New Review of Film and Television Studies
Vol. 7, No. 4, December 2009, 393–409

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The shape of 1959

Barry Salt*

The London Film School, 24 Shelton Street, London WC2H 9UB, UK

When I wrote 'The Shape of 1999' (2004), I was aware that the comparison I made between the stylistics of my sample of American films from that year, and those of earlier times, was not as well supported as it might have been. Although I made reference to the general statistics for hundreds of American films which were given in my *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (1992), most of those were from the 1940s or earlier, and with only a few from the 1950s onwards. So to remedy that defect, this paper will use an expanded comparison of my 1999 sample with a sample of 20 films from 1959, to give a more absolute demonstration of the general stylistic changes of American feature films over the 40 years from 1959 to 1999. This time span is sometimes said to encompass major changes in film style, but just how true is that? In the process of investigating this last point, I will introduce one or two new stylistic measures to deal with shot to shot continuity.

Keywords: film style; American cinema; statistical analysis; continuity editing

The sample

In the twenty-first century, all the American films released in the cinemas become available on DVD after a year or two, and indeed remain available for at least several years after that. This is hardly surprising, since most of these films depend partly on the DVD market for their very existence. In fact, the entire sample of 20 films from 1999 that I used for the previous paper can still be procured in DVD copies. So for recent films, it is possible to select a truly random sample to investigate, if one so wishes. But for 1959, when there were 151 American features produced according to the Internet Movie Database (Imdb.com), only 61 of these are available on DVD or VHS tapes. A random selection of these available films produced the list given in Table 1.

The selection has been slightly adjusted to be reasonably proportional to the output of the various studios, and also to the proportions by genre in films of 1959. Both A- and B-westerns still made up a significant part of production in 1959, and there were also more films set in the Second World War made at that time than in 1999. It is also correct that there were many fewer comedies

*Email: b.salt@lfs.org.uk

ISSN 1740-0309 print/ISSN 1740-7923 online

DOI: 10.1080/17400300903307126
http://www.informaworld.com

Table 1. A random selection of films from 1959 available on VHS and DVD.

Title	Director
Behemoth, the Sea Monster	Lourié, Eugene
Ben-Hur	Wyler, William
Best of Everything, The	Negulesco, Jean
Compulsion	Fleischer, Richard
Darby O'Gill and the Little People	Stevenson, Robert
Five Pennies, The	Shavelson, Melville
Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake, The	Cahn, Edward L.
Gidget	Wendkos, Paul
Go Johnny, Go!	Landres, Paul
Last Train from Gun Hill	Sturges, John
North by North-West	Hitchcock, Alfred
Nun's Story, The	Zinneman, Fred
Odds Against Tomorrow	Wise, Robert
On the Beach	Kramer, Stanley
Pillow Talk	Gordon, Michael
Ride Lonesome	Boetticher, Bud
Shadows	Cassavetes, John
Some Like it Hot	Wilder, Billy
Suddenly, Last Summer	Mankiewicz, Joseph
Verboten!	Fuller, Samuel

produced in 1959 than in 1999. Otherwise, things have not changed that much as far as film subjects are concerned. Also, the distribution of Average Shot Lengths (ASLs) for this selection matches that for a much larger sample for this year fairly well. However, there are noticeable gaps in the output of the studios amongst the available films. For instance, only 3 of the 21 films that MGM released in 1959 are currently available on DVD, including none of the five comedies that company released in 1959. While for Twentieth Century-Fox, only *Return of the Fly* is available from the eight Associated Producers Inc. films released by Fox. And so on.

Analytical methods

I fed the DVDs and VHS tapes of the films in succession into a non-linear editing (NLE) system on a computer, and then I went through each film in the NLE programme, marking each shot transition. Although this takes time, it makes the subsequent stages a little bit faster, and it also gives an automatic recording of the sequence of shot lengths in these films. Although this latter point is not important for my main stylistic study here, it does give some useful extra information. The results for my shot length analysis of these films can be studied on the Cinemetrics website (www.cinemetrics.lv).

After that I went through the films again, counting the number of shots with each Scale of Shot, which usually requires some stopping and starting and going back, particularly for the films with very short ASLs. I also recorded the number

of Inserts on this pass. Two more passes were necessary to get the numbers of reverse angles and POV shots, and yet another to get the number of camera movements.

There are important cautions to be made about this analytical process when working from tape recordings or DVDs of films. The first of these relates purely to the use of recordings made for the PAL television system. These are initially created from film prints that were shot at 24 frames per second when the original films were made, but are always transferred to the consumer medium at 25 frames per second. This means that their running time when played on PAL system devices is shortened by 4% of the original running time. And this means that a correction factor has to be applied to the ASL by multiplying it by a factor of 25/24. No correction is necessary for NTSC recordings. More important is the question of Scale of Shot determination from video and DVD copies of films. For old Academy screen ratio films, both 16 mm copies and, even more so, video copies are cropped in all around the frame on transfer to a greater extent than the screen masking when they are shown in the cinema, or on a Steenbeck. The effect of this on the Scale of Shot is fairly slight, as it shifts a very small proportion of the CUs into the BCU category, and an even smaller proportion of the more distant Shot Scales into the next closer category. Since nearly all American feature films made since 1954 are intended to be masked to widescreen on projection, or are shot in one of the anamorphic 'Scope systems, or in a wide film system, the difficulty does not exist in quite this form for widescreen films.

The problem is that films made since then which are shot 'flat', that is, with spherical lenses on the camera, may have the full Academy image, which was invariably recorded on the negative for American films, transferred to video, and not masked in to the widescreen proportions that were intended to be seen in the cinema. Although DVD transfers for recent films are virtually always given the correct masking, films from 1959 are sometimes left in the full Academy aperture ratio when transferred to DVD as well as to VHS. Another difficulty that can occur with films shot in Panavision, or other 'Scope systems (as opposed to merely being filmed with a Panavision camera with ordinary spherical lenses), is that full frame VHS and DVD copies can be made by 'scanning and panning' the 1:2.35 'Scope frame. A pan made across the 'Scope frame during the video transfer will show almost the true height of the frame, so creating no more of a problem for determining Scale of Shot than a video copy of an old Academy ratio film, but a scanning *cut* from one end of the 'Scope frame to the other, which sometimes happens, introduces an apparent extra cut into the film which wasn't there before. This is the case for the DVD copy of *Gidget* I used for this study. This only has a few scanning cuts, and I think I have spotted all of them, so they should not have introduced any significant uncertainty into my results.

For the films shot with ordinary lenses ('flat' or non-anamorphic images), the majority had to be masked at top and bottom to determine the correct Scale of Shot. This was true of *Behemoth, the Sea Monster*, *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*, *The Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake*, *Go Johnny, Go!*, *The Nun's Story*,

Suddenly, Last Summer, and *Verboten! Odds Against Tomorrow* and *Shadows* I left unmasked, because the former had too many ugly cut-offs of the tops of the heads even with a masking of 1:1.65, and the latter because it was shot on 16 mm, and clearly without any idea of masking it to widescreen, not to mention the fact that an Arriflex 16 St was used to film it, and those cameras never had widescreen markings on the ground-glass in the viewfinder.

The major stylistic variables

The Scale or Closeness of Shot is measured, as before, by the size of the human figure relative to the height of the frame (see Figure 1). They are as follows: Big Close Up (BCU) shows head only, Close Up (CU) shows head and shoulders, Medium Close Up (MCU) includes body from the waist up, Medium Shot (MS) includes from just below the hip to above the head of upright actors, Medium Long Shot (MLS) shows the body from the knee upwards, Long Shot (LS) shows at least the full height of the body, and Very Long Shot (VLS) shows the actor small in the frame. As usual, the figures quoted are the number of each scale per 500 shots in the film concerned.

An average Closeness of Shot profile for all the 20 films has been calculated, and is displayed at the beginning of Figure 1, and then the films are shown in order of their resemblance to that average distribution. This order was determined by calculating the correlation coefficient between the average 1959 profile and that for each of the individual films. The first 12 titles show a fair resemblance to the norm, but by the time we get to *The Nun's Story* the profiles are beginning to deviate markedly from the norm in various directions. For instance, the choice of shots is piled up in the middle range for *The Five Pennies*, but the opposite is true for *Behemoth, the Sea Monster*, with most of the shots either Close Shots or Long Shots. What we have here are individual stylistic differences due to the respective filmmakers, as several of the other films show that you can make a gripping drama without being so close, and *Some Like it Hot* proves that you also don't have to be close-in to make a hilarious comedy. At the other end of the scale, *Behemoth, the Sea Monster* inevitably has lots of Very Long Shots (VLSs) to accommodate the immense mutated monster of the title, when it finally comes into the open and lays waste to London. *North by North-West* is part of Hitchcock's Paramount Vistavision period, when that high resolution format seems to have encouraged him to give distant landscapes more screen time. For comparison on this point, the statistics for most of Hitchcock's other films can be seen in *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (Salt 1992). The surprise in the 1959 results as far as VLSs are concerned is *Odds Against Tomorrow*, which is about a small-time bank robbery, a subject not usually treated with lots of Very Long Shots. There is quite possibly an expressive intention here, as these distant shots are used when the bunch of New York losers head out into the country to rob a small up-state bank, and are bound for doom because of their character flaws.

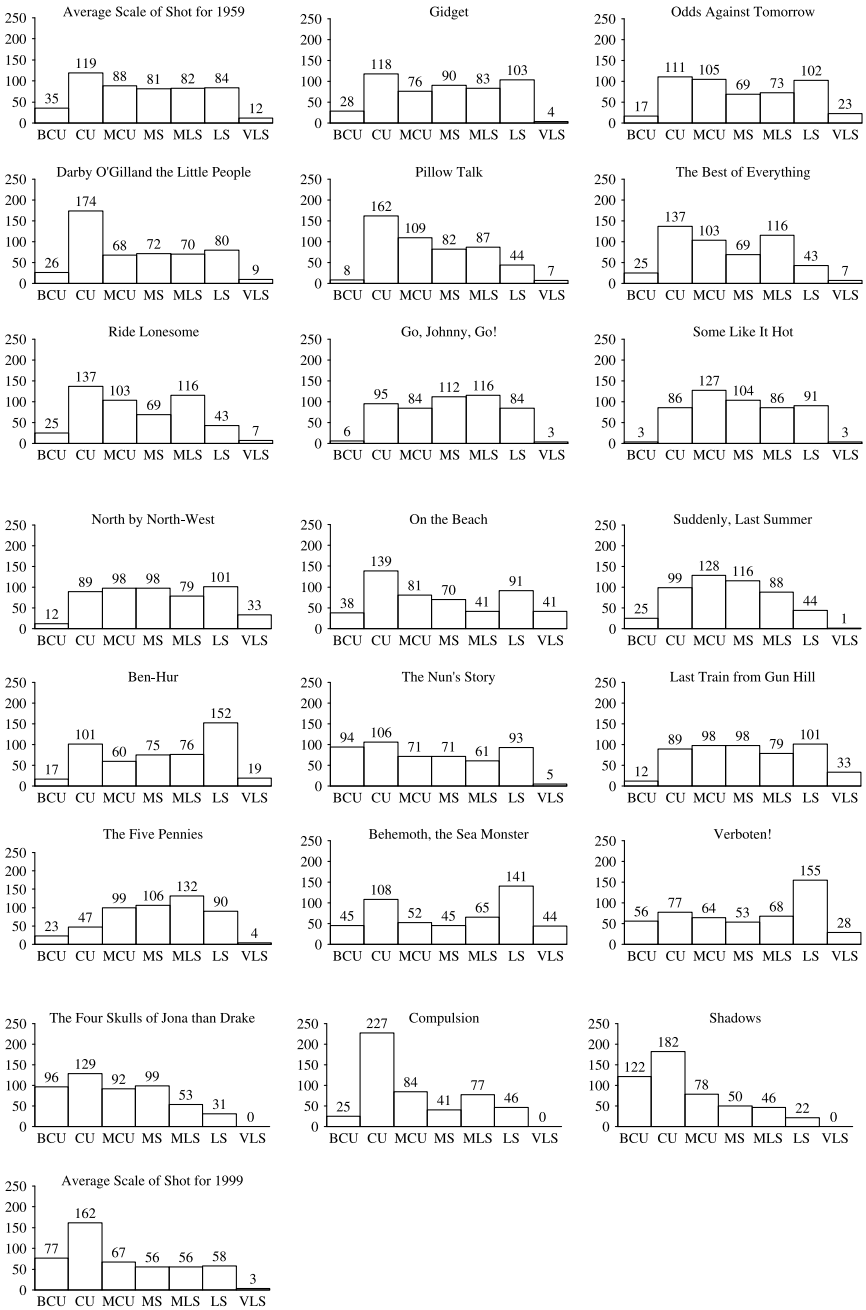

Figure 1. Scale or Closeness of Shot in the 20-film sample from 1959.

A reverse choice of shot scale can be seen in *Ride Lonesome*, which has substantially fewer VLSs, and even LSs, than the usual western, and in particular than *Last Train to Gun Hill*. *Ben-Hur* obviously had to have a lot of distant shots. As for *On the Beach* and *Verboten!*, I don't have any ready explanation for the relatively large proportion of VLSs, and it might be considered a flaw, but I personally don't mind it in the case of the former, as it gives me a good look once again at my home city, as it was once upon a long time ago. And *Gidget* has lots of waves to accommodate within Long Shots as an essential part of its story, and does so in the usual way. The film from 1959 that is closest to the typical 1999 film is *Shadows*, followed closely by *Compulsion*. As far as this aspect of film style is concerned, they both could have been made that way in 1999.

The plot of the average Scale of Shot for my previous 1999 sample also shows a real change over the intervening 40 years. This can be seen by eye, but it can be also summed up by the comparison for the average use of BCU and CU taken together. The average 1950 profile shows 153 per 500 shots of these kinds of shot, while for 1999 there are 239 per 500. In other words, nearly half the shots in an average 1999 film are Close Ups of one kind or another. There is inevitably a similar reduction in the amount of distant shots in 1999 films.

Camera movement

The categories of camera movement I use here and in the 1999 paper are pan, tilt, pan with tilt, track, track with pan and/or tilt, crane, and zoom. All of these are fairly self-explanatory, but it is worth remarking that my category of simple tracking shot includes only camera dolly movements in a straight line, including those sideways to the camera direction and subject, which is sometimes referred to as 'crabbing'. Any tracking on a curved path invariably contains panning movements as well. The zoom category, admittedly not strictly a camera movement, includes zooms made with simultaneous panning or tilting as well as zooms straight in and out. Camera movements of small extent which are made to keep the actors well-framed as they move about a little are not counted, as these have been done effectively automatically by camera operators for the last 80 years at least, and are hence without significance. The same applies to small dolly adjustments of a foot or so made for the same reason. Camera movements in Table 2 are also normalized to the number per 500 shots for the film in question. The table also includes a final column adding up all the camera of all kinds per 500 shots for the film in question. There are also two final rows in the table which give the average number of camera moves per 500 shots taken over the whole 20 films in my 1959 sample, and the same for my 1999 sample in the previous 'The Shape of 1999' (2004) paper.

The greatest use of camera movement occurs in *On the Beach*, and since this film uses long takes, the camera movement is quite evident to the casual viewer. The other film with a fair number of crane shots is *Ride Lonesome*, but most of these are not very extensive in height. The much smaller number of crane shots listed for a few of the other films all use small rises, so they are not doing

Table 2. Camera movements in the 20-film sample from 1959 (plus comparison with 1999).

Title	Pan	Tilt	Pan with tilt	Track	Track with pan & tilt	Crane	Zoom	Total
Behemoth, the Sea Monster	20	7	14	23	9	0	1	74
Ben-Hur	24	12	14	55	15	4	0	123
Best of Everything, The	54	7	18	21	56	0	0	156
Compulsion	19	4	3	17	29	5	0	77
Darby O'Gill and the Little People	24	4	9	5	3	0	0	44
Five Pennies, The	28	4	11	30	42	4	2	120
Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake, The	43	3	12	25	18	3	3	108
Gidget	73	5	17	9	17	0	0	120
Go Johnny, Go!	38	1	0	9	37	0	0	86
Last Train from Gun Hill	77	14	18	18	9	3	0	138
North by North-West	20	3	8	29	22	3	1	87
Nun's Story, The	36	10	16	28	28	0	0	118
Odds Against Tomorrow	55	6	53	9	15	0	7	145
On the Beach	31	4	20	36	52	18	0	160
Pillow Talk	21	6	6	23	56	2	0	113
Ride Lonesome	23	2	12	9	15	12	0	72
Shadows	55	4	11	2	4	0	0	75
Some Like it Hot	51	9	24	28	33	0	0	144
Suddenly, Last Summer	25	4	14	25	49	7	0	123
Verboten!	35	7	19	19	34	2	0	117
Average for 1959	38	6	15	21	27	3	1	111
Average for 1999	16	5	16	20	30	4	3	93

much stylistically. In the other films that use substantially more movement than the average, the moves, both tracking and panning, are mostly not very large, and are mostly integrated with actor movement, as in *Odds Against Tomorrow*, *The Best of Everything*, and *Some Like it Hot*, so that they do not draw that much attention to themselves. One special case is the large number of tracking shots in *Ben-Hur*, where most of them occur in the long chariot race scene, as a camera car tracks along with the chariots. The other is *Last Train from Gun Hill*, with an excessive number of panning shots. This is what Andrew Sarris was talking about when he wrote in *The American Cinema*: 'Sturges' stock-in-trade for superficial visual analysis is the wasteful pan' (1968, 202). Sarris' point is presumably that some pans are wasteful, and others are not, otherwise he would have to write down his favourite Max Ophuls, who goes well above Sturges with 100 pans per 500 shots in *Liebelei* and 92 per 500 in *The Reckless Moment*. It is true that nothing much is happening during a substantial number of the panning shots in *Last Train from Gun Hill*, to the point that one wonders why the director is hanging on to the shot while Anthony Quinn wanders around the front of his ranch mansion, but in *Never So Few*, also directed by John Sturges in 1959, this sort of thing does not happen at all, and there are only 21 pans per 500 shots. Not everything can be summed up in a quick wise-crack. Camera moves are perhaps most visible in *Some Like it Hot*, because they are associated with longer takes, which always draw attention to camera movement.

At the other extreme, there is markedly little camera movement in *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*. This is not because of its exceptionally short ASL, because recent films demonstrate that you can get a camera movement into even shorter shots. It is pretty certainly due to the fact that all Disney live-action films were *completely* storyboarded by the studio artists before the filming started, and the director had to follow the storyboard exactly. (Yes, I know you can indicate camera moves on a storyboard, but it involves extra conceptual work, so there is usually not much of it.) Using special-effect combination shots also creates a pressure against camera movement, and this can be seen in the results for *Behemoth, the Sea Monster*, but although that film is noticeably more static than the average, it still has more camera movement than *Darby*.

Good, easily useable zoom lenses had just become available from SOM-Berthiot and Angénieux for non-anamorphic filming, but they were not being used by most studio filmmakers (Salt 1992, 244). The only film here that makes noticeable use of them is *Odds Against Tomorrow*, where they are entirely confined to some location exteriors. The handful of other instances of zoom shots in my sample are done quite discreetly.

The average quantities for camera movements for my sample of films from 'The Shape of 1999' shows that there has been remarkably little change over 40 years in the amount and kind of camera movement in American feature films. What change there is occurs purely in a halving of the amount of panning used to cover the action. This is where doubling the number of shots to shoot a typical scene, as has happened over the last 40 years, really has its effect.

Shot lengths, reverse angles, and point of view

The simplest stylistic measure, and indeed the most studied since I introduced it 34 years ago, is Average Shot Length (ASL). Although filmmakers do not use this term, they have talked about comparative cutting rates in films, which refer to the same thing in an imprecise way, since at least the 1930s. The length of the film, divided by the number of shots in it, gives the Average Shot Length, which perhaps should have been called the Mean Shot Length, to comply with standard statistical terminology, but it is too late to change it now. (Actually, I chose 'average', rather than 'mean' when I introduced the term in the hope of being understood by more people.) Table 3 shows the ASLs, as well as percentages of Reverse Angles (RAs), Point of View shots (POVs), and Inserts for my sample of American films from 1959. The second last row in the table gives the average of these quantities for the whole sample, followed by the last row, which gives the averages of the same quantities for the 1999 sample I used in 'The Shape of 1999'.

Leaving the ASL aside for the moment, and dealing with the other variables, the range in the use of reverse-angle cutting goes from no lower than 22% in *Verboten!* to a high of 63% in *Compulsion*. The distribution of values for this quantity is not as strongly peaked around the average, which is 39%, as it is for

Table 3. Percentage of Average Shot Lengths, Reverse Angles, Point of View shots, and Inserts in the 20-film sample from 1959 (plus comparison with 1999).

Title	Director	ASL	RA	POV	INS
Behemoth, the Sea Monster	Lourié, Eugene	5.6	25	12	19
Ben-Hur	Wyler, William	8.1	33	5	7
Best of Everything, The	Negulesco, Jean	11.3	35	5	5
Compulsion	Fleischer, Richard	9.9	63	4	2
Darby O'Gill and the Little People	Stevenson, Robert	4.4	60	10	6
Five Pennies, The	Shavelson, Melville	15.9	34	7	7
Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake, The	Cahn, Edward L.	7.7	23	18	14
Gidget	Wendkos, Paul	11.7	34	8	3
Go Johnny, Go!	Landres, Paul	8.2	35	25	4
Last Train from Gun Hill	Sturges, John	6.7	47	5	2
North by North-West	Hitchcock, Alfred	6.3	53	24	9
Nun's Story, The	Zinneman, Fred	8.6	44	7	7
Odds Against Tomorrow	Wise, Robert	7.3	45	7	12
On the Beach	Kramer, Stanley	18.4	27	14	14
Pillow Talk	Gordon, Michael	9.5	35	7	9
Ride Lonesome	Boetticher, Bud	7.8	57	16	3
Shadows	Cassavetes, John	7.1	31	1	1
Some Like it Hot	Wilder, Billy	12	49	7	3
Suddenly, Last Summer	Mankiewicz, Joseph	8.9	41	3	3
Verboten!	Fuller, Samuel	10.7	22	20	13
Average of the 1959 values		9.3	40	10	7
Average of the 1999 values		5.5	40	8	10

the distribution of ASLs, and both the spread of values and their average for the year is almost identical to that for 1999. And the same could be said for the use of POV shots. The exceptional cases at the high end are for *Go, Johnny, Go!* (25% POV cuts) and *North by North-West* (24%). The former film has so many POV shots because it largely consists of rock-and-roll performances before audiences, so it inevitably has lots of shots of the audience intercut with the performers they are looking at, just as happens with *Man on the Moon* in the 1999 sample. On the other hand, in *North by North-West*, as always with Hitchcock, the POV shots are working dramatically to put the audience in the threatened protagonist's position. Something similar is also managed by *The Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake* (18% POV), *Verboten!* (20% POV), and *Ride Lonesome* (16% POV), though it is nowhere nearly as well planned as by Hitchcock.

The ASLs of individual films are mostly fairly near the mean value of the ASL for the sample, as the distribution is fairly strongly peaked, and approximates a Normal or Gaussian distribution (like the heights of people in a population, and so on), as usual. The noticeably deviant cases are *Darby O'Gill* and *Behemoth*. Other Disney live-action features from around this time are mostly almost as fast cut as *Darby O'Gill* – for instance, *The Shaggy Dog* (Charles Barton, 1959) has an ASL of 5.7 seconds, and *Greyfriars Bobby* (Don Chaffey, 1960) an ASL of 5.0 seconds – and this was probably imposed by the studio, mainly through the storyboarding process. As for *Behemoth*, the importance of fast cutting to cover up the defects and cheating of special effects was evident long before this, as far back as the 1930s Tarzan films, at least. At the other end of the scale, the many long takes in *On the Beach* and *The Five Pennies* are in danger of introducing a certain dullness into the story-telling, though a less extreme use of the long take need not conflict with the excitement, as in *Some Like it Hot*, with an ASL of 12 seconds.

When we look at the average values of these variables for the 1999 sample in the row below, the really big change is obviously in the cutting rate, with the ASL almost halved 40 years later. The mean ASL for my 20-film sample from 1959 is 9.3 seconds, and for the 20 films from 1999 it was 5.5 seconds.

This can be put in the context of the general trends of cutting rates for American films between 1930 and 2005 by showing the graph for the mean ASL from each year for that period (see Figure 2). I have described these general movements in cutting rate in 'The Shape of 1999', and indeed long before that, but previously I took the mean cutting rates over a series of six-year periods rather than year by year. I now have enough results to get a decent number of films in each year, and indeed the results summarized by the graph come from 7448 films over the 75-year period.

Unfortunately, the coverage of these years is somewhat uneven, and ranges from lows of about 50 films a year in the 1930s and 1960s to around 200 films a year in the 1990s. The more jagged sections of the graph correspond to the years for which my yearly sample is smaller, and I think these sections would be a bit smoother if the samples for the years in question were over 100 films. However,

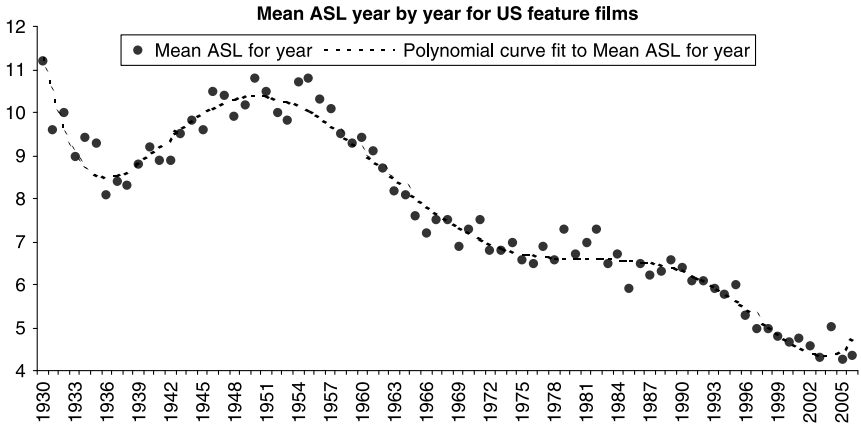

Figure 2. Mean ASL year by year for US feature films.

the peak of slow cutting (i.e. long-take filming) from 1947 to 1955 is quite real, and holds up into 1955 as a result of the way CinemaScope filming was done with long takes for the first couple of years it existed, before it was generally realized that fast cutting in CinemaScope was acceptable to audiences. Then the fall in the ASL (the increase in the cutting rate) begins from 1956, and goes on continuously to about 1975. You can also see the way that ASLs almost stopped falling between 1975 and 1984, then resumed their decrease through to 2003. The sample sizes for the years from 2000 to 2005 are sufficiently large (between 100 and 200 films per year) to support the idea that we may have reached another plateau.

I must emphasize that the crude technological explanations sometimes given for the increases in cutting rate are clearly wrong, as the decrease in ASL began in the 1950s, before the CIR tape splicer came into use in Europe, let alone in Hollywood, and continued downwards again from 1989 just before NLE systems came into general use in the middle 1990s. The comment by Bill Pope quoted in *Moving into Pictures* (Salt 2006, 320), that in 1990 Sam Raimi wanted one cut every three seconds in *Darkman*, suggests that it was a conscious desire by filmmakers to increase the cutting rate that led to the resumed fall in ASL. And one might speculate that this in turn was influenced by the very fast cutting occurring at the time in some pop music videos. The real surprise is the plateau in ASL from 1975 to 1987. This may well be the result of the temporary infatuation of film directors in the 1970s with using a combination of zooming and panning to cover parts of scenes, rather than breaking them down into shots taken from different camera positions.

Continuity in continuity

Another area of film form where one might expect change is in the handling of continuity from shot to shot. Traditionally, a ruling idea in film construction was

that the discontinuity between shots should be concealed as much as possible. However, like many important technical features of film construction, there are no detailed discussions and analysis of this point by the people actually engaged in the activity. So although I generally try to use analytical categories derived from professional film practice in my work, in this case I will have to create my own.

My subjective impression from seeing large numbers of both old and new films is that in films from the 1930s and 1940s the leading actors visibly 'flow' through the film from one shot to the next more than they do in recent films. To test this impression with the films from 1959 and 1999 that I am studying, I used as a measure the proportion of cuts between shots that show at least one actor in the same position in the filmed space on both sides of the cut. For this I ignored any small discrepancies in the actor's position in the filmed space of the two shots, taking the attitude that these were accidents, and considered unlikely to be noticed by the film audience. The simplest cases are when there is a cut from a shot from one angle on an actor to another angle on him, followed by the case in which there is a cut from two or more actors to an individual shot (a 'single') of one of them, or the reverse sequence. In another very frequent case, we can have something like the pair of adjacent shots shown in simplified frame diagrams in Figure 3.

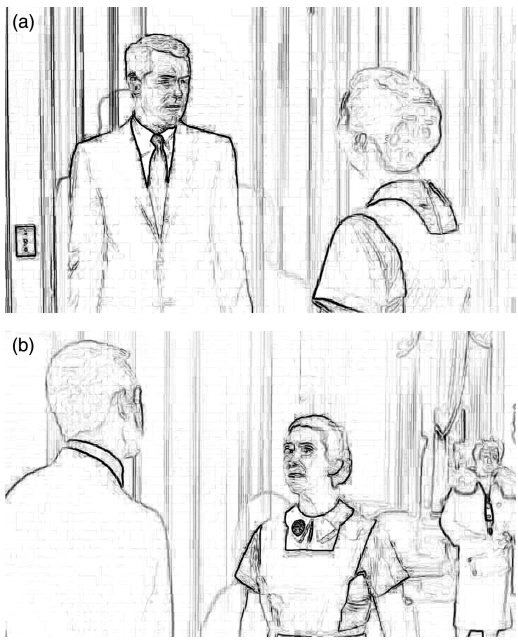

Figure 3. Actor clearly identifiable across cut.

In this case, both actors are in focus and well lit, and readily identifiable across the cut from one shot to the other. The two shots happen to form a reverse-angle pair, but that is not necessary for this degree of visual continuity.

However, one can also get situations, in which one or more of the actors is out of focus and underlit in one of the adjoining shots, as in the pair similarly shown in simplified diagrams in Figure 4.

The figure in sharp focus in the first shot is partially seen from behind at the left and out of focus in the second shot, which is a reverse angle to the first one. One can recognize that this is the same actor quite quickly, but less instantaneously than in the first case. So this would be included as an extreme example of a continuity cut, according to the criterion I am using at the moment.

Using this criterion illustrated by the above cases for my samples from 1959 and 1999, I got the results for the percentage of continuity cuts in the films shown in the second column, labelled 'Continuity', in Table 4.

The averages for the 1959 sample and the 1999 sample are entered below the appropriate column. There are no values for *Gidget*, because the DVD I was working with was 'panned and scanned' from the original CinemaScope frame into the Academy frame by eliminating the sides of the original picture. This means that it is impossible to be certain which actors appeared in the lost part of the frame, and hence what the continuity (as I define it) is between successive shots.

Figure 4. Actor not clearly identifiable across cut.

Table 4. Percentage of continuity cuts in the 1959 sample and 1999 sample.

Title	Continuity	Tighter continuity
Behemoth, the Sea Monster	17	14
Ben-Hur	44	37
Best of Everything, The	46	42
Compulsion	56	46
Darby O'Gill and the Little People	29	26
Five Pennies, The	51	47
Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake, The	34	23
Gidget		
Go Johnny, Go!	32	31
Last Train from Gun Hill	38	34
North by North-West	27	24
Nun's Story, The	39	35
Odds Against Tomorrow	33	30
On the Beach	28	22
Pillow Talk	46	33
Ride Lonesome	18	18
Shadows	27	26
Some Like it Hot	30	21
Suddenly, Last Summer	34	33
Verboten!	14	13
Average for 1959 sample	**34**	**29**
10 Things I Hate About You	50	42
Angela's Ashes	34	25
Blair Witch Project, The	1	0
Brokedown Palace	28	19
Crazy in Alabama	18	15
Deep Blue Sea	39	25
Detroit Rock City	29	25
EDtv	32	24
Insider, The	50	22
Jakob the Liar	32	28
Life	35	29
Love Stinks	37	25
Man on the Moon	37	28
Mating Habits of Earthbound Humans, The	21	17
Minus Man, The	18	10
Sixth Sense, The	23	17
SLC Punk!	15	13
Snow Falling on Cedars	21	8
Talented Mr. Ripley, The	41	30
Three to Tango	43	33
Average for 1999 sample	**30**	**22**

As you can see, for the 1959 films the continuity measure is a bit higher, at 34%, than for the 1999 films (30%). However, what I was originally noticing about continuity in older films is not exactly the same as the criterion I used to get these figures. So I did the experiment again, using a criterion for continuity that requires the actor present across the cut to be *instantly* recognizable. This requires that the particular actor's head be visible, and approximately in focus, and fairly well lit, on both sides of the cut. This disallows the second case represented in Figure 4 above.

The percentage of shots falling within this tighter (or more restricted) form of continuity is tabulated in the third column under the heading 'Tighter Continuity'. The figures obtained are a bit lower for the 1959 films, but a lot lower for the 1999 films. One might think that the general decrease in continuity from shot to shot using this measure is partly due to the fact that 1999 films are shot from closer in to the actors than 1959 films, but this is not the whole explanation. If you look at the 'Tight Continuity' figures for individual films released in 1999 in comparison with the proportion of close shots in them in the graphs for Closeness of Shot in 'The Shape of 1999' paper, there is no correlation at all. Adding the BCUs and CUs together, and getting the correlation coefficient of this value with the value of 'Tight Continuity' for the respective 1999 films gives a value close to zero. So other factors are in play here, and in particular stylistic choices by the filmmakers about how much of the actors they get in successive shots.

Another important element in the impression of continuity is the presence or absence of 'jump cuts'. These are cuts in which some of the characters in the film are shown at what is clearly a later time in the shot that comes after the cut. Although the distinction is not definitely made by filmmakers on the rare occasions when they have to discuss these sorts of cuts, it is obvious that there are two major classes of jump cuts; those in which people appear in a different location across the cut, and those in which they appear elsewhere in the same space after the cut. I will call these respectively 'jump cuts between scenes' and 'jump cuts inside scenes'.

In 1959 American films using jump cuts of any kind were very rare, and the use of a jump cut within a scene was almost unknown. In my sample of 20 films, *The Nun's Story* has the most jump cuts, in fact 38 of the 98 scenes in the film are joined by jump cuts, with increasing frequency as the film goes on. The film also contains one jump cut within a scene, though this is fairly well concealed by the way it fits into the action. *Odds Against Tomorrow* is the runner up, with five jump cuts between scenes, and one inside a scene. They all occur in the build-up to the climactic robbery. And finally, *On the Beach* manages to get in two jumps between scenes, again towards the end of the film when things are getting really bad for the survivors of the atomic holocaust. The other 17 films contain no jump cuts, with all the transitions between scenes done with the traditional fades, dissolves, and wipes.

In 1999, all the films contain jump cuts, but there is a quite large variation between them. This latter point means that filmmakers in 1999 are making a stylistic choice about how much to use jump cutting.

Table 5 shows the statistics for this feature in films from 1999.

Jump cuts between scenes are less disruptive, because they are just a simple replacement of the dissolve that would have been used in former times, whereas jump cuts inside scenes are much more visible in the way they instantaneously move the actors across a fixed and visible space. Taking this into account, it can be said that *Deep Blue Sea* is the most conventional of these films in this respect, while at the other extreme, *SLC Punk!* is earning its punk credentials with jump cuts, some of them very extreme, as well as in a number of other ways. And *Snow Falling on Cedars* is earnestly striving for post-Resnais art with its very complex structure of flash-backs which accounts for most of the 294 jump cuts between scenes.

In between these films, there is a large group that uses jump cuts mostly to get from one scene to the next, and hence the number of jump cuts is about the same as the total number of scenes in the film. And there is a smaller group that uses a mixture of jump cuts and traditional transitional devices to advance from one scene to the next. For instance, *The Sixth Sense* works its time transitions with fades and dissolves as well as jump cuts.

Table 5. Number of jump cuts within and between scenes in the 1999 sample.

Film	Editors	Jumps inside scenes	Jumps between scenes
10 Things I Hate About You	Brown, O. Nicholas	5	46
Angela's Ashes	Hambling, Gerry	52	225
Blair Witch Project, The	Myrick, D. & Sanchez	25	
Brokedown Palace	Clayton & Zimmerman	6	41
Crazy in Alabama	Hoy, M. & Jones, R.	27	25
Deep Blue Sea	Urioste & Brechlin	3	13
Detroit Rock City	Goldblatt, Mark	35	6
EDtv	Hill, M. & Hanley, D.	7	36
Insider, The	Goldenberg & Rubell	7	67
Jakob the Liar	Simpson, Claire	16	21
Life	Wolf, Jeffrey	9	42
Love Stinks	Candib, Richard	13	66
Man on the Moon	Tellefesen & Klingman	36	76
Mating Habits of Earthbound Humans, The	Myers, Stephen R.	44	51
Minus Man, The	Ramsay, Todd	10	54
Sixth Sense, The	Mondshein, Andrew	21	23
SLC Punk!	Russell, Esther P.	173	92
Snow Falling on Cedars	Corwin, Hank	73	294
Talented Mr. Ripley, The	Murch, Walter	22	109
Three to Tango	Semel, Stephen	24	40

So altogether, 'continuity' is hanging on quite well in film construction, but it has also undoubtedly decreased by the measures I have used. So should we give a special label to the type of continuity occurring in recent films? Say, 'Intensified Continuity'? Not if we have any respect for the meaning of words in the English language, and anyway, why bother? It is all just part of the gradual and continuous shifts in film style that have been going on for a hundred years.

References

Salt, Barry. 1992. *Film style and technology: History and analysis*. 2nd ed. London: Starword.

———. 2004. The shape of 1999. *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 2, no. 1: 61–85.

———. 2006. *Moving into pictures: More on film history, style, and analysis*. London: Starword.

Sarris, Andrew. 1968. *The American cinema: Directors and directions, 1929–1968*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co.