

Appendix: The Mechanics of Books versus the Mechanics of Movies

by John Dean

An end product is the result of a process. The design, construction, and use of books and movies depend each upon the particular dynamics of how they come into existence. Here is an outline of how they are made.

The Mechanics of Books

As of today, there are two kinds of publishing in the United States: trade publishing and educational publishing. Each category mainly publishes books. Trade publishing is the smaller part of the industry, with educational books a much larger part.

Trade publishing means general interest, hardcover and paperback books which one finds in general bookstores in the U.S.A. such as Borders or Barnes and Noble. Educational publishing means text books, reference, technical, science, biography, history, technology books, along with cook books, regional interest books, and university press books. One can find educational books in general bookstores, but they are mainly available in specialty bookstores or in specialized areas of a store (like a university bookstore, or the education section of a Barnes and Noble bookstore).

One of the most significant factors in the history of Western culture has been the prodigious increase in the multiplication of texts. The first great Western breakthrough came in 1430–1460, with Gutenberg and Co. The second came in 1780–1820, when industrialization revolutionized both the volume, manner, and distribution of book production. Then, specially in the American 1930s (but gradually in Europe as well), recorded music, movies, radio, and eventually TV and multimedia digital media (cell phones, Blackberries, personal computer) created massive new media competition with books. The public's entertainment and education attention diversified and thus storytelling diversified. As of 1930, nonfiction book titles published in the U.S.A. began to outnumber fiction titles. This has been true ever since. Then, after World War II, there was a tremendous increase in education—sparked by the GI Bill of Rights¹ and the Baby Boomer generation—and U.S. educational publishing skyrocketed.

Nowadays, book publishing in the America breaks down into the following process, step by step:

1. Author's writing and research
 - a. Possible secretarial assistance
 - b. Possible agent and contract to begin with (but both unlikely, specially for beginning authors)
2. Author's composition and text refinement
3. Manuscript acquisition by publisher
 - a. Possible intermediary: agent
 - b. Contract (Ideally an author begins with the contract. But the reality is far from ideal.)
4. Editing by publisher: Editing was once a major factor, now minor. A vital author-editor relation is mainly a thing of the past in the U.S.A. In most cases, editing is now the author's sole responsibility.

5. Publisher: book production process

- a. Copy Editor: i. checks and corrects spelling, punctuation, facts ii. styles manuscript for printer
The U.S. copy editor is nowadays mainly a technician; he does not play a key part in shaping or discovering the final work—as with the great U.S. editor at Scribner's Maxwell Perkins (1884–1947), who fathered F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Ring Lardner, Thomas Wolfe, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, and others, into print.
- b. Design and production editor: book's physical appearance.
- c. DComposition: typesetting, makeup, proofs, printing and binding.

6. Bookselling

- a. Publication and diffusion
- b. Market targeting and pricing

The Mechanics of Movies

The American motion-picture industry has its own way of doing business, its technique and art—the “seventh art.”² The mechanics consist of three areas, each with a set of six components. These are:

Preproduction Work

1. *Script*. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the majority of major Hollywood films were based on material that came from other forms, mainly literary. Most U.S. films nowadays are created from scripts written to be directly filmed.
2. *Actors*. For all but the major actors, casting is done by a casting director. The film actor—as opposed to the stage actor—has to be superb in close-ups, powerful with the understated gesture. Movie acting is not about versatility and range, but individual charisma—and a certain haunting continuity (playing “in character”).
3. *Sets*. Two kinds: natural and studio-constructed. Why one rather than the other? Answer: budget, convenience, time, and the director and producer's personal vision. But do not think what you see is what you get if a movie is filmed in a “natural” setting. In Coppola's *The Godfather* (1971), the “realistic” director rebuilt a city street to make it look “more authentic,” while director Michelangelo Antonioni was known to spray-paint trees and bushes to get the color he wanted.
4. *Costumes*. Clothes count. The legendary French designer Coco Chanel once said: “A woman is closest to being naked when she is well dressed.” Clothes visually situate the story in an historical period or place without need of narrative comment. They heighten characterization and create a charismatic signature: like Humphrey Bogart's trench coat. Plus, subtext must suit the style. As historian Edward Gibbon put it, “Style is the image of character.”
5. *Aspect Ratio*. This refers to film frame proportion, the ratio of width to height of the image on film and on screen. This is crucial since aspect ratio frames the screen image. Thomas Edison created a slightly rectangular screen, then sound films brought a nearly square screen. The U.S. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1932 returned the aspect ratio to its original, Edisonian 1.33 : 1. This became the standard until the 1950s when a wider screen (CinemaScope, 2.35 : 1) was introduced.
6. *Film Stock*. This is the raw, unexposed film, traditionally distinguished by gauge, type, and exposure index. It also means black and white or color film. Why black and white today? As U.S. actor and director Sam Fuller says to Wim Wenders in his movie *The State of Things* (1982) “Life is in color, but black and white is more realistic.” Film stock has changed the way movies look and age. If a color movie was made with an impermanent dye, then there's no way to tell what the original story color was meant to look like (as with much of Eastman Color film commonly used in the U.S.A.).

The Work of Filming

1. *Lenses*. A camera lens fulfills the practical requirement of obtaining an image and a desired artistic effect.
2. *Camera Distance and Position*. Camera distance, height, and angle all influence a scene's effect. The camera is where the viewer's eyes will be and effects the viewer's response to the meaning of the scene. Lens, filter, and camera angle are decisive when photographing the movie star. The flamboyant, hard-living American stage and screen star Tallulah Bankhead (1902–1968) said at the end of her career: "They used to photograph Shirley Temple through gauze. They should photograph me through linoleum."
3. *Composition*. This is the spatial arrangement of the scene. It is crucial since it focuses audience attention on the explicit meaning of the visible and the implicit meaning of the unseen.
4. *Camera Movement*. When the camera moves, composition changes. This distinguishes film from painting, which has a fixed perspective. Film can constantly shift and alter its shape, present its material from ever-changing viewpoints. Camera movements include the pan, the tilt, dolly³ in or dolly out, a tracking shot, crane shot, jiggle shots, zoom shot, slow, medium, or fast.
5. *Lighting*. Photography means literally "to write with light"—which is what movies do. Film lighting derives from still photography. Filmmakers talk about two kinds of lighting: high key and low key—high key is bright with little shadowed area; low key leaves much of the set or scene in darkness. Additional factors: contrast, light angle, kind, quality, and color of the light, muted or dispersed light (as with smoke or fog).
6. *Sound*. From shellac disc recordings of the late 1920s to contemporary multichanneled digital sound, the search has been for realism in sound when the film is actually made. Sound track manipulation is done in the postproduction stage. However, the Italian director Federico Fellini could not care less about sound quality when he filmed. The image came first and all other sounds that mattered were recorded or altered after the filming. Alfred Hitchcock in *The Birds* (1963) opted for a constant interplay of natural sounds and computer-generated noises. As Hitchcock told François Truffaut: "Until now we've worked with natural sounds, but now, thanks to electronic sound, I'm not only going to indicate the sound we want but also the style and the nature of each sound."⁴

Working with the Exposed Footage

1. *Processing and printing*.
2. *Editing*. The final stage of creative manipulation.
3. *Special effects*. The unusual technical means by which an image is manipulated, with a charm and style characteristic of each technological era. There is no such thing as "the ultimate special effect."
4. *Music*. It is oxygen to movies (it either gives life and breath or suffocates the movie to death).
5. *Sound effects*. These add mood, tone, place, ideas, and emotions.
6. *Postsynchronization or dubbing*. To rerecord, cast other voices, add dialogue, prepare a foreign-language version.

Notes

- 1 The G.I. Bill (officially the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944) was a bill that provided college or vocational education for returning World War II veterans (commonly referred to as G.I.s) as well as one year of unemployment compensation. It also provided many different types of loans for returning veterans to buy homes and start businesses.
- 2 The phrase was first coined by the early Italian-French movie critic Ricciotto Canudo (1879–1923) in 1911.
- 3 Camera dolly. In German: "Kamerawagen."
- 4 François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967; originally published as *Le Cinema selon*

Hitchcock [Paris: Robert Laffont, 1966]), 224.

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The subject of the relation between literature and movies as a critical subject has been widely studied and analyzed since the middle of the twentieth century. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, Anglo-American critical writings on this subject were done by significant film critics and authors such as James Agee (1909–1955) and Graham Greene (1904–1991). Movie industry professionals everywhere have always known a lot about adaptation—since it is their bread and butter—and still do. Excellent proof of this is screenwriter William Goldman's *Adventures in the Screen Trade* (1983). Seek out academic criticism and a current check on *JStor's* website (www.jstor.org) will show about five thousand available critical articles on this theme. The interested student of film can now target what point he/she may seek to know more about, or go ahead and produce yet another close-reading study of adaptation. The critical breakthrough book in the U.S.A. on this subject, still quite useful, especially as a beginning point, was George Bluestone's *Novels into Film* (1956)—noted below.

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