
Labelling a Shot

By Dennis Hanlon

A few years ago, I was struck by a certain type of shot. A character in the frame turns his or her head to look at something and this head movement initiates a camera movement, usually a pan of one sort or another. Sometimes it takes the form of a 360-degree pan that completes its arc by coming to rest again on the character's face (*Sixty-nine* [Pen-Ek Ratanaruang, 1999]). Other times it is a whip-pan (*Bend of the River* [Anthony Mann, 1952]) or a pan combined with a tracking shot (*Vertigo* [Alfred Hitchcock, 1958]). In each instance, though, the camera movement seems to be a response to a single character turning their head to redirect their gaze, and the camera moves to take in the object of the character's attention. Teaching courses on Latin American and Asian cinema, I noticed that this particular shot was not unique to US cinema and began compiling examples in a folder. My provisional name for this kind of shot was the "cast gaze". I liked the symmetry, as well as the pun on cast; further, the camera seemed to move at times like a fishing line that has been cast, as if the character had a rod somehow attached to their head. As a placeholder, this name worked, but it failed to address what made these shots singularly interesting- that they are both and neither objective and subjective simultaneously.

Failing to devise a more appropriate name, it occurred to me that the "Labelling" issue of *Frames* would be a good opportunity to explore this shot. After collecting six examples from US, Thai, South Korean, Hong Kong and Argentine cinema (along with three further examples suggested to me), I made them accessible to the staff and students of the University of St Andrews Department of Film Studies. I asked for volunteers to choose one of the clips, come up with a name for the shot, and justify that name in 250 or fewer words. My thinking was that given the diversity of academic backgrounds and "home" cinemas among the possible contributors, a variety of names would be given to the shot that would reveal the contributor's methodological and historical approaches to Film Studies. As you will see from the entries below, my hunch proved correct.

The Free Indirect Shot

Dr Dennis Hanlon, Lecturer at University of St Andrews

In free indirect discourse in literature, while indirectly reporting a

character's speech, the language of the narrator assumes the language of a character. In "The Cinema of Poetry" (1965), Pier Paolo Pasolini argued that free indirect discourse was nearly impossible in the cinema. In any given piece of literature, as long as there were class and cultural differences between the typical language of the narrator and that of the characters, free indirect speech was marked linguistically. In cinema, however, there are no class or cultural distinctions in looking (a point a film theorist like Jorge Sanjinés would take issue with). For Pasolini, free indirect discourse only existed in cinema made by middle class filmmakers about middle class subjects, i.e. the art cinema of the time, and it appears only when a character's neurosis is made visible. An example he gives is *Red Desert* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964), for instance, when Giuliana (Monica Vitti) and Zeller (Richard Harris) leave an empty apartment and encounter a fruit stand on which the fruit is all a uniform grey.

To the extent that the camera narrates to us through what it shows and how it shows it, this type of shot functions somewhat like free indirect discourse. If, as Pasolini notes, the POV shot is the cinematic equivalent of direct discourse, i.e. characters' speech in inverted commas, this type of shot is somewhere in between. The camera is commanded by the head movement of the character to assume his or her looking relations without recourse to POV.

The Relay Camera Movement

Chris Fujiwara, First-year PhD student

During a party at the Hadley mansion in Douglas Sirk's *Written on the Wind* (1956), Kyle Hadley (Robert Stack) receives from his doctor (Edward Platt) the news that he is impotent. Kyle turns to see his wife (Lauren Bacall) and his best friend (Rock Hudson) dancing together. In a kind of delegation or relay, Kyle's movement is communicated to the camera, which pans and tracks to reframe the dancing couple.

The economy of Stack's performance is admirable. By the same subtle shift in the distribution of body weight that conveys his intense physical reaction to what he has learned, he allows the doctor, hitherto immobilized by Kyle's insistent gaze, to escape from the shot. Shifting his weight again at the end of his body's turn, Stack hides his face from the camera, permitting the camera to move towards the dance.

In an example of what Deleuze, in his discussion of free indirect discourse in *The Movement-Image*, calls an "assemblage of enunciation",^[1] Sirk shows the dancers from a point of view that partly overlaps with but is not the same as Kyle's. For Kyle, vision has suddenly become a trap (just

as he earlier trapped the doctor with his gaze), but Sirk frees and elevates the viewer's vision. In the image of the wife and the friend dancing, we see both the emblem of an objective truth (that the two people, linked by friendship, are somehow a couple) and the fantasy that will henceforth derange the husband (that his friend is doing what he himself can't - having sex with his wife). The same camera movement that unites these two visions also differentiates them.

The Subjective Panorama Shot

Connor McMorran, Second-year PhD Student

In this sequence from Kim Seong-Su's *Beat (Biteu)*, 1997), Romi (Go So-Yeong) enters into her new apartment and the camera moves from her face into a 360-degree pan of the room in front of her. As our understanding of the environment is impacted by the facial expression or bodily gestures of the character, in my efforts to name this shot I finally arrived at the idea of the "subjective panorama". Through witnessing the character reacting to the environment, the audience gains a particular idea of how to process or interpret the visual information that follows once the camera moves away from the character and onto the source behind the character's reaction or expression. As such, while the shot continues the audience is led into a particular reading of the landscape, figuring the character's opinion into their understanding of the scene.

Therefore, this shot stands distinct from both the standard panorama, which creates its meaning through the shots appearing both before and after it, and the point-of-view shot, which gives full insight into how a particular character perceives something. Instead, this shot offers only an idea of how the character feels, which allows for a more open reading of the scene, albeit one undoubtedly influenced by the initial reaction of the character.

The Alienation Shot

Jinuo Diao, First-year PhD student

Generally, when the camera tracks in and comes closer to the characters, the audience can relate to the emotion of the characters more easily and a closer relationship between characters and audience can be built. However, in *Fallen Angels* (Wong Kar-wai, 1995), in lieu of feeling closer, audiences actually feel alienated from the characters when the camera comes closer. This is because many of these track-in shots have been made using a wide-angle lens in order to artificially extend the physically short distance. This visually deformed distance can establish a feeling of isolation. This technique has been used commonly in Wong Kar-wai's

works and could be termed the “alienation shot”, in which the feeling of being alienated from other people is created on purpose. The alienation can be created between the character and their surroundings, from one character to the other, as well as between the character and audience.

In this clip with Wong Chi-Ming (Leon Lai) and a ‘wild prostitute’ (Karen Mok), two shots have been taken using the moving wide-angle lens. First, in a deep focus, the camera follows the prostitute and pans to Wong, and then the circular panning shot follows Wong’s eyesight to observe the surroundings.

Subsequently, the camera tracks-in from a medium shot to a medium close-up, eventually focusing on the faces of Wong and Mok. The distance has been created between characters, even as they sit together and eat the same food. The audience can feel that despite only being a short distance away, they are poles apart.

The Radical Subjectivity Shot

Mina Radovic, Second-year undergraduate

Wong Kar-wai’s *Fallen Angels* (1995) displays a piercing intuitiveness in blending perspective and perception and moment and matter through uninhibited camerawork. It revels in the monolithic subjectivity of the individual, expressing a loneliness and the desire for human connection. I apply monolithic here as the shot focalizes with its female character in a meta-spatial sense, amplifying her physical appearance, and the ratio between body and set, moment of action and reception (by the audience). The effect is consequently ideological and ontological. The panoramic take and discontinuous editing breaks with flow and enables a fragmented vision to take shape. Anchored by jagged cuts, magnified close-ups and alignment of vision with the characters, the shot highlights its own subjectivity, radically negating the objective ideological nature of the camera and thereby re-imagining the spatio-temporal dynamics among characters, camera and spectator. This extends the diegesis of the film to recognition of the audience and the cinematic apparatus, consciously subverting the latter’s normative absence. The camera reduces its characters to objects (of voyeurism), but in this case the technical break from convention liberates them in the meta-cinematic and ontological sense, piercing into the question of being – both that of characters and spectators – and their lack of relationship to one other and the Real. The radical subjectivity of this take thus results from the conflict between ideology (convention) and ontology (liberation), as well as the “objectivity” of the apparatus and the subjectivity of its human counterparts, both on- and off-screen.

The Indirect POV-Shot

A train station. A man is sitting on a bench reading a newspaper when a couple enters the room in the far background. The man looks up at them, and as they walk to the luggage storage he turns his head, following them with his eyes. The camera is placed behind him and turns with him so that the couple, the man's head, and the camera all move together in one smooth joint action. It's a kind of POV-shot, but not in the traditional sense as we are behind the person whose POV it is, yet it does still qualify, which is why I'd like to call it an "indirect POV-shot". These can take slightly different forms. The example above, from *The Undercover Man* (Joseph H. Lewis 1949), is one kind. A different kind is when a shot begins as what appears to be an ordinary POV, but after a while the person whose POV it is supposed to be appears in the shot. One prominent example is in the beginning of *The Man from Laramie* (Anthony Mann, 1955), with James Stewart, and another is in *The Passenger* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1975), in a shot with Jack Nicholson in the desert. The combination of the movement and the estranged POV make such scenes or shots in some way unsettling and they usually suggest either emotional upheaval or danger. Such shots also call attention to themselves, so it is no surprise that such a supreme visual stylist as Joseph H. Lewis uses them. The director's POV is also implicated, also indirectly.

The Circuit Pan Shot

Shorna Pal, Second-year PhD student

In *The Man From Laramie* (Anthony Mann, 1955), Will Lockhart (James Stewart) comes across evidence of an Apache attack on a cavalry unit. A pan initiated by Lockhart's head movement becomes an animated reflection of his mind and extension of his gaze.

The Pan at the outset embodies Lockhart's persona and lives through him as an entity (hence the capital letter). It begins relatively loyal to the character's gaze and disposition towards what he beholds. As it continues, however, the Pan is no longer subordinate to Lockhart's body, but seamlessly floats out along its own orbit, eventually sneaking up behind him, crossing the line and coming to a stop just parallel to his left, gazing at a one quarter angle of Lockhart's face, whose own gaze is no longer in sync with the Pan. The overall effect is accentuated through the Cinemascope lens, which generates a tidal sense of discovery in the Pan's wake.

In being drawn as spectator into the filmic space as a searcher, it is with surprise and reluctance that we face the Pan's abrupt termination and find that we are no longer aligned with Lockhart's gaze, but rather are occupying an unknown gaze that has stolen up on him. There is an interesting interplay of the character and the Pan, much as a person's shadow may step out or stalk, returning to hover not far from the person it belongs to, always closing the circuit, which leads me to my choice of name for this type of shot.

The Point-of-Feeling Shot

Dr Lucy Donaldson, Lecturer at University of St Andrews

The moment in *Vertigo* when Scottie (James Stewart) first encounters Madeleine (Kim Novak), offers a striking example of what I want to term the "point-of-feeling shot". While this isn't exactly a point-of-view shot, it remains linked to Scottie's subjectivity, inviting us to understand and share in his experience of falling for Madeleine.^[ii] This is achieved through the continuation of the camera movement, and, perhaps more importantly, the particular qualities of this movement.

This evokes the point-of-view shot, so that even as the camera moves across the space, the connection between Scottie and what we see remains. While a cut here would have separated us from Scottie, thus detaching us from an experience of his space, the continuation of the shot maintains and expands upon our connection with him and his response to what he sees. The slow, smooth motion of the camera evokes the feelings that accompany his look, his sensory impression of the space and this person. The gliding quality of its motion further intimates the sensuality of these dynamics. In this way, the shot goes further than a typical point-of-view shot, describing, and perhaps explicating, Scottie's absorption in Madeleine's enigmatic qualities and immediate attraction to her.

This movement enacts a balance of simultaneous separation and continuation that could work in a number of ways. The attention drawn to camera movement in reference to a character's gaze allowed by moments like this indicates the manner in which camera movement itself can describe and express feeling.

Notes on Contributor

Dr Dennis Hanlon is a lecturer in Films Studies at The University of St Andrews, Scotland. His main research areas are: political cinemas (both documentary and fiction) of the 1960s-70s and the transnational

articulations among them; Indian cinemas, with a particular focus on their relationship with Latin American cinema; the transnational movement of genres throughout East and South Asia; and World Systems Theory as a way of exploring the relationship between economic crises and the gangster genre. He currently supervises six PhD students writing dissertations on Indian, South Korean and Andean cinema.

[i] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), 73.

[ii] My understanding of this moment is indebted to the process of teaching it for many years in a row - an experience which highlighted the consistency of its sensory appeal - and to the seminar notes given to me by Douglas Pye which framed the camera movement as “not S’s literal pov, but ...?”.