams show the camera path and choreography required to stage the action taking place in the story-boards. Some of the choreography is complex so you will probably have to look through a storyboard more than once to understand how the scenes were staged.

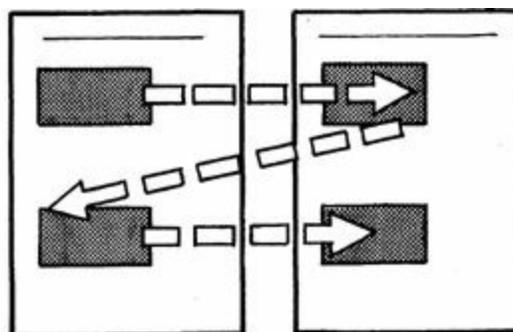
To help you better understand the illustrations, I’ve included a description of how the storyboards and the various symbols are used throughout the book. If you spend some time familiarizing yourself with the techniques shown below, you will find it much easier to use the book.

STORYBOARDS

The storyboards used in this book are drawn in the 1:1.85 wide screen aspect ratio which is the typical release format for most American films.

The page layout for the staging illustrations is a two-page spread with top and bottom pairs of storyboard/diagram illustrations.

Storyboards
appear on left
hand pages
and are
numbered.



Diagrams
accompanying
the storyboards
appear on right
hand pages.

Description of each shot is printed directly underneath the storyboard panel. When dialogue is used, it appears underneath the description, as shown below.

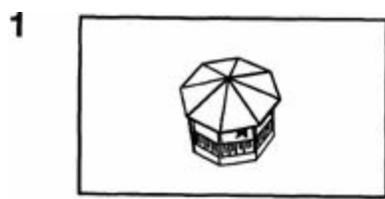


Description appears here.

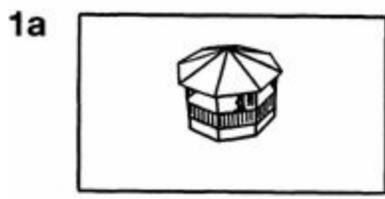
ANN: Dialogue appears here.

All storyboards are numbered and the accompanying set diagram will have the same number following the letter D. The number for storyboards and diagrams refers to the shot. Sometimes several storyboards are required to explain sequential stages of a dolly shot and in this case the shot number won't change. Instead, the various panels are distinguished alphabetically.

For instance, the first of four panels showing an uninterrupted crane shot would be numbered. In this example shot 1 is the crane move and storyboard panels 1a through 1c show different stages in the shot. Ellipsis... is included in the description as an added reminder that the shot is continuing as shown below:



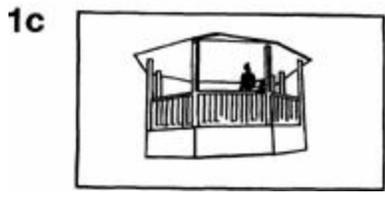
1



1a Consecutive letters after a number...



1b... indicate that the shot...



1c... is continuing.

2 A change in number indicates a shot change.

To make a shot change clear, Cut To: appears at the beginning of the new shot description.

ARROWS OUTSIDE THE FRAME

Arrows appearing on the right side of the storyboard frame indicate the movement of the camera. The arrows are drawn in perspective to show if the camera is dollying in or out, dollying left or right.

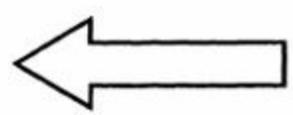
If the camera movement is a lateral pan, the arrow will not be drawn in perspective. Examples are shown below.



**DOLLY
IN**



**DOLLY
OUT**



PAN



**DOLLY
AROUND**



CRANE

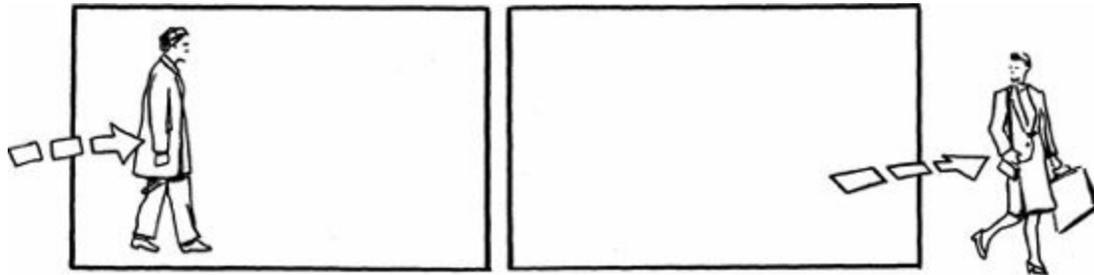
ARROWS INSIDE THE FRAME

An outline arrow indicates the movement of a subject.

If a subject enters the frame from off-screen, the arrow will pass through the border of the frame.

Similarly, if a subject exits the frame, the arrow will pass beyond the border of the frame.

An arrow path that begins at a subject, indicates the path that the subject takes.

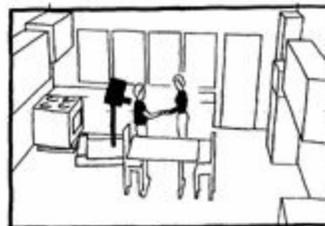


SET DIAGRAMS

A perspective overview of the set or scene space will be included to help clarify the choreography. These diagrams are based on computer models created in Virtus Walk Through, a computer program that is rapidly becoming a director's best visualization tool.

In most cases, these diagrams will show the entire set or location from the perspective of a person standing behind the camera. If a moving shot is being illustrated, the set diagrams will include the path of the camera.

D1



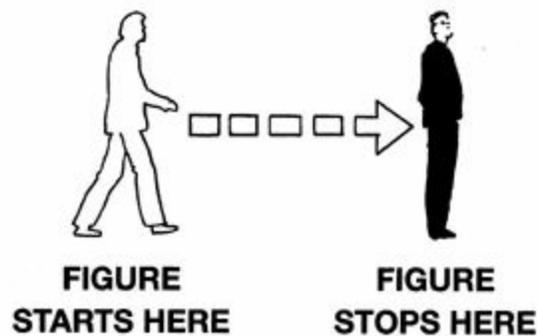
There are two types of camera symbols. The first shows the outline of the camera. This indicates the beginning of a camera move. The second type of camera symbol is solid black. This indicates the final position of a move.

In a few cases, when the camera movement is complex, intermediate stages of camera movement are shown. This will be indicated by multiple outline cameras.

A pan move is indicated by a camera symbol with a curved arrow through the middle.

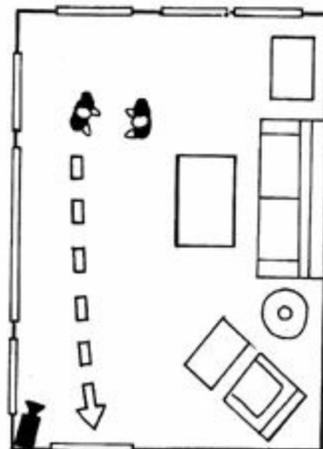


The path of moving actors is shown by broken lines connecting outline and solid figure symbols. As with the moving camera, outline symbols indicate the starting point of an actor's move while a solid black symbol indicates the final position for an actor.



SCHEMATIC DIAGRAMS

Accompanying some of the storyboards are aerial views of the set or location; The general rule for symbols already established will also apply to the set diagrams. This means that outline symbols (for camera and actors) indicate the beginning of a move while solid black symbols indicate the end of a move.



CONSISTENCY

In the majority of illustrations the format and symbols shown here will be followed, however, there are exceptions. In these special cases, notes will appear alongside illustrations. For example, there were times when a solid black camera would have been difficult to see in front of a dark background and in those instances the outline of the camera was used instead.

My aim in *Cinematic Motion* was to write a book accessible to both new and seasoned directors. Therefore, the stagings presented in the following chapters are explained with the expectation that the fundamentals of editing, photography, cinematic technique and motion picture production are familiar to the reader. This includes a knowledge of shot types, the use of the shot, reverse shot pattern, the line of action and other stylistic conventions of the continuity style.

Chapters 1, and 3, however, offer an overview of staging theory which is not absolutely necessary to understand the staging examples if you are already familiar with basic camera movement.

The ideas presented here tend to emphasize camera choreography and the master shot rather than cutting as a way of varying the viewing angle and directing the viewer's attention. You will, however, find both approaches covered in the book, since in actual practice, they are complementary techniques.

If you are interested in the staging possibilities of the static frame, the subject has been covered in many books on film including my own, *Shot by Shot*, which, in an informal way, lays the groundwork for the stagings in *Cinematic Motion*.

part 1