



## Review of The Dynamic Frame: Camera Movement in Classical Hollywood

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### Abstract

Review of Patrick Keating, *The Dynamic Frame: Camera Movement in Classical Hollywood*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. xi + 349 pp. ISBN 9780231190510, \$35.00 (pbk).

**Keywords:** cinematography, Hollywood cinema, framing



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"A history of camera movement must be a history of ideas about camera movement." (p. 2).

Exploring the largely untapped history of camerawork during the American studio system era, Keating's analysis is an establishing text. Well-organized and deeply researched, the timeline is chronological. The time period examined is book-ended with F. W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924) and Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958). After Acknowledgements and an Introduction which reviews the basic types of camera movement (pan, tilt, dolly, crane, zoom), the book breaks into six chapters.

Chapter 1 is American Cinema, German Angles. Reaching briefly back to 1915 the book opens with the establishment of narrative storytelling as the main product of Hollywood, typically either comedy or drama. It is then German filmmakers' abstract concepts such as subjectivity (the camera can be a character or omniscient), drama (mobility is not just for slapstick), and medium specificity (what film offers as a unique art form), that imparts great influence on camera movement beginning in the 1920s.

Chapter 2 is Purposes and Parallels. After the transition to sound, new technologies at the various studios emerged to make camera movement easier to master. Yet new questions also arose, about why the camera should or should not move, and what its movement intrinsically said about the perspective captured. Chapter 3 is Dynamism, Seriality, and Convergence. These are the three ways the moving camera characterized American life in the 1930s and early 1940s. Each theme became used both positively and negatively, and each led to distinct motifs against the backdrop of the Great Depression and World War II.

Chapter 4 is Constructing Scenes with the Camera. This chapter focuses on the early 1940s, the labor breakdown of camerawork in an era of incomplete screen credits, and the approaches of specific directors to capturing footage. A shift occurred from master-and-coverage to the alternative techniques of cut-in-camera (favored by Alfred Hitchcock) and the long take (favored by Orson Welles). This changed the landscape of power, control and voice in the film industry.

Chapter 5 is Between Subjective and Objective. At the time, films of the 1940s were largely categorized as either subjective or objective. This chapter explores examples demonstrating there was significant stylistic nuance on a spectrum that included semi-subjective, documentary, detached, and mock objective, among others.

Chapter 6 is An Art of Disclosures. By the 1950s there were even greater opportunities for fluid camerawork and long takes thanks to new dollies and cranes. However the filming challenges of widescreen formats and their various aspect ratios caused complications. Also affected were the narrative functions of revelation, concealment, emphasis and understatement.

The Conclusion uses an analysis of the opening crane sequence of *Touch of Evil* (1958) to connect back and review all the chapters in the book. Extensive Notes, the Bibliography, and an Index follows.

The book contains shot breakdown tables, screenshots, and vivid descriptions of the scenes discussed. In addition, it has a supplemental website with free access to over 250 clips, organized by chapter. There is even bonus material. This multimedia combination makes *The Dynamic Frame* an astonishing resource for any level of scholarship. Each chapter is rich with examples of moments in studio era cinema that prove the history of camera movement is a thrilling and intricate one. A history that combines storytelling, collective consciousness, artists and craftspeople, world history, technological advancements, spectatorship, and so much more.

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