The Theory of Shot Composition Applied to Various Genres of Film

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Abstract

I am fascinated by the composition of shots in movies, specifically as it applies to the various different genres. However, there seems to be a lack of research into this particular area of the theory of composition. Therefore, I am planning to research the history and theory of shot composition as it applies to films throughout the history of film and into modern times. This will be supplemented by my own experience in the Fall of 2022 where I will be a Director of Photography for four individual films of varying genres as well as by a film I wrote and directed with a focus on the horror/thriller genre that will serve as a kind of case study for my research. I plan to include stills of my work and excerpts from the script, supplemented by a commentary on the shot composition of those particular scenes, as my creative thesis.

The Theory of Shot Composition Applied to Various Genres of Film

While there is an abundance of literature in various forms of media as to the theory of shot composition, there is little discussion about its application to specific genres in film. Certainly it is clear when watching a film what genre is being presented even if the genres do sometimes mix and meld together. When simply looking at what is presented on the screen, the shots themselves that are used, can an audience tell what genre they are watching? It is my belief that this deduction is possible because the different genres subconsciously rely on particular types of shots to better tell their story.

I have personally experienced this conundrum throughout my time in film school. When I first began to narrow my field of interest towards the camera department, and cinematography in particular, my eye was immediately drawn to the way shots are composed. As a cinematographer, there is a number of things that should be considered when creating a shot: lighting, camera movement, color, etc., and I have been training in all of these things since I first realized I wanted to be a cinematographer. My interest has always been focused, however, in the way a shot is composed. The placement of the actors within the frame, how the movement of the camera interacts with the environment, or even the decision of what lens to use can tell so much story in itself.

I therefore propose a study into this area of the theory of shot composition. An analysis of the various types of shots and their uses will be applied to different genres to provide some understanding as to what types of shots are used for what genres and why. This study will then inform an analysis of the horror genre and how its breaking of conventions serves as an excellent example of the power of shot composition. As an application of this study in the horror genre, I will analyze the filming of my horror short *Liminal*, and how this theory of shot composition

applied to genre helped me create a film in a specific genre.

What is Cinematography in the Context of Filmmaking?

The term "filmmaking" can refer to various different types of media. Encyclopedia Britannica defines "film" as "motion picture or movie, series of still photographs on film, projected in rapid succession onto a screen by means of light" (Britannica). However, by this definition, every video created could be a film. Britannica goes further to say that "Film is a remarkably effective medium in conveying drama and especially in the evocation of emotion" (Britannica). This narrows the field into a video that is created to evoke an emotion or convey drama, yet this still feels too broad.

There are four characteristics of film that "differentiate" it from other mediums, according to Britannica: "luminosity, movement, realism, and montage" (Britannica). The term luminosity in this context refers to the brightness of what is being seen on screen rather than the screen itself. It is to say that the brightness and colors and gradations of a film are to enhance this depiction of reality and make it something that viewers are drawn to see. While movement refers to the fact that films are "motion pictures," for the purposes of this discussion, it means the relationship of all the parts of film and how they move in conjunction with one another (Britannica). Realism is a tricky one because there are films about the future or about fantastical worlds or even animated films. However, an audience to a film should receive an "impression of reality," whether in the visuals presented or the feelings evoked (Britannica). This can be interpreted in various ways, but to put it simply, a viewer should be able to see something of their own life or world in the film, as though reality has left an impression on the film, and therefore, the viewer perhaps can take something from the film into their life, leaving an impression. Finally, montage simply refers to the cutting together of all the necessary pieces that

make a film, such as aligning footage and sound or cutting two shots together.

With this working definition of a film and therefore filmmaking, it is time to dive deeper towards the specific aspect of filmmaking that is cinematography. Cinematography could technically be defined as “the art and the science of recording light either electronically onto an image sensor or chemically onto film” (StudioBinder). However, a more applicable and broader definition would include the creation of each shot from conception to application to the recording of it in the camera. It is the step-by-step process of creating beautiful and meaningful images that, when correctly strung together, tell a story.

Why Genre is Important

The purpose of typifying a film as a certain genre is not to place limits around its creation or to confine it to certain parameters that exist only within that genre. Instead, sorting films into genres can tell the audience what to expect out of that film. Even in the initial screenwriting process, it’s important to establish what genre or genres the film falls under because audiences are primed to expect certain things from certain films. While almost all films fall under multiple genres or subgenres, a coming-of-age movie will most likely not have a jumpscare, and if it does, it will be mild and probably lighthearted in nature.

It is because of these expectations that I am researching the shot composition of different genres. Certainly there is more to the expectations than conventions like jumpscares or comedic moments. Perhaps part of what an audience expects out of these genres is a specific style of shot composition. This is of course subconscious, and because filmmakers do attempt to choose shots based on what those shots can do, they adhere to these expectations and conventions of shot composition without even noticing. My goal is to bring these conventions to light, so filmmakers can better follow these expectations and even meaningfully break them in order to better tell a

story and evoke emotion.

The Elements of Shot Composition

Filmmakers tend to work in the industry by pirate code in which the parameters of what makes a film good are "more what you would call guidelines than actual rules," as stated by Captain Barbossa in *The Pirates of the Caribbean*. Different filmmakers have their own personal opinions and preferences on what makes a good shot, a good film, a good score, etc. In fact, many of the most well-known and accomplished directors have very differing opinions towards filmmaking. A comparison between the Coen brothers and David Fincher makes this especially obvious.

The Coen brothers place an emphasis on the rhythm of a scene, opting for often 27 or 32 mm lenses and simple shot-reverse-shot structure in order to achieve the proper beats between the characters and the dialogue (Zhou, *Joel & Ethan Coen*). The wider lens creates a feeling that the audience is up close and personal with the character and the tried-and-true conversational shot structure means that the emotion in the scene comes from the story beats and the edits (Zhou, *Joel & Ethan Coen*). On the other hand, David Fincher places numerous restrictions on himself when building a shot, such as avoiding using close-ups, so that when they are there, the audience knows "this is important" (Zhou, *David Fincher*). Some other restrictions are no handheld, no human operation of the camera, and no unmotivated camera movements (Zhou, *David Fincher*). With these restrictions, he focuses on the placement of the camera, the size of the shot, and the blocking of the actors to portray exactly what the scene is telling the audience, which often results in unusual setups outside of the standard shot-reverse-shot.

In complete contrast to both of these directors is Edgar Wright, who is known for making comedies. Wright simply plays with the frame, creating comedy using every aspect of

filmmaking rather than just allowing the jokes to come out in the dialogue and acting (Zhou, *Edgar Wright*). He has objects and people enter and exit the frame in funny and unique ways, he creates montages out of quick and jarring but informative cuts, he synchronizes action with the music, he uses over-the-top lighting cues, and he creates hilariously jarring match cuts between scenes (Zhou, *Edgar Wright*). Many of these techniques are based on breaking the previously set rules within filmmaking, showing that once you know the rules (guidelines), you can break them with the purpose of playing with audience expectations and therefore creating comedy out of it.

These directors each have very unique approaches to filmmaking, and despite their clear disagreement in how it should be done, none of them are necessarily the right or wrong way. It's in these disagreements, this divergence from what is expected or considered correct, that a filmmaker finds their own style. However, this style is formed out of the original baseline that filmmakers learn and try to adhere to before they learn how to "break the rules." That baseline is in the elements of shot composition.

Size

Shot Type.

Different shot types and sizes are used for different reasons depending on the context, the motivation, and even the execution of the shot. A wide shot is often used as an establishing shot to show what the setting of the scene is, where and when, but it can also be used to provide a way to look at the character within the context of their environment, showing the audience either who this person is or what they're up against. A full shot is very similar to a wide shot in that it shows the whole character, and many filmmakers may distinguish these two types of shots in different ways. My personal distinction is that a full shot shows the full character, and therefore what is around them but not much more than that while a wide shot is more about the

environment with the full character being shown a result of showing so much of their surroundings.

A cowboy shot is somewhere between a full shot and medium shot. It cuts off at the character's thighs and is so named because it is most known for being used in westerns to show the gun on the hip. Now it's used mostly for the same reason in westerns, but also in crime dramas for policemen and period pieces or fantasies for swords and other weapons. It's also very helpful for scenes with a lot of characters, sometimes used in order to comfortably fit everyone in the same shot.

A medium shot is generally from just above the waist up and a medium close-up is like a larger head and shoulders. These shots are probably the most common shot sizes as they are the most conducive for character moments, conversations, reactions, and so on. A head and shoulders shot is just that: a shot of a character from the shoulders up. It has very similar uses as the medium shot but is more intimate. It's often used to hit an emotional beat, or, on the other hand, to land a joke.

Chokers, close-ups, and extreme close-ups are simply closer than head and shoulders and are essentially used for the same reasons but to an extreme. They can show extreme sadness, extreme fear, extreme weakness, extreme anger, extreme heartbreak, extreme insanity, extreme calm, extreme love, extreme hate, extreme sarcasm, extreme arrogance, and the list could go on. Since they are essentially magnification of the character, they are used to magnify the emotion being presented.

Inserts are unique shots in that they are generally focused on something other than a character. These can come in many sizes, but they're usually mediums or close-ups on some object of importance to the scene, the character, or the plot. Another unique shot is an over-the-

shoulder. This simply is a shot of one of the previous sizes but from over one of the characters' shoulder to something else of importance in the frame. They're often used in conversations to keep the character that is the subject from feeling alone in the frame. A 2-shot or 3-shot is simply to denote if a shot has more than one character as a subject in the frame.

Angle.

Another part of this particular element of shot composition is the angle from the camera is looking. This can describe whether the camera is looking straight on the subject, up towards the subject, or down towards the subject, but it can also describe where the character is facing – directly at the camera, slightly off from the camera, or even so far away that it looks like an over-the-shoulder.

In *Se7en,* there is a scene between the two main characters and their boss where director David Fincher is very particular about the angles of the camera in each shot. A face-on angle of the chief later switches to an angle more from his side to show that the character Mills is trying to work his way into the conversation (Zhou, *David Fincher*). In another instance, there is a shot of Somerset from so far to his right that it's almost behind him, indicating his attempt to ignore Mills, but that shot changes to the same face-on that was used before when he finally addresses him (Zhou, *David Fincher*). Additionally, there is an interesting use of the low angle technique on Mills in this scene. As a rookie, he is the lowest on the ladder, but he is shown to have a lot of power in this scene with a low angle on him that becomes extremely low when he stands and walks over to the chief's desk. On the other hand, the shots of Somerset are eye level, and the shots of the chief are generally eye-level or a slightly low angle. Instead of showing how much power Mills has in this situation, it is showing how hard he is trying to gain power. Somerset and the chief are very secure in their position and therefore their angles are very level. Mills is a

rookie, and he even has to stand up and walk to the desk in order to be heard. This is exaggerated by the low angles on him.

Two other camera angles that are worth pointing out are the POV shot and the dutch tilt. These shots are used for very specific reasons and often sparingly. A POV shot is simply a shot from a character's point-of-view. This can be used to reveal something about a character opposite the POV, whether emotional, amusing, or unsettling, or it can be used to further place the audience into the emotional headspace of the character from the POV, often fear, distrust, curiosity, or even intoxication. The dutch tilt is a very specific type of shot where the camera is tilted so that the horizon is no longer straight. It has to be done in a way that it looks intentional and not like the camera was simply balanced improperly, and this can be hard to do. When it's done right, it can create a feeling of unease, tension, or power.

Distance

Each of these different sizes of shots can be created with different focal distances, which is the size of the lens. Wide lenses (lower millimeter focal length) see a very wide view of what is in front of them. Longer lenses (higher millimeter focal length) have a much farther reach forward but at the expense of a much more cropped image. Wide lenses make everything in the frame feel farther apart, pushing the background away from the subject and separating the people and objects in the frame. Long lenses bring everything in frame closer together, both from side-to-side in the frame as well as front-to-back. If the lens is wide enough, it will also distort the character's face, which can be implemented to evoke various different emotions, sometimes funny, sometimes uncomfortable, and sometimes powerless or afraid. A cinematographer could choose a wide lens to make the character look very small in comparison to their big empty room or a long lens to provide the audience a more intimate moment with the character.

Motivation and Emotion

Directors are trying to evoke emotions in their audience through the decisions they make while creating their film. All of the elements of a film – the sound, the lighting, the dialogue, the production design, and the composition of the shot – aid in the portrayal of that emotion. Therefore, camera placement, movement, shot composition, lighting, etc. are all motivated by emotion. Cinematographers need to be aware of what emotion the director wants out of a scene as that will directly influence how they set up each shot.

A great example of using emotion to motivate the composition of a shot is in the opening scene from *Up*. This is an incredibly emotional scene that takes the audience through a rollercoaster of different emotions, but there is one section in the middle of the scene that really pulls at the audience's heartstrings. This is during the transition between Carl and Ellie decorating the baby's room and Carl and Ellie in the doctor's office finding out something happened to the baby. The first shot is again, very bright and colorful. The audience is closer to Carl and Ellie, and the frame is very open, so the audience can see the mural on the wall in full (Boseley). This is in stark contrast to the very next shot, which is dark with only the sliver of light in the office that the audience sees through the door (Boseley). Not only is this shot dull and white in a sterile environment, but it is also a frame within a frame, creating a claustrophobic feeling that could imply a sense of being trapped or stopped in their tracks or even just without as many options for moving forward as they once had (Boseley).

Placement within the Frame

Probably the most obvious element of shot composition is the placement of people and objects in the frame: the literal composition of the frame. Some of the core rules for composing things within a frame are the rule of thirds and leading lines. The rules of thirds essentially says

that if you cut the frame into thirds vertically and horizontally, you should put your subject on those lines and/or where they cross. This creates balance within the frame, avoiding something that might subconsciously distract the audience. On the other hand, framing things directly in the center can also make a statement, showing the audience that this is a crucial moment or an important piece of information, or even that the character is wavering between choosing one side over the other. Some directors, most notably Wes Anderson, even make a style out of center framing. The rule of leading lines is simply that the lines in the frame made by the objects, environment, or even eyeline can direct a viewer's eye, so the person composing the shot should be aware of what those lines are leading to.

Some other ways to place things in a frame are to hide or cut them off. This is fairly normal for objects in the background or foreground, but hiding parts of a character's face or body, or cutting off half of them by something in the foreground can depict certain emotions, usually something like trapped, restricted, unseen, or controlled.

The location and production design of a scene is also fundamental in creating a shot, such as using a mirror to extend our view of a room (StudioBinder). It can also be a part of the storytelling, such as having a character constantly standing in front or surrounded by picture frames to imply they are creating a fiction or even to foreshadow framing another character, as happens in *Vertigo* (Bellini).

Movement

Camera Movement.

There are so many ways to move the camera within a shot, and more complex movements are being invented every day. However, they all boil down to some basic movements that are each used for specific reasons.

A pan is when you turn the camera on the tripod to the right or left while a tilt is when you physically tilt it up or down. These simple movements can be used to reveal information, hide information, have a character escape the frame, chase a character through a scene, or search for someone or something. Quicker versions of these movements can show paranoia or fear while the whip pan, which is an extremely fast version of the pan, is often used comedically to reveal something either related or contrary to what was just being said.

A dolly is when the camera itself moves on the horizontal plane toward the subject or away from it while a truck is when the camera moves to the right or left, or even around the subject. Dollies and trucks are often used to track something or someone through the scene, most commonly during a conversation occurring while the characters are going from one place to another. They can also be used to show fear, power, or the scale of something. Dollying toward a character can emphasize their growing fear or their growing power in the situation while dollying away could show they are beginning to feel lonely. Trucking around a character could show how they are starting to feel out of control of the situation or conversely, how they are beginning to take control. The dolly zoom is a technique where the camera dollies one way while the lens zooms the other way. It creates something called the "Vertigo effect" because it was made popular by its use in Hitchcok's *Vertigo.* This effect generally makes the audience feel very uneasy about what is happening but in a very disorienting way. It's often used to emphasize some kind of revelation, devastation, or change.

Handheld shots are shots with natural movement by the camera operator. These shots add some life and authenticity to a scene. They can be used to showcase raw moments with characters, chaotic movements like fight scenes or running from or to something, or to indicate a character's world, life, or mental state is deteriorating in some way.

On the other hand, static shots can be used to offer some stability in the scene. They are calm and focused. While these appear simple, they can be used creatively for things or characters entering or exiting the frame in a unique, funny or even terrifying way. They can also be used to showcase an actor's emotions in the scene rather than trying to supplement it and therefore potentially distracting from it.

A step between handheld shots and jib shots are gimbals and Steadicams. These are shots done with the camera mounted on equipment that is still handheld but balances out the more chaotic motion that often comes with handheld shots. The range of motion on these is limited only to the abilities of the person holding the equipment, which can allow for some very nice handheld shots that don't have the wild movements of true handheld.

Finally, there are drone, crane, and jib movements. These are the wild spins, dips, and flights that cameras do. These can be used for a variety of reasons. Drones are often used for sweeping landscapes, high-up above the action or the location of the scene. They can also offer a new vantage point for scenes that have a lot of characters or a lot of action.one of which being to essentially throw the audience into the heart of the scene. However, another reason that all of these types of movements might be used is to throw the audience into the scene. Moving swiftly down and around a character, the audience is thrown around in the same kind of emotion the character might be feeling in that moment, or spinning over the top of a character can force the audience to feel the same kind of spinning they're going through in their mind. However, this is just a fraction of what these moves are used for. While jibs and cranes can usually be used interchangeably, cranes sometimes are considered larger jibs. These shots are taken with the equipment of the same name that allow for movement along all axes rather than just one or two like dollies have, but they are much smoother than handheld shots and even sometimes than

gimbal shots. However, they have a more mechanical feel than gimbals and Steadicams.

Primary Movement.

The position and movement of actors within a scene is considered blocking. Actors need to receive the blocking from a director in order to know what to do and where to go within the scene. However, the cinematographer must also know what the blocking of the scene is in order to properly stage the camera. The story a director is trying to tell influences the blocking of a scene; the blocking of a scene influences the position and/or movement of the camera; the position of the camera influences the lighting; and so on. Blocking, camera position, and movement often work in tandem with one another. The blocking of a scene can express a character's beliefs depending on what side of the screen they are, direct a viewer's eye by the shapes made in the frame, or land a character in just the right space to perfectly frame a fundamental reaction (StudioBinder).

As discussed before with static shots, there is also how people and objects enter or exit frame. This can be done for comedic effect, such as objects entering the frame at just the right (or wrong) time, or it can be done in a more serious manner, such as the entrance of an important character in the background while the subject of the scene doesn't notice from the foreground.

Movement from one side of the frame to the other can also be a very subtle storytelling tool. Alfred Hitchcock does something unique with his blocking in *Vertigo*. When characters are moving from left to right, they are telling the truth, embracing the truth, or seeking the truth, but when characters are moving from right to left, they are living a lie, searching for a fiction they have created, or actively deceiving someone (Bellini). Hitchcock uses the blocking of various scenes in order to show when a character has accepted the truth or when they have fallen victim to a fantasy (Bellini).

What Can We Learn from Various Genres in Films?

Over the course of the fall semester of my senior year in college, I had the privilege of being the Director of Photography on the sets of four different films that represented various different genres in film: coming-of-age, comedy, fantasy, and mystery. In preparation for each of these films, I asked my directors what films inspired the making of that story. Below is a summary of my analysis of these films and my application in the field.

Sam.

Laura Palacio's *Sam* is probably one of the few films that so perfectly fits into a single genre that it doesn't need to be grouped into more than just the genre of coming-of-age. Most films have a protagonist that undergoes some kind of growth, but a coming-of-age film deals specifically with the issues that come with growing into their identity and the obstacles that hinder that growth or cause the protagonist to grow in the wrong way.

A big inspiration for this film was Disney Pixar's *Luca.* Other coming-of-age films include the book-to-movie adaptation *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and the anime-style film *A Silent Voice*. These films are all coming-of-age films with very different styles and subgenres. An analysis of the shot composition of these films reveals some consistencies.

There is a general sense of gentleness in these films. The camera is often still, and if it moves, it is very strongly motivated by the actions or even thoughts of the characters and moves almost completely in conjunction with them rather than on its own. This leads to a focus on the size of the shot, the distance the subjects are from the character, lens choice, the placement of subjects in the frame, or frames within a frame. There are also a lot of tracking shots or revealing shots with gentle pans, tilts, or dollies. The camera is invisible in these types of movies. It is strictly a tool to see inside these characters' lives or even inside their heads.

An example of the use of size, distance, and lens choice can be found in a scene from *Luca*, where Alberto reveals to Giulia that he is a sea monster. A wide lens is used at the start of the scene to show the distance between Giulia and Alberto to Luca standing on the beach, unable to stop her (Niswander). This changes to long lens from the same angle in which Alberto's tail is large and imposing to Giulia (Niswander). Alberto initially takes up a majority of the frame, but as the scene goes on and he is betrayed by his best friend, he becomes smaller in the frame as the shots become increasingly further away and slightly higher angled (Niswander). In another genre, this scene might have had a lot more flashy cuts and camera movements to depict the imposing sea monster. However, this film relies on these subtler choices because it's not about the sea monster, it's about the characters.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower uses a lot of the types of shots that are simply to follow the characters, to see their growth, to get inside their head. Tracking shots are used constantly: in the dance scene, the car ride through the tunnel, and when characters are entering or exiting rooms. They're not flashy; they serve the story. Pans and tilts and even dollies are used a lot to reveal moments as the character sees or realizes them. There are POV shots to get the audience inside the main character Charlie's head, such as the low angle from inside the car when he sees Sam standing in the bed of the truck while they drive through the tunnel. The audience sees Sam in a position of power and high energy, the same as how Charlie sees her, almost like a goddess in that moment of infinity ("*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* Scene Analysis").

A Silent Voice also uses POV shots in a pretty brilliant manner. Towards the beginning of the movie, Shoya is seen walking down the school hallway. He is the center of attention, both from the audience and the people around him. Later on, the audience sees a very similar situation but from Shoya's POV, staring at the floor, and when he looks up at people, their faces are

covered with X's, to very clearly indicate the walls he's built up against the people around him ("A Cinematographic Analysis of Koe No Katachi"). There is also a very interesting scene in this movie between Shouko and Ueno. A full 2-shot of these two characters depicts a conversation, that in its own right is pretty powerful, but Ueno is separated by Shouko by a tree splitting the frame in the foreground, and Shouko is standing behind an art structure of red bars ("A Cinematographic Analysis of Koe No Katachi"). Showing Shouko physically separated from her classmate and trapped in a maze of bars evokes the trapped and lonely feeling Shouko has in the audience – an incredible example of visual storytelling.

Tangerine Butterflies.

Tangerine Butterflies, directed by Eddy Wallace, is another coming-of-age film that I worked on in the fall, but another genre it fits very well into is comedy. This film has a very Wes Andersonian style, and therefore, it specifically speaks to his type of comedy. The majority of what makes Wes Anderson's style of filmmaking funny is subverting expectations. He treats so many unusual circumstances, characters, and actions as completely normal for the world that his film is set in. For example, in his film *Moonrise Kingdom,* the two child main characters proceed to get married. They are entirely too young to do so, but with the way it is presented within the world of the film, it is unusual but perfectly fine as long as they both understand and agree.

A lot of Wes Anderson's style is very straightforward: wide shots, face-on, overhead, profiles, informative inserts, pans and tilts to reveal information, etc. It is fairly utilitarian in its approach in that it is there to show the action on the screen. This functional aspect creates a sense of "this is normal; this is how it is," while still showing absurd and abnormal things. On the other hand, it is still a stunning work of creativity in the variety of shots that are used, such as wide, overhead, insert all in a few seconds; in the lenses that are used, such as often using very wide

lenses even when filmmaking conventions wouldn't; and in the way it is all put together in the final edit. This juxtaposition is what makes Wes Anderson's style stand out so distinctly. It's something that has never been done before and that he has mastered.

My director for this film wanted exactly this type of absurdity being completely normal, so I turned to Wes Anderson filmmaking to guide me. We used a lot of wide angles, profiles, and dollies: again, a very utilitarian approach. However, the combination of these shots was something unique that told a story of a boy in a world very abnormal to the audience but perfectly average to him. For example, the very first scene of the film shows the main character getting on the bus. The bus has someone carrying a fishbowl, someone playing guitar, the bus driver is a dog, and a shower of playing cards and paper airplanes that flies behind him as he approaches the back seats. However, the only thing that breaks him out of the music he is listening to is his bully. Everything else was normal, everyday occurrences for him. The treatment of these things as completely normal is what creates that level of comedy that my director was looking for.

Brothers' War.

Joshua Knight's film *Brothers' War* falls under the genre of medieval historical fiction, but it is a good example of the types of films that all fall within this era of history, which includes a lot of fantasy films, such as *Lord of the Rings*.

A historical piece is often very focused on the setting, the time and location that it is taking place in, generally because the reason for setting a story in that time period is because some commentary is being made about said time period or said time period is being used to make a commentary on the characters or even on modern society. It is not an arbitrary decision, and the setting of these movies can almost be a character in itself. It influences the story so

heavily that it is no doubt influencing the way it is filmed.

With this emphasis on the setting, many historical fictions feature wide, establishing shots. Because the film is not set in a time period the audience will be familiar with, the filmmaker must help the audience become familiar with where they are going to be for the rest of the film. Not to mention, most settings for these films are considered very beautiful, and wide shots are wonderful ways to show off the locations and production design of the sets. Specifically for the type of historical fiction that this section is discussing, there are often big scenes with lots of people – battle scenes, throne room scenes, in the town, in an important discussion with many advisors – and wide shots are perfect for including all the people, action, and information at once as well as to show the sheer scale of these events within the story.

These wides often work hand-in-hand with close-ups and inserts. Historical fiction relies a lot on the details, whether this be to show off the historically accurate clasp the costume designer included in the costume, to place emphasis on the ring that will seal a coming deal between two countries, or to showcase the reaction of a pained mother as she watches her sons duel to the death. This contrast creates a back and forth that keeps the audience engaged and searching for the next important piece of information.

Historical pieces also showcase a fair amount of handheld shots. Simply put, these shots feel raw and human, aiding to the rustic feel that often accompanies the movies of this genre. They fit the aesthetic of films that are often set in very rough locations – in the woods, on the battlefield, in a town where each house was built by hand. It is especially conducive to filming battle scenes. War is messy, chaotic, and horrific. The shakiness from handheld cameras accompanied with quick cuts between the pain and gore is a perfect way to show the emotion, disorientation, and chaos during a fight.

On the other hand, many historical fiction films are about power dynamics, such as between a ruler and his subjects, a king and his son, two people vying for the throne, and so on. These scenes showing who is in power are often shot with still or mostly still shots as well as high and low angles to showcase who is really in power. Cowboy shots are also surprisingly common in these films, usually to show the full extent of a king's robes or to highlight a character's sword dangling menacingly, or benignly, at their hip. These shots really do serve the discussion of who is truly in authority in these types of scenes.

Restless.

The romantic crime drama that is Grant Janz' *Restless* takes inspiration from a wide variety of films. It tells the story of Rose, a widow with insomnia whose husband very recently took his own life. She takes sleeping pills to cure her insomnia, but instead she is transported into dreams where he is still alive. Throughout the film, she learns to cope with the loss, but at what cost?

One of Grant's biggest inspirations for this film was *Inception* because of the dream vs. reality concept. While *Inception* is more of a sci-fi and action movie, it is also a mystery as they are trying to learn something important from deep within someone's mind and must gather clues as they go deeper and deeper into the inception. This type of mystery is going to exhibit a lot of the more mind-bending and engaging camera movements that reflect the ever-changing investigation, such as crane, jib, and drone shots.

Another inspiration for *Restless* was *Se7en* by David Fincher. Fincher has a very unique style for his films. He tends to use camera shots and movements that are far removed from the camera operator (Zhou, *David Fincher*). Fincher has said of his own style that he "love[s] the idea of this omniscience like the camera it just goes over here kind of perfectly, and it goes over

there kind of perfectly, and it doesn't have any personality to it, it's very much like what's happening was doomed to happen" (Zhou, *David Fincher*). This makes perfect sense for mysteries and crime dramas where a lot of the drama is created by how serious and often uncontrollable a situation is. Removing the human element to the camera makes the audience feel even less in control and even more immersed in the dangerous world of these films.

Some other shot types that I have noticed in these types of movies are an emphasis on head and shoulders as a go-to, quick cuts and whips, dutch angles, extreme high and low angles almost to the point of underfoot and overhead, and inserts. Head and shoulders are great for investigations as the audience can see reactions during observations, deductions, interrogations, and revelations throughout the film. The quick cuts and whips aid in the suspense and action of the film, mimicking how quickly the plot can move at times. Dutch tilts always create tension in a scene and are really nice to use sparingly to send the suspense of a certain scene over the edge. Extreme high and low angles create a sense of unease in the audience while simultaneously showing who is truly in power during an investigation. Finally, inserts are essential. Fincher uses these sparingly, so that when they are included, the audience knows that the clues and symbols that are depicted in that shot are important to the story and to the mystery (Zhou, *David Fincher*).

In mysteries, it is all about what the audience can and can't see – what's revealed and when. The screenwriter knows the whole story, and often the antagonist knows the whole story, but because the audience is following along with the protagonist, who is usually the investigator, a lot of information is withheld at the beginning and slowly revealed throughout the film. This slow reveal is a strong motivator for particular shot types in mysteries. For example, a head and shoulders to show a character's reaction to something, but not a wide because the audience shouldn't know what they are reacting to yet. This revealing or withholding is a primary

motivator for a lot of shot composition in mysteries.

The Application of Research in Shot Composition to the Horror Genre.

With the analysis of shot composition in a few genres that I have recently worked in, I would like to do an in-depth analysis of the horror genre. This will include a more extensive discussion of what the genre is as well as its subgenres, and an analysis of some modern horror movies and the shot composition conventions in them. Horror is a great genre to do this kind of in-depth analysis in because a lot of the fear comes from the way the camera is set up, the angles, what can and can't be seen, the way things are placed within the frame, and especially breaking expectations that conventional filmmaking and other genres have set in audiences. My goal is to discuss exactly why the shot composition affects the audience's fear so much.

An Analysis of the Horror Genre

Focusing Our Understanding of the Horror Genre.

A distinction needs to be made between horror and thriller. While the two share elements and sometimes can be mixed in the same movie, there are certainly clear differences between what is considered a horror movie and what is considered a thriller.

The best way to explain the difference is probably that horror is more about the action and aftermath while thriller is more about the build-up. The definition of the word "horror" is "an intense feeling of fear, shock, or disgust," and that is exactly what horrors are trying to instill in their audiences while thriller relies more on "suspense and excitement" (Google, Neil Chase Film). Another way to distinguish the two is that in thrillers, audiences are afraid because they never know what will happen next, but in horrors, audiences are afraid because they know what's going to happen and are dreading to see it. Additionally, thrillers tend to be more plot-driven, building up to a climax, while horrors are more focused on eliciting a certain response

out of the audience: fear, disgust, or dread (Neil Chase).

The History of Horror.

Horror began with more artistic films designed to awe rather than to scare, such as George Mellies' *Le Manoir du Diable* in the 1890s or the adaptations of *Frankenstein* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in the early 1900s ("The First Horror Movie & The History of the Horror Genre"). It was in the 30s that the genre coined its name and became something that the general public was truly beginning to fear, noted by the censorship that began in this era ("The First Horror Movie & The History of the Horror Genre"). From there, new subgenres came out of experimenting with this particular art form, such as monster and disaster movies coming off of the war in the 40s and 50s or zombie movies in the 60s ("The First Horror Movie & The History of the Horror Genre"). Audiences loved to be scared, and new ways were invented every decade in order to do so, such as theater gimmicks of buzzing seats or screaming patrons in the 60s ("The First Horror Movie & The History of the Horror Genre").

It was in the 70s and 80s that the horror genre hit its stride with iconic cult classics such as *Carrie, The Shining, Halloween,* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* ("The First Horror Movie & The History of the Horror Genre"). These slasher flicks and supernatural scares were what the genre was known for well into the 2010s. Unfortunately, that gave horror a bad reputation. While a couple of these films were well-written and -made, a lot of them were full of tropes and cliches and gratuitous scenes that were designed to attract young audiences just for the scares and sex. The art was being sacrificed for money. Additionally, because audiences would so easily tire of the same things, the movies had to come out by the dozen, soon leading to very low-budget films that were cranked out as fast as possible to keep audiences coming to the theater.

For a while the horror genre died down significantly, but in the past decade, it has picked

back up in a new way with psychological horror, original indie films, sociopolitical commentary, and more ("The First Horror Movie & The History of the Horror Genre"). Horror has finally gone from a lower art form used as an excuse for blood, gore, screams, and sex to something smart, artsy, atypical, and real. It's no longer about instilling fear in the audience but about the audience themselves: what they are afraid of, what they are going through, and what they need to know about the world.

Subgenres.

Horror also might have the most subgenres of any other genre of film: found-footage, psychological, survival, slasher, monster, supernatural, and the list could go on (Rampton). Because really the only requirement to categorize a film as a horror movie is to scare the audience, filmmakers have been finding new ways to do so since the creation of the genre. Additionally, audiences tire of the same tropes and jumpscares, so in order to perpetuate the genre, unique ways of scaring the audience have to be invented pretty regularly leading to new subgenres as new tactics are used.

Current Horror Conventions and Why They Work

With all of the negative sides to horror, there are a plethora of unique aspects to horror films that do work very well. One reason horror films are such a great genre to analyze for shot composition is because they use shot composition in a very different way than most films. In most genres, shot composition is meant to subtly evoke emotion without the audience even noticing that there is any "manipulation of emotion" taking place. The same goal is true for horror films, but their methods are much more obvious after the fact, generally due to the divergence from conventional shot composition being what makes the film scarier, uneasy, and suspenseful.

Use of Space.

One of the best examples of unique shot composition in horror movies is the use of space. The point of proper shot composition is to direct the viewer's eye towards the subject of the frame, whether that be the main character in the scene, someone in the background, a reaction, or an object being discussed. However, what is often demonstrated in horror movies is directing the eye toward something that is not the subject in order to create a sense of foreboding, unease, and heightened tension or expectation for something that may or may not ever come. This is especially prevalent in the recently released horror film *Smile*. During a conversation between the main character Rose and her therapist, she is framed on the right side, looking off-screen even further to the right, creating a lot of empty space behind her to the left and middle of the screen. However, this empty space is intentional. The soft focus on an open door to a darkened room in the background subtly creates unease in the audience. Without even realizing it, the audience is expecting for something to come out of the door or at least to be standing in it, building a silent tension. By the end of the scene, nothing comes from the door, so the tension is never released, compounding it with the subsequent scenes. This growing anxiety and fear also doubles with Rose's descent into madness throughout the film: as she falls further prey to her fears, so does the audience.

Exploiting Expectations of Safety.

Something else *Smile* does well is the "there and back again" technique. This is essentially accomplished with something similar to a shot-reverse shot coupled with the building of tension. During her investigation of the creature she has been seeing, Rose is listening to the recording of her session with the victim that gave her the smile curse, and she's found a discrepancy in the audio. The scene goes between a head and shoulders shot of Rose from a

lower angle at her right, placing her on the left third of the rule of third; a face-on choker of Rose from behind her computer; and a close-up of the computer screen. The shots switch back and forth a few times to show Rose's reaction to the odd sound, the volume on her computer being turned up, and her frustration at not being able to figure it out. The scene plays longer than might be expected to show her intense focus on this small detail in the audio. Finally, a close-up on the computer screen has her play it back and the sound is gone. The shot switches back to the low-angle head and shoulders with a ghostlike person filling up the space to the right of Rose and a loud musical sting and scream playing simultaneously with the cut.

This back and forth between the shots does two prominent things for the scene. The first is that it engrosses the viewer in the action of the scene: Rose's investigation into the sound. The viewer begins almost to mimic Rose's focus, and after a long enough scene, the viewer just begins to let their guard down enough for the jumpscare. Additionally and perhaps more importantly, the editing of this scenes creates something safe and then exploits the viewer's expectations of that safe space by using it to scare them. The scene cuts between the three different shots in varying order a few times before the jumpscare, so the audience becomes accustomed to the empty space beside Rose in the head and shoulders shot. With the amount of times that shot is shown, it becomes safe to the audience that nothing is there. This allows the cinematographer to use those expectations as an opportunity for a jumpscare.

The Restricted View.

One convention that horror movies exhibit very often is a restricted view within the frame. A lot of the scare of horror movies is the fear of the unknown. What you can't see and what you therefore imagine is almost always much scarier than what could actually be shown. Horror movies utilize this in their shot composition. Close-up shots on character reactions rather

than what they're reacting to, focusing on the shadows on the wall rather than the action creating the shadow, and even beginning a scene with a closer framed shot then moving wider as the scene goes allows for the audience's imagination to play on their fears.

Found-footage films use this technique almost to a fault. In 1999, *The Blair Witch Project* changed what people expected from horror films, and while it did not create the subgenre, it absolutely kickstarted its prominence in horror. This film was shot on a 16mm film camera and a Hi-8 camcorder meaning the resolution was much lower than what we can get on film cameras today as well as on a cropped sensor compared to the sensors most modern films are shot on, resulting in a tighter frame ("The Blair Witch Project - Technical Specifications", Atkinson). It also appears as though the filmmakers shot on longer lenses for a majority of the film, creating an even more cropped or closer-framed picture. A lot of the shots of the forest and the actors were very close-in, cutting off a lot of the environment, leaving it to the viewer to imagine what was out there chasing them. The iconic shot from the film that shows only Heather's eyes as she says "I'm gonna die out here," is brilliant as it doesn't show what she's afraid of - the forest or the Blair Witch - it shows her reaction to it, and not even her full reaction, on a pitch-black background of the trees around her. The audience is left to wonder "Is she really gonna die out there?" because they know even less about her environment than she does. Shots of the crosses they find in the forest, inside the cabin they explore, and when they run around the forest at night all are such quick shots with little context around the subject of the shot. This brings the audience into the same kind of panic they are in with no idea what's around them, chasing them, or even how close it might be.

Don't Show the Monster.

One crucial piece of advice that filmmakers must remember when making a horror movie

is to not show the monster. As just discussed, what is imagined by an audience is always so much scarier than what is actually on screen. Obviously, it is not always practical to avoid showing the monster for an entire feature-length film, so the rule-of-thumb is not to show it until the big climax or at least after a lot of build-up.

The Wretched is an indie horror film that shows the monster far too soon in the film. In the first act, the main character Ben is facing away from the humanoid-deer-like creature just sitting on the railing of the front porch. When he turns around almost just in time to see it, the floodlights flash on, and the audience only gets one more glimpse at the creature while Ben seems not to have seen it at all. This scene goes back and forth between a shot of the monster and a shot of Ben before the final shot of the floodlights, but if this scene went without the establishing shot of the monster, and the only glimpse the audience could get of it was the milliseconds before the floodlights shone, it would leave everyone guessing and wondering what that shape in the dark was, creating suspense for its reveal and a fear that the audience would carry further into the film.

On the other hand, a movie that does this very well is *Psycho.* Hitchcock has been dubbed the Master of Suspense for good reason. He understands the difference between suspense and shock. Shock is simply scaring an audience with something sudden, like an explosion, while suspense is showing the audience the ticking bomb in the back of the hero's car unbeknownst to the hero. The audience is on the edge of their seat knowing something is about to go wrong, but they don't know when, and they don't know if the hero will figure it out. *Psycho* does this from the very beginning. The audience sees Marion steal a large sum of money; it's like a ticking time bomb in her purse as she makes her great escape, and every encounter with someone that may be suspicious of her puts the audience even more on the edge of their seat. It's an invisible monster.

However, when Marion stops at the Bates Motel, the audience begins to question whether the true danger is Marion being caught or whoever is living at the motel. When Marion is killed in the famous shower scene, the audience doesn't see her attacker directly. The silhouette appears to be an old woman, and with the conversation Marion had with Norman just before the scene, the audience can assume the horror that is in this silhouette. However, the audience never directly sees her face, nor do they see it for the rest of the film. The "monster" is concealed until the final twist in the last few minutes of the film that leaves the audience questioning everything that they thought they knew.

The Creation of *Liminal*

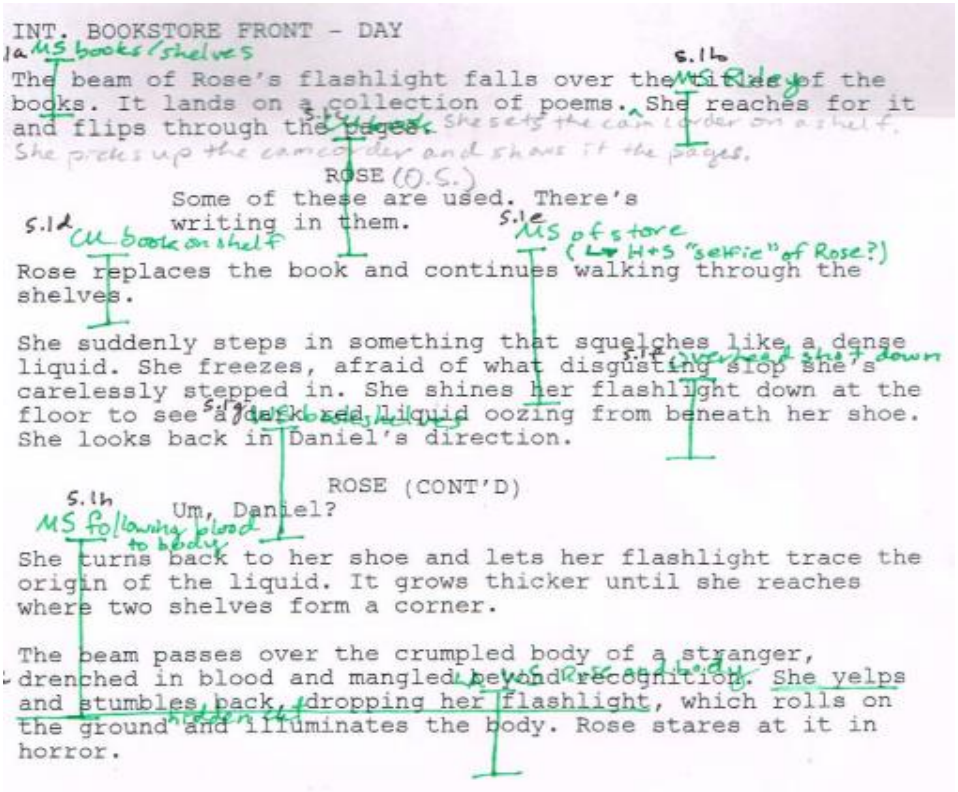
As a conclusion to all of my research in shot composition, specifically in the horror genre, I created a short, found-footage film called *Liminal*. This film could fall under a few different genres: horror, thriller, mystery, found-footage, and even monster – but as it relates to my research, I will be focusing on the horror elements. Specifically, I will be presenting evidence of the elements of horror I have described: restricted view, use of space, don't show the monster, and creating something safe then exploiting those expectations.

An Analysis of Shots in *Liminal* – A Creative Thesis

Scene 5 – Restricted View

The very first big scare of *Liminal* happens in scene 5. Riley is exploring the bookstore, when she comes across a narrow aisle of books that have been scribbled in and thrown around. At the end of the aisle, she steps in a puddle of blood, seen in figure 2. Because of the restricted view of the camera, the audience doesn't immediately see where the blood is coming from. She looks around for Landon, for something safe, before she ventures to see what has created this puddle of blood. The audience is dragged along in her irrational response, creating tension as they wait for the reveal. When the dead body is finally revealed, as shown in figure 3, she steps back and falls in surprise and fear, keeping the audience from getting a good look at the body, aiding the tension being created.

Figure 1. Excerpt of *Liminal* script, scene 5



INT. BOOKSTORE FRONT - DAY

The beam of Rose's flashlight falls over the titles of the books. It lands on a collection of poems. She reaches for it and flips through the pages.

ROSE (O.S.)
Some of these are used. There's writing in them.

Rose replaces the book and continues walking through the shelves.

She suddenly steps in something that squelches like a dense liquid. She freezes, afraid of what disgusting slop she's carelessly stepped in. She shines her flashlight down at the floor to see a dark red liquid oozing from beneath her shoe. She looks back in Daniel's direction.

ROSE (CONT'D)
Um, Daniel?

She turns back to her shoe and lets her flashlight trace the origin of the liquid. It grows thicker until she reaches where two shelves form a corner.

The beam passes over the crumpled body of a stranger, drenched in blood and mangled beyond recognition. She yelps and stumbles back, dropping her flashlight, which rolls on the ground and illuminates the body. Rose stares at it in horror.

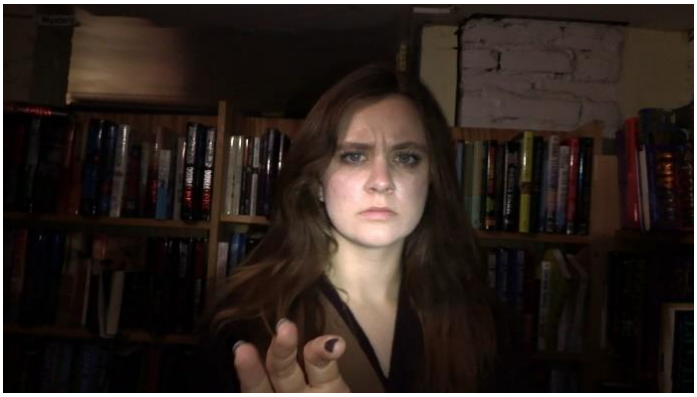
Figure 2. Still from *Liminal*, with Jessica Bryant

Figure 3. Still from *Liminal*, with David Cabe

Scenes 5 and 10 – A Steady Camera – False Expectations of Safety

Because *Liminal* is a found-footage film, a majority of the camera movement is very shaky handheld. However, there are a few occasions where the camera becomes steady or even motionless, usually after the characters have set it down somewhere. In scene 5, Riley sets the camera down on a shelf next to her while she looks through the messy bookcase. This action is shown in figure 4. The scene is fairly calm, setting up a false expectation of safety before, only a minute later, she steps in a puddle of blood and finds a dead body. The scare happens only moments after this apparently comfortable and safe environment is established, making for a bigger emotional hit with the juxtaposition.

Figure 4. Still from *Liminal*, with Jessica Bryant



In scene 10, the characters finally come to a rest after the Figure gave chase, and both of them set their cameras down as they sit and hide behind a bookshelf. This release doesn't last long though

as only seconds after Riley has set her camera down, she huddles up in fear, presumably from something she heard, and the Figure walks past their hiding spot in the background of the shot. The Figure's movement can be seen in figure 5. The moment of catharsis for the audience, finally releasing the tension built up throughout the chase, is immediately taken away by more tension and fear, leaving the audience to spend the rest of the scene in heightened emotion, wondering when the Figure will walk by again. This steady spot is no longer safe for the characters nor the audience.

Figure 5. Still of *Liminal*, with Joshua Knight, Jessica Bryant, and Cat Modica

Figure 6. Excerpt of *Liminal* script, scene 10

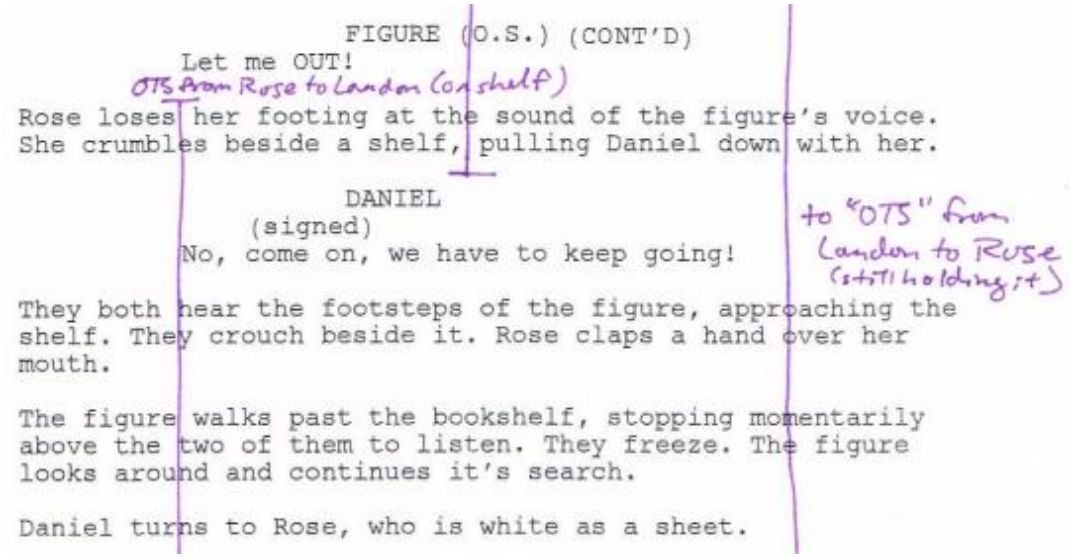


FIGURE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Let me OUT!
OTS from Rose to Landon (on shelf)
Rose loses her footing at the sound of the figure's voice. She crumbles beside a shelf, pulling Daniel down with her.

DANIEL
(signed)
No, come on, we have to keep going!
to "OTS" from Landon to Rose (still holding it)

They both hear the footsteps of the figure, approaching the shelf. They crouch beside it. Rose claps a hand over her mouth.

The figure walks past the bookshelf, stopping momentarily above the two of them to listen. They freeze. The figure looks around and continues it's search.

Daniel turns to Rose, who is white as a sheet.

Scene 9 – A Scare from Behind – Use of Space, False Expectations of Safety

While Riley is trying to find her way back to Landon, she ends up at a section in the middle of the store where a lot of bookshelves branch off in separate ways, as shown in figure 7. While she is here, the camera shows the space around her very well, but only moments later, she is scared by the sound of footsteps from behind her. She jumps and turns the camera around to use it to peak around the bookshelf she's hiding behind, which is shown in figure 8. As the camera turns to her right (screen left) and shows an empty aisle, she is grabbed from the left (screen right) and pulled away. Each of these scares comes from setting up false expectations with the space around Riley and breaking them by doing the opposite of what the camera is leading toward.

Figure 7. Still from *Liminal*

Figure 8. Still from *Liminal*, with Jessica Bryant

Figure 9. Excerpt of *Liminal* script, scene 9

ROSE (CONT'D)
~~(signed)~~
9.1c This'll be harder than I thought.
WS whip pans
Footsteps interrupt her, and she spins around to see empty darkness. The footsteps echo from everywhere, and she looks frantically in all directions. She feels a presence behind her and turns her camera around to check behind her. I see a mirror.
ROSE (CONT'D)
Daniel?
9.1e
2-shot "selfie" profile
A hand clasps over her mouth, and for a moment, she starts to scream, but the hand turns her head to face Daniel. He's shaking his head.

Scene 6 – Creeping Hand – Use of Space, Don't Show the Monster

In scene 6, Landon is exploring a room in the bookstore by himself. While he's there, he sets the camera down on a shelf that shows the bookshelves behind him, but they block off the majority of the room. This allows for a spacious-looking shot while still leaving a lot of the space in the room hidden. This framing is shown in figure 10. When Landon picks up the camera again after hearing movement behind him, the Figure creeps her hand onto his shoulder. This is the first time the audience sees any indication of the Figure, and it is a pale, veiny, dirty hand with unkempt nails that dig into Landon's shoulder to pull him down, a still from this action is shown in figure 11. Whatever is attached to that hand, the audience can only imagine. They will most likely picture something so much scarier than what could reasonably be shown on the screen.

Figure 10. Still from *Liminal*, with Joshua Knight

Figure 11. Still from *Liminal*, with Joshua Knight and Cat Modica

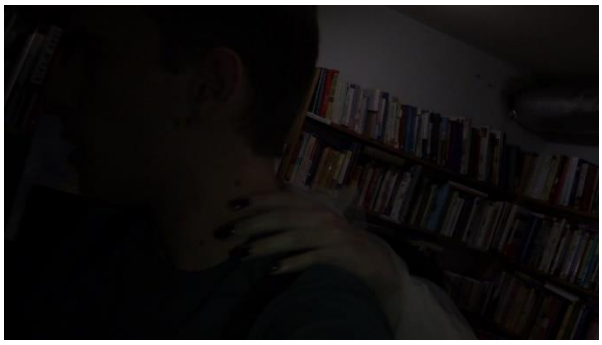


Figure 12. Excerpt of *Liminal* script, scene 6

A dark figure seemingly materializes behind Daniel, towering over him, white veiny hands grasping his neck and lifting him off the ground. Daniel drops his knife in surprise, and a horrible voice comes from the shadows of the room, croaking as though it hadn't spoken in years.

Scene 6 – Glimpse of Blood – Restricted View

After Landon's whirlwind fight with the Figure, his camera briefly shows a bloody scratch on his cheek, which he quickly covers with his other hand, wincing in pain. Two stills from this moment are shown in figures 13 and 14. The flash of blood-red, so close to the camera,

adds another layer to the danger this Figure poses. Because of how restricted the camera's view is in this particular situation, it's hard to say what the Figure has actually done to Landon and therefore what it may do now that it has tasted blood. Additionally, the shock of seeing the blood so quickly and with no further explanation and no opportunity to linger on the scratch again allows the audience to picture something that could be so much worse, adding to the tension.

Figure 13. Still from *Liminal*, with Joshua Knight

Figure 14. Still from *Liminal*, with Joshua Knight

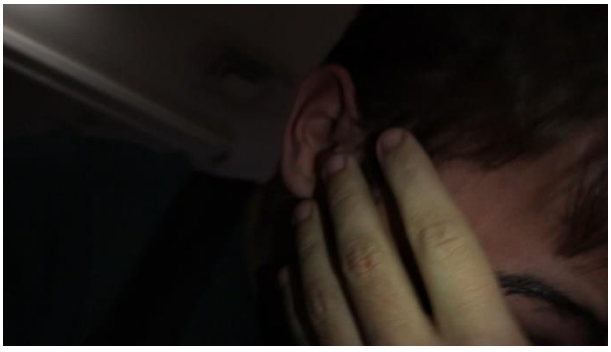
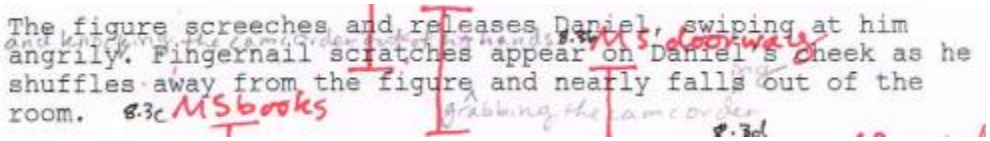


Figure 15. Excerpt of *Liminal* script, scene 6


The figure screeches and releases Daniel, swiping at him angrily. Fingernail scratches appear on Daniel's cheek as he shuffles away from the figure and nearly falls out of the room.

Scenes 4 and 6 – A Scare Around the Corner – False Expectations of Safety

False expectations of safety don't necessarily have to be set up in the same scene or right before the expectations are shattered. They can be set up from a previous scene. In scene 4 when Landon and Riley are initially exploring the bookstore, Landon jumps around a corner to scare Riley. While it is certainly a jumpscare, it is harmless as it is just her friend playing with her. The empty frame of the bookstore aisles juxtaposed with the familiar face of Landon immediately after is shown in figures 17 and 18.

However, in scene 6, when Landon looks around the corner to try to find the Figure, he is caught off guard by the Figure being behind him. The expectation of safety that may have come

from looking around a corner and seeing a familiar face or something harmless is shattered by the Figure reaching around in front of the camera to grab Landon. A similar frame of the empty aisle of bookshelves can be seen in figure 19, but in figure 20, the interruption is not a familiar face, but the hand of the frightening Figure.

Another expectation of safety that is broken here is that the Figure runs around the bookshelves, and Landon looks around the corner to head it off. Instead, it appears behind him, almost like it teleported. The audience might expect nothing to come from behind him because they saw the Figure go in the opposite direction, preparing the audience for the scare to hit hard.

Figure 17. Still from *Liminal*

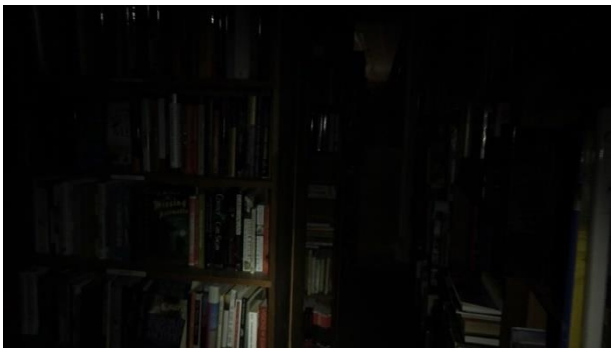


Figure 18. Still from *Liminal*, with Joshua Knight

Figure 19. Still from *Liminal*

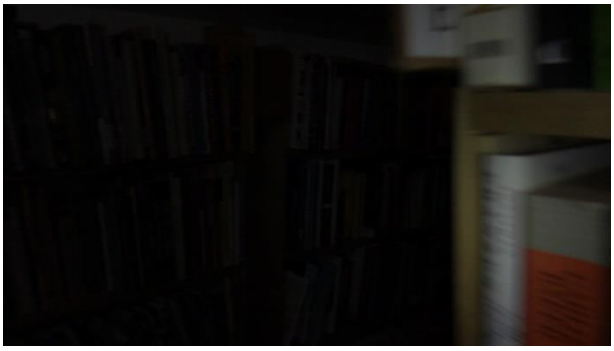
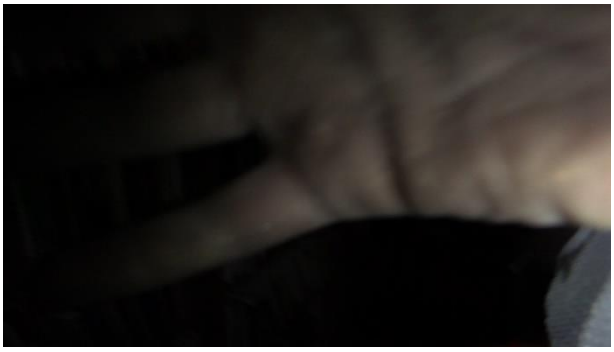


Figure 20. Still from *Liminal*, with Cat Modica



Scene 8 – Glimpse of the Figure – Don't Show the Monster

The shots in figures 21 and 23 are from scene 8 of *Liminal*, which is already halfway through the film, and it is only the second time the audience sees any sign of the Figure. The two

successive shots show only her dirty feet below her tattered and billowy dress and the edge of that dress disappearing around the corner, almost as though it were a cloud floating away. The audience may even wonder if they saw her in that second shot at all. Making the audience question what they are seeing and encouraging them to lean in and look closer not only sets up for coming jumpscares but also puts the audience in a state of unease and questioning what exactly they saw. As mentioned before, what is imagined is always worse than what is actually on the screen.

Figure 21. Still from *Liminal*, with Cat Modica and Joshua Knight

Figure 23. Still from *Liminal*, with Cat Modica

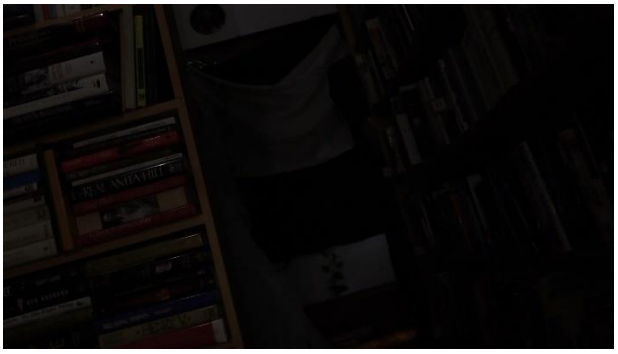
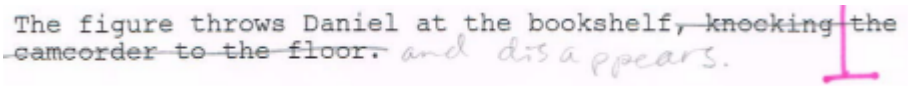


Figure 22. Excerpt of *Liminal* script, scene 6



Scene 10 – Building Tension Before the Chase – Use of Space

The shot of Landon in figure 24 is well-composed, placing Landon on the left line of the rule of thirds and giving him adequate head-room, but the right side of the frame is a solid wall that he is standing next to. Often, filmmakers try to avoid dead flat space like this, either by avoiding it or dressing it up with production design. However, this limited space is perfect for *Liminal* as it makes the characters feel claustrophobic even in a spacious shot. It also restricts the audience from seeing what might be behind that wall and therefore behind Landon. This builds tension in the audience as the characters pause here to decide their next move.

Figure 24. Still from *Liminal*, with Joshua Knight

Scene 10 – Building Tension Before the Chase – Restricted View

Similar to the previous shot from scene 10, figure 25 shows a bookshelf very close-up to the lens with only a restricted view of Landon's eye looking through the bookshelf. In this particular shot, the audience is following from Riley's POV, and anything that may be in front of, behind, or next to Landon is obscured. This puts the audience on edge, waiting for what might be around the corner when the two reunite.

Figure 25. Still from *Liminal*, with Joshua Knight

Scene 10 – The Figure Seemingly Teleporting – Use of Space, False Expectations

Scene 10 is the final climax of the tension that has been building with Landon and Riley trying to escape the bookstore. They find the place where the stairs used to be, but they aren't there anymore. Riley hears a sound, and they hide, and the Figure walks by going to the left. When it's gone, the two of them come out of hiding and check to the left, but it's nowhere to be

seen, so it's assumed they're safe, as shown in figures 26 and 27. The absence sets up a false expectation of safety, and the characters let their guards down, standing out in the middle of the aisle and talking with assumption they are safe, as shown in figure 28. Landon finally breaks the silence saying "Where are we?" and the Figure responds, but from their right. This breaks the expectation of where the Figure should be, solidfying the slowly accumulating evidence that it can in some way teleport around them, which adds just another layer of terror to the Figure.

Figure 26. Still from *Liminal*

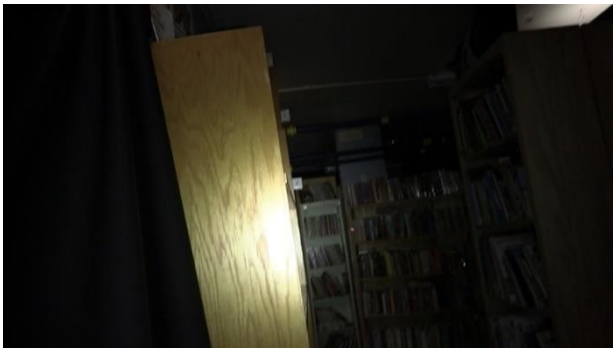


Figure 27. Still from *Liminal*, with Joshua Knight

Figure 28. Excerpt of *Liminal* script, scene 10

DANIEL
(softly but spoken)
Where are we...

FIGURE
Hell.

MS tilt up

The two whip around at the voice to see a shadow in the corner of the shelves. It's horrifying. Its body is twisted,

Figure 27. Still from *Liminal*, with Joshua Knight and Jessica Bryant

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