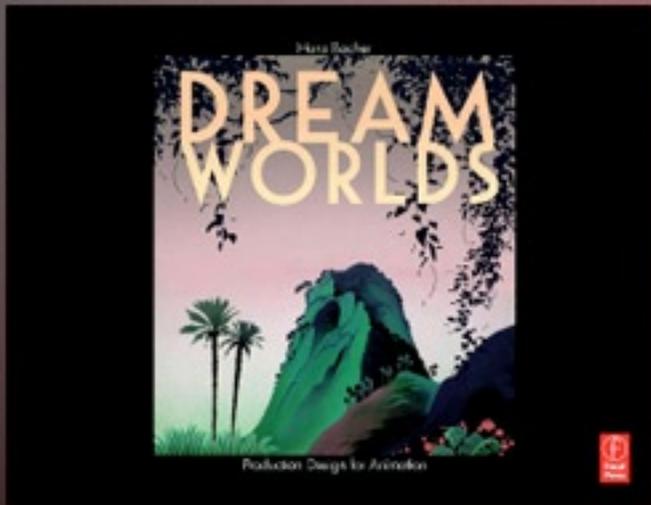


***Like what you see?  
Buy the book at  
the Focal Bookstore***

Click here:

<http://focalbookstore.com/?isbn=9780240520933>



**Dream Worlds**

**Hans Bacher**

**ISBN 978-0-240-52093-3**

# INT



Working with film is challenging as you are creating thousands of pictures. They are all connected throughout a story with several actors: human or animals, cartoony, realistic or very stylized and, with lots of emotions, action and fantastic worlds. You are part of a creation process in which a dream world comes alive. It is scary and fascinating at the same time. So many artists create one piece of art that you alone would never be able to do.

What does it mean – Production Design? Exactly that, the design of the production; the “look” of the film. Of course, the Production Designer does not do all that independently. The vision of the director gives him or her a direction of where to go, and they are limited to a budget and a timeframe. Not to forget, the final look of the movie depends on the ability of a good design team of layout artists and background painters, who have to

translate all the ideas. A feature film is the team effort of up to sixty artists in that department. If the production designer and the art director fail to keep the quality standards up, it could end in disaster. Usually a lot of major problems have to be solved. The movie has to look expensive, but should not be expensive to produce. During the production of *Mulan*, the executives asked me constantly if we could add a bit more detail in the backgrounds.



The overall look of the film was in their opinion “poor.” We were not using tonal mattes on the characters. Well, they did not use them in *Lady and the Tramp* and it did not look cheap! There is usually a lot of fighting against windmills, and in case if in the end, it looks like different pieces of the movie don’t fit together, it shows that the designers lost the battle against the “powers.”

I’ve always enjoyed working with so much talent, to get inspired

and excited together with artists from very diverse disciplines. The preproduction time on a new movie in the very beginning is the best time. With complete artistic freedom, the assigned team creates the craziest and most fantastic ideas in beautiful sketches and paintings. Later, after production starts, fun is limited. Work has to happen within clear, defined borders. There are deadlines and the footage numbers become more important.

This is not a fast process. Sometimes it takes five or more years from the first ideas to the finished product.

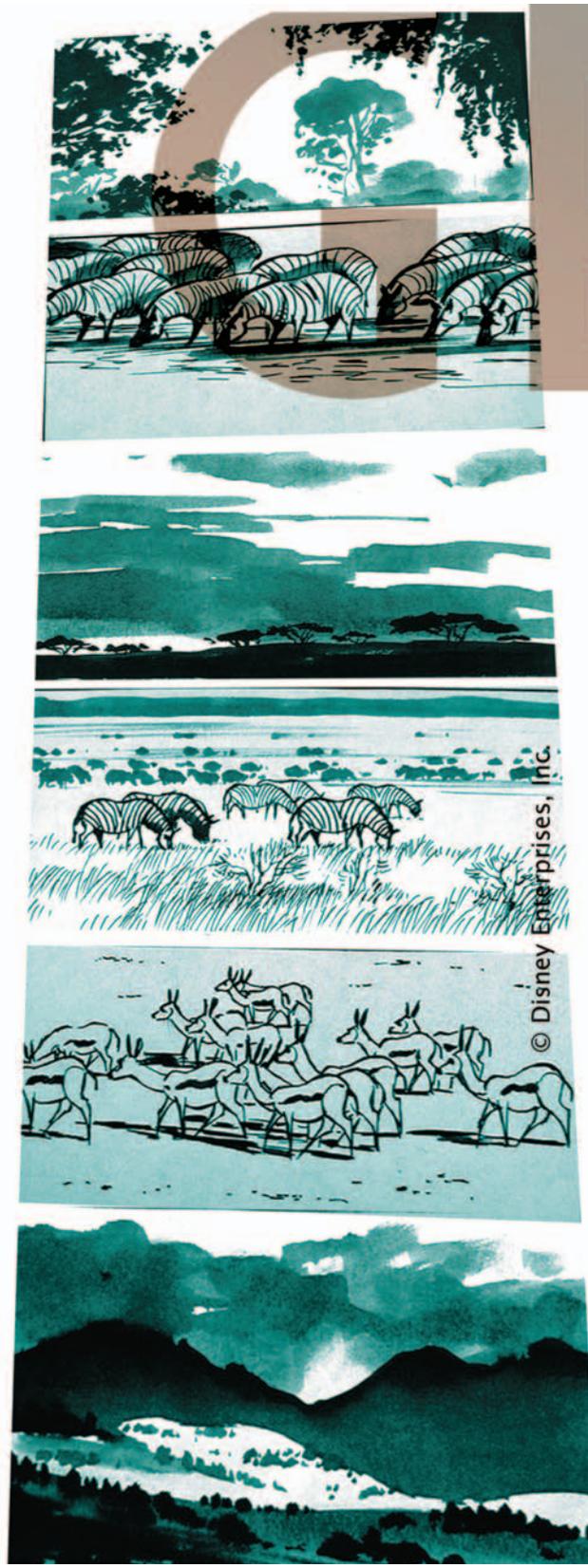
In this book, I will try to explain the design process, show you a lot of examples and will also analyze some art pieces of the “masters.” I hope you enjoy them.

# INDUSTRY

The Production Designer designs the movie. If necessary, he or she develops a visual style for the film, depending on the story, the target group and the budget. They translate the written script into visuals, including background- and character-styling, color and design language.

In the early stages of a new film, the Production Designer is part of the Visual Development team. This group explores all visual possibilities. They do research and try to come up with as many interesting ideas as possible, while working with complete artistic freedom. Usually at this time, the director is not yet involved.

As soon as a director has been assigned, the look of the movie is narrowed down. Some good directors have a vision as to the look of the film and may be able to verbalize it.



Now the work of the visual development team is sorted out and a clear direction is defined. During this period of time, a production designer will be assigned to the project in case he was not already part of the team.

The production designer now develops the final look of the movie in close connection with the director. Some presentation pieces showing the key moments of the story have to be done. They will reflect the look of the movie and backgrounds in combination with character designs. The preproduction team has to approve them before they are presented to the head of the production company for a final decision.

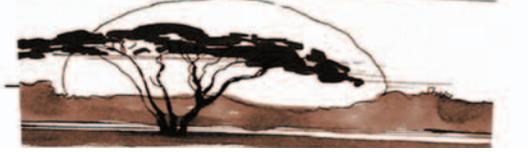
To sum it up to this critical point, in the beginning of a new production, a major part of the Production Designer's job is to sell the project with impressive-looking designs. That is especially important in case outside investors are involved.

# ER A

If no major disaster happens, the production is green lit. That means that the new project is announced to the outside world.

Now, it is necessary to analyze the style and to create a Style Guide. A style guide is about a sixty-page booklet in which the basic rules of the styles are explained for the different departments: Layout, Background, Animation, Effects, Clean-up and Color. That is another very important step in the production process because so many different artists are involved. They have to learn everything about the new look and get used to it. For about the next eighteen months, they will have to live in that new world.

There is usually a training period of some weeks to allow the different artists to practice and create some test pieces. Sometimes new techniques have to be



© Disney Enterprises, Inc.

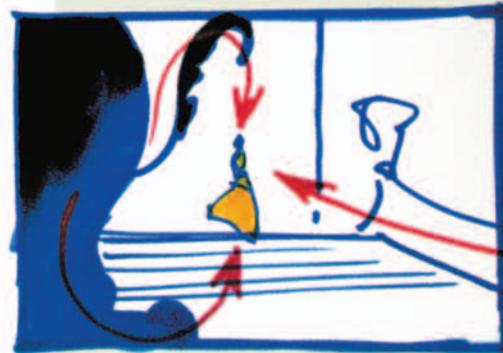
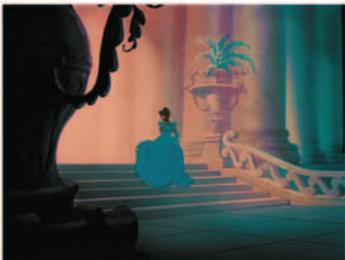
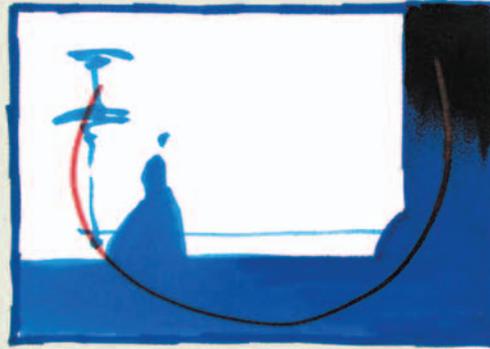
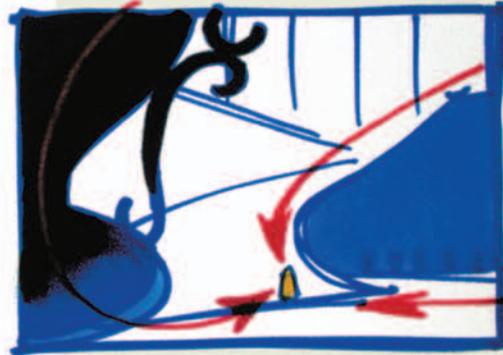
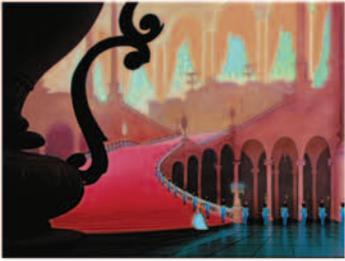
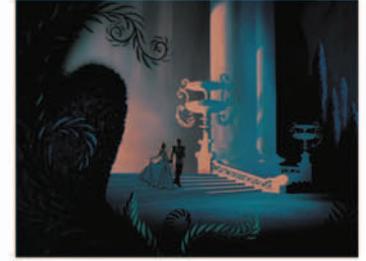
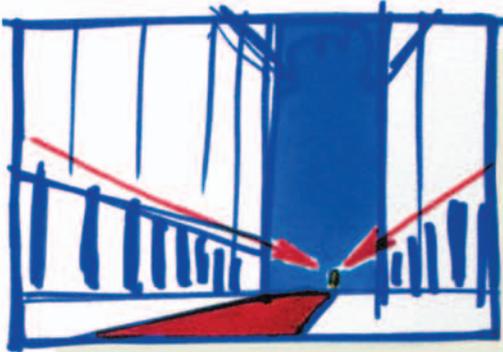
developed, especially for combinations of 2-D and 3-D. All of that is discussed in a smaller group of department heads together with the production designer, the art director and the director. During that time, sources for possible problems should be eliminated and the work pipeline refined.

During the same time, the production designer develops a precise color concept for the first sequence to go into production. Here it shows how important it is to create a Color Script for the whole movie at a very early stage, after the basic story is approved, because usually the first sequence in production is not sequence 1; it can be from the middle of the movie.

Now that the train cannot be stopped anymore, the hungry crew has to be fed with everything they need. More sequences are approved one after another. It will be necessary to redesign certain changed locations. Props are always needed, little details such as the style for certain effects have to be developed. It all has to fit the look. And, of course, after the finished animation the production designer is part of the Sweat Box group to approve rough and final animation, as well as the color combinations.

Toward the end of the production, they are involved in the designs for publicity, the title logo, the posters, and the merchandise.

# ANALYS



© Disney Enterprises, Inc.

# IS

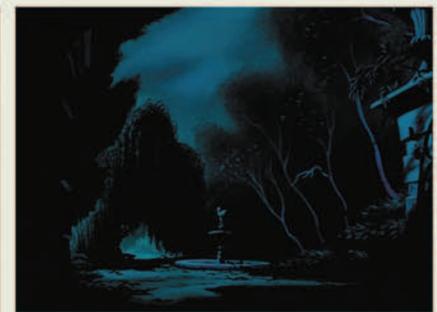
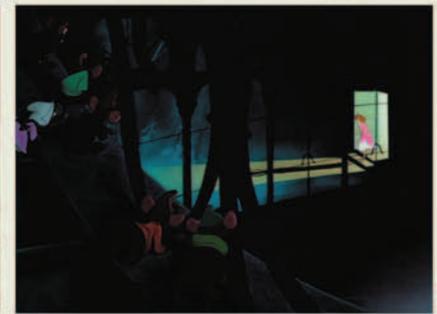
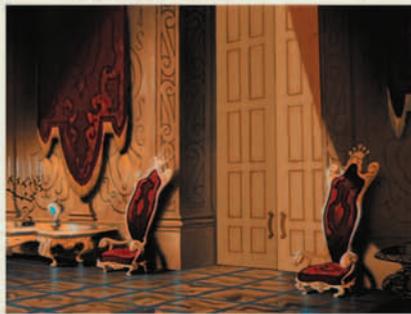
The scenes on the left from *Cinderella* show you how well-planned every single composition was. Note the Framing Effect and how all the background elements lead toward the characters. In addition, the action in every frame is clearly readable.

Look at the first scene where Cinderella enters the castle and seems to be lost within the huge architecture. You find her immediately; all the perspective lines lead you there.

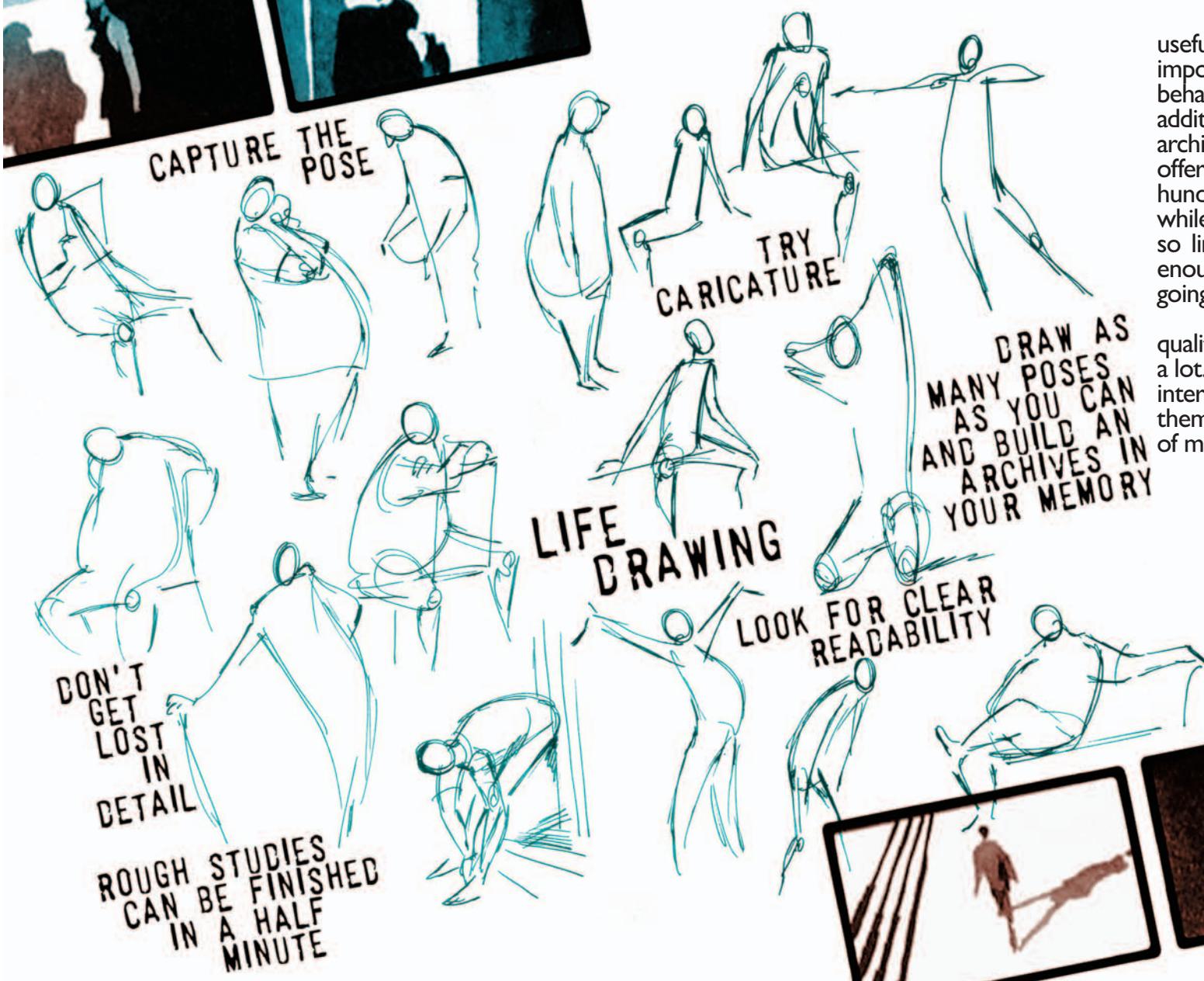
In most of the other shots, you can find the same concept – big foreground elements frame the action; the characters are on a theatre stage in a pool of light.

The whole movie feels like a romantic theatre piece, like a Puccini Opera stage. Compare the simplicity of the designs to recent productions. Even with very few characters, they are able to tell a funny and very entertaining story. Joe Grant told me they did the whole movie in nine months! No wonder, after all the experience of the preceding masterpieces.

On the right, I have collected some more stunning compositions. There is no need to talk about the incredible style – *Mary Blair*. What else can I say?



# ...LEARNING



**CAPTURE THE POSE**

**TRY CARICATURE**

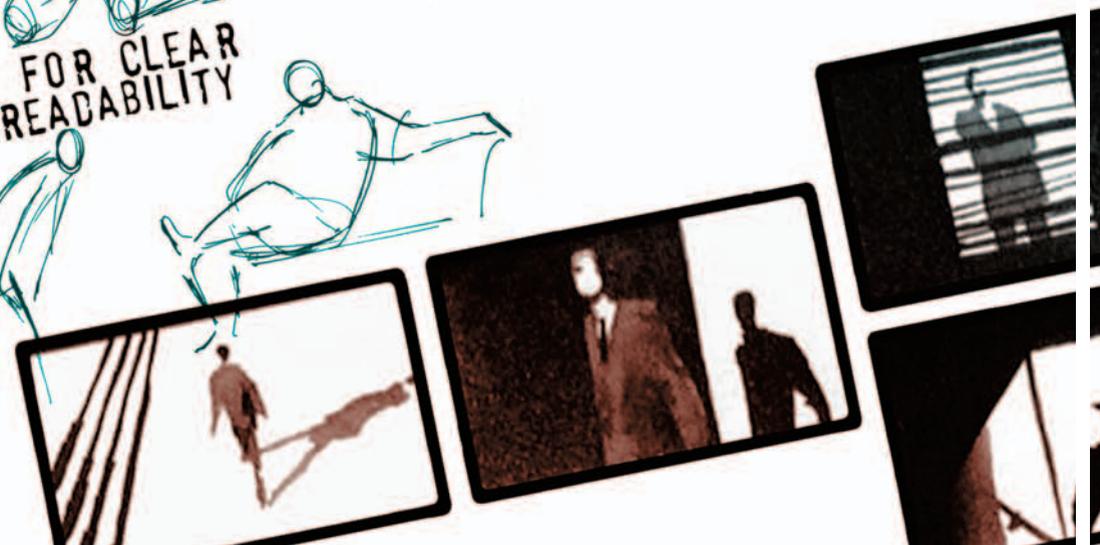
**DRAW AS MANY POSES AS YOU CAN AND BUILD AN ARCHIVES IN YOUR MEMORY**

**LIFE DRAWING**

**LOOK FOR CLEAR READABILITY**

**DON'T GET LOST IN DETAIL**

**ROUGH STUDIES CAN BE FINISHED IN A HALF MINUTE**

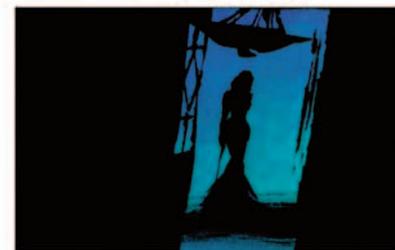
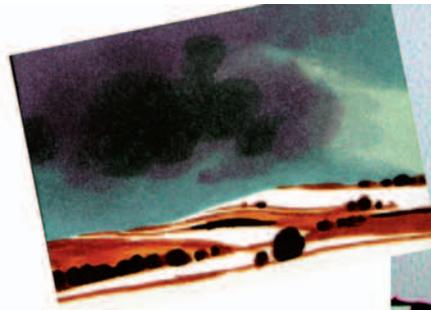


Sketching from real life is very useful. For a character designer it is important to watch people and their behavior; a production designer additionally studies the environment, architecture, styles and colors. TV offers a lot of these real-life images in hundreds of channels. I do sketches while watching TV. However, you are so limited because you are not fast enough and there is so much more going on.

During the early nineties, the quality of the video-printers improved a lot. I spent hours taping all different interesting programs to go through them afterward and print thousands of moments for reference.

In previous years, you were limited to creating your image archives by collecting magazines or doing your own reference photography. It was a very time-consuming job. Cutting out and sorting, took a lot of space and lots of boxes.

With the video prints all that improved. The Discovery Channel offered everything you ever needed for wildlife research, not to mention everything available on VHS, Laserdisc, and DVD.



Well, over the years I have collected several thousand images in video prints. Very useful for all different assignments, but even more useful to get inspired. Just looking through the dozens of books with video prints gave me so many ideas.

It is even easier now, and cheaper. With available software, you create archives in your computer – no need for expensive prints. Moreover, to find later what you are looking for is very easy with archiving software programs, not to mention that the picture quality is much better.



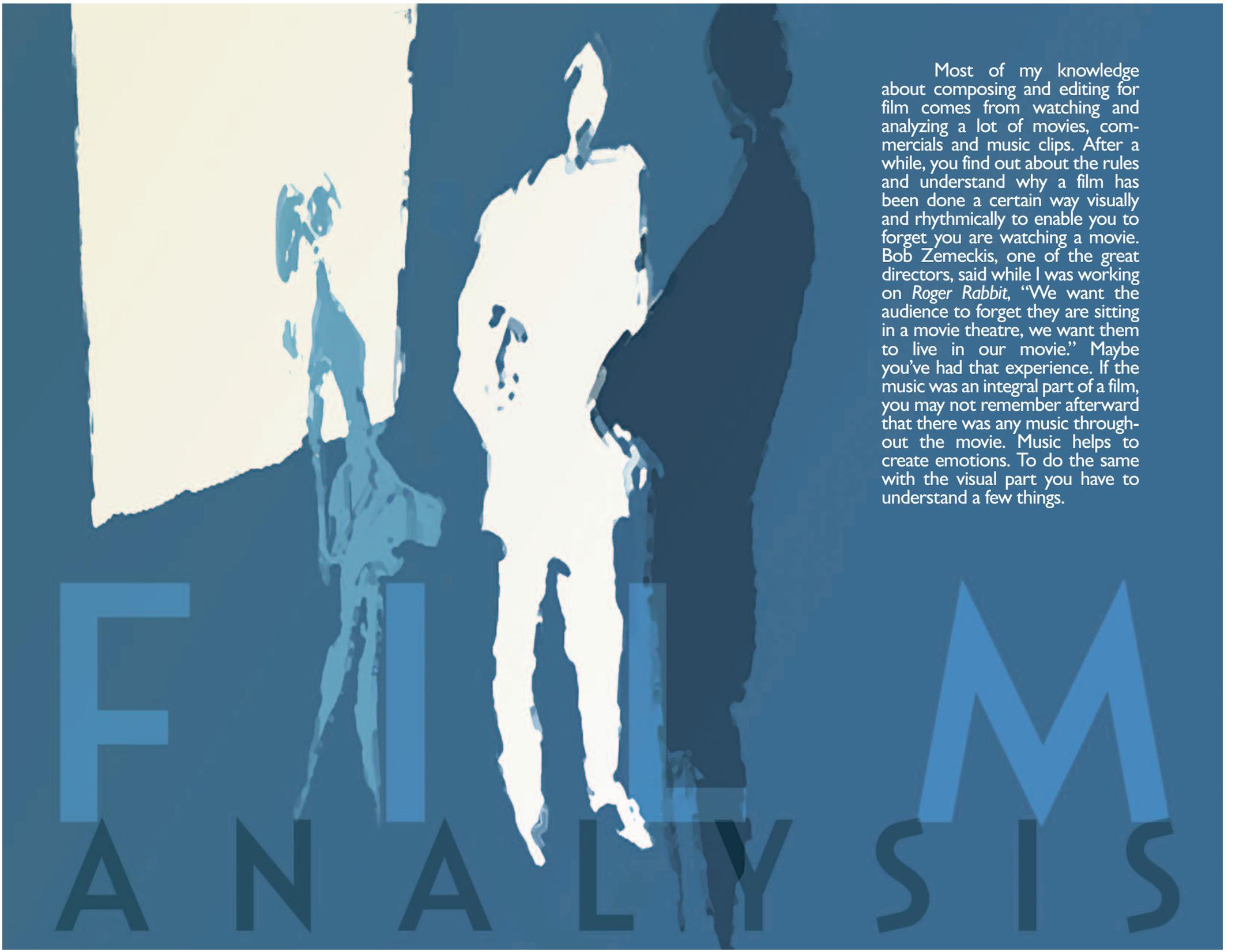


The choices are endless! Even without a background, just dealing with one character, you have a lot of choices about where to place the action. Does the story ask for a closer look at the face? Or do you need to be further away? On what side of the screen would it work? Closer to the edge, or more in the golden section? Do I choose an up-shot or a down-shot? A center-position usually looks boring, but would it work in this case? What do I want to say?

It gets a lot more interesting and challenging with two or more characters. What is the interaction? Do I need to show them up close, or does space between them characterize their relationship? Who is the dominant character? A size difference will make that clearer.

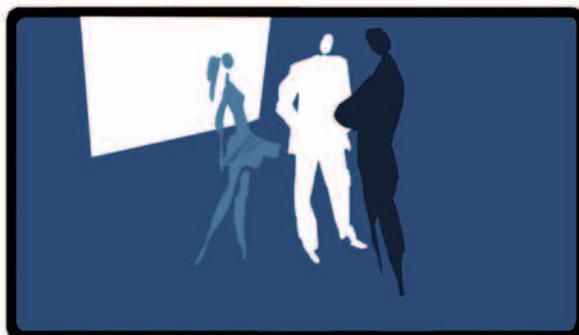
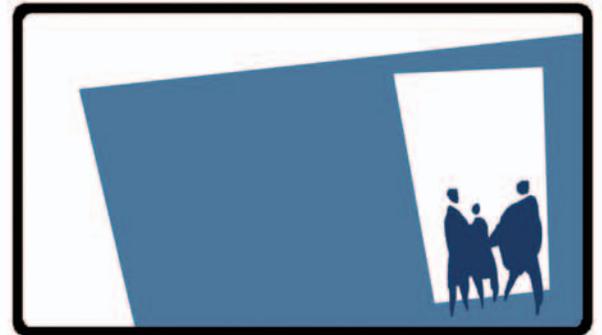
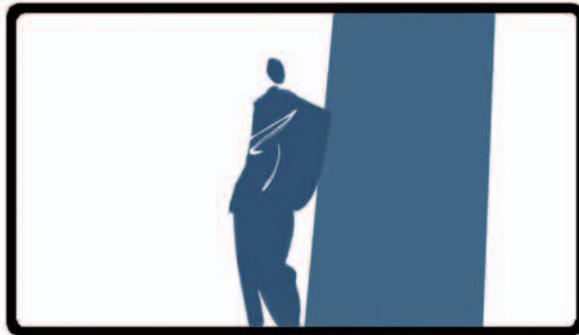
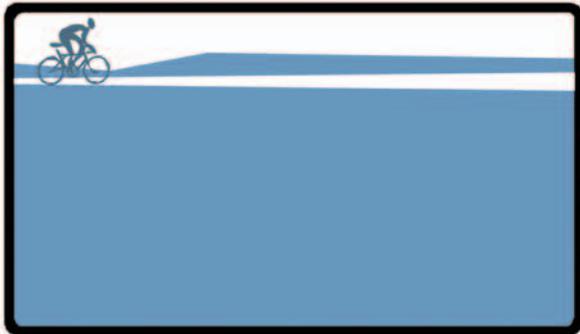
When you add background to your character-composition more choices come up. You can separate them by dark in front of light, or light in front of dark placement. So far we have not even added detail to our background, detail that has to be treated the same way as the action. I want to explain some examples of this visualization in the next chapters.

# CHOICES



Most of my knowledge about composing and editing for film comes from watching and analyzing a lot of movies, commercials and music clips. After a while, you find out about the rules and understand why a film has been done a certain way visually and rhythmically to enable you to forget you are watching a movie. Bob Zemeckis, one of the great directors, said while I was working on *Roger Rabbit*, "We want the audience to forget they are sitting in a movie theatre, we want them to live in our movie." Maybe you've had that experience. If the music was an integral part of a film, you may not remember afterward that there was any music throughout the movie. Music helps to create emotions. To do the same with the visual part you have to understand a few things.

# FILM ANALYSIS



Choosing a good film to study helps one to find out about the rules. I am sure you can see the difference between just ordinary movies and the good ones. It has nothing to do with taste.

Following is a list of my personal top choices. You will notice that a lot of them are black & white films. Maybe you can concentrate better without being confused by colorful backgrounds, or maybe the better films are just black & white. But, there are some very good color movies out there as well. The problem with color is that it has to be designed as well. It's not enough to just go outside and shoot a movie.

Alfred Hitchcock – *Rebecca, Spellbound, Paradine Case, Dial M For Murder, Vertigo, Psycho, The Birds, Frenzy*

Andrzej Wajda – *Ashes and Diamonds, Danton*

Baz Luhrmann – *Moulin Rouge*  
Bernardo Bertolucci – *The Conformist, The Last Emperor, The Sheltering Sky*

Bertrand Tavernier – *Sunday In The Country, Beatrice And The Great 'Film Noir' Director*

Billy Wilder – *Double Indemnity, Sunset Boulevard, Witness for the Prosecution*

Carl Reiner – *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*

Christoph Gans – *Le Pacte Des Loups*

David Lean – *Oliver Twist, Bridge on the River Kwai, Dr. Zhivago, Lawrence of Arabia*

Federico Fellini – *La Strada, La Dolce Vita, 8 1/2, Satyricon, Amarcord*

Franco Zeffirelli – *Romeo and Juliet, Othello, Brother Sun, Sister Moon*

François Girard – *The Red Violin*  
Fritz Lang – *Dr. Mabuse, Siegfried, Metropolis, M*

George Cukor – *My Fair Lady, Travels With My Aunt*

Ingmar Bergman – *The Seventh Seal, Wild Strawberries, The Silence, Winter's Light*

Jacques Tati – *Mr. Hulot's Holiday, Mon Oncle*

Jacques Tourneur – *Cat People, Out of the Past, Curse of the Demon*

Joel Coen – *Raising Arizona*  
John Boorman – *Excalibur*

John Frankenheimer – *Grand Prix, 52 Pick-Up, French Connection*

Ken Russell – *The Music Lovers, Tommy*

Michael Powell – *Thief of Baghdad, Black Narcissus, Red Shoes, Tales of Hoffman*

Michelangelo Antonioni – *Blowup, L'Avventura*

Mike van Diem – *Character*  
Mikhail Kalatozov – *The Cranes Are Flying*

Milos Forman – *Hair, Amadeus, Valmont*

Norman Jewison – *The Thomas Crown Affair*

Orson Welles (My Personal Favorite) – *Citizen Kane, The Stranger, Macbeth, Othello, Mr. Arkadin, Touch of Evil, The Trial*

Peter Webber – *Girl with a Pearl Earring*

Peter Weir – *Picnic at Hanging Rock, Year of Living Dangerously, Witness*

Ridley Scott – *The Duellists, Alien, Blade Runner, Legend, Black Rain, Gladiator*

Roman Polanski – *Repulsion, The Fearless Vampire Killers, Rosemary's Baby, Macbeth, Chinatown, The Ninth Gate*

Sergei Eisenstein – *Battleship Potemkin, Alexander Nevsky, Ivan the Terrible*

Stanley Kubrick – *Barry Lyndon*  
Steven Spielberg – *Duel, Jaws, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Jurassic Park*

Terry Gilliam – *Time Bandits, Brazil, Twelve Monkeys*

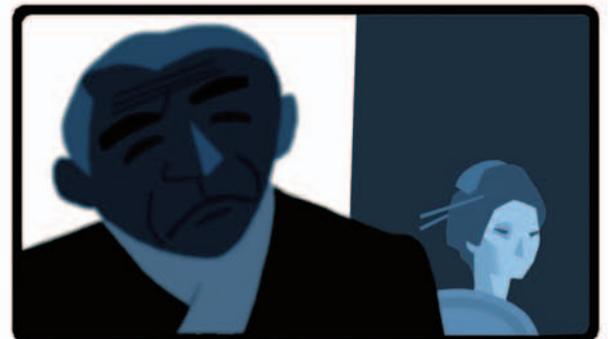
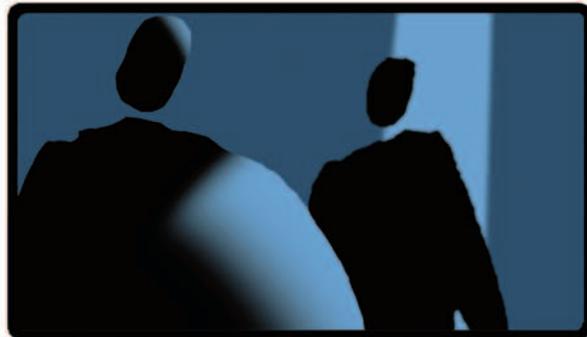
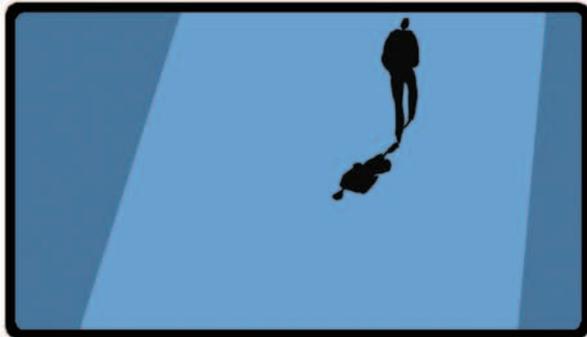
Vittorio De Sica – *The Bicycle Thief, Miracle in Milan*

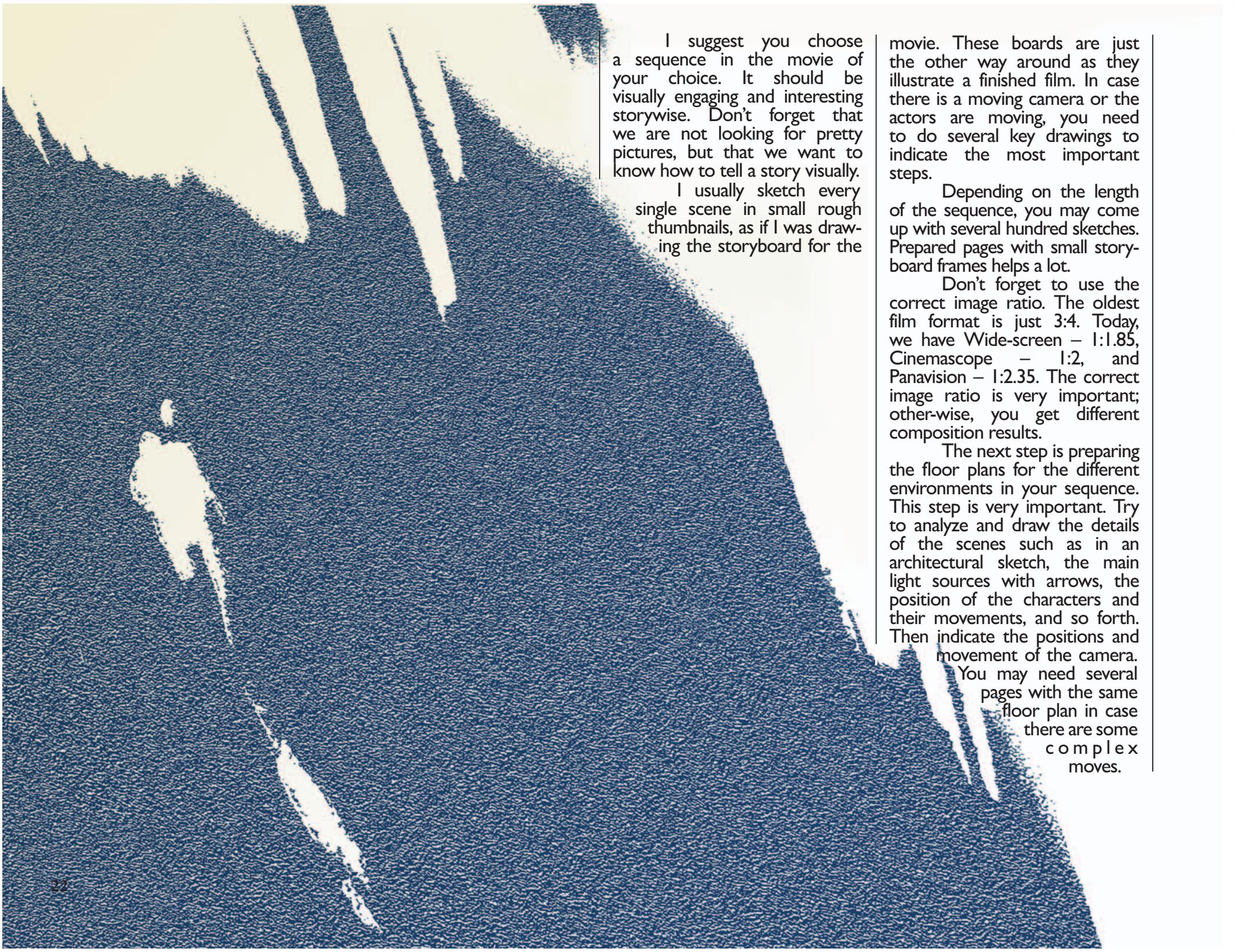
Wachowski Brothers – *Matrix Trilogy*

Wong Kar-wai – *In the Mood for Love*

Woody Allen – *Shadows and Fog*

Zhang Yimou – *House of Flying Daggers*





I suggest you choose a sequence in the movie of your choice. It should be visually engaging and interesting storywise. Don't forget that we are not looking for pretty pictures, but that we want to know how to tell a story visually.

I usually sketch every single scene in small rough thumbnails, as if I was drawing the storyboard for the

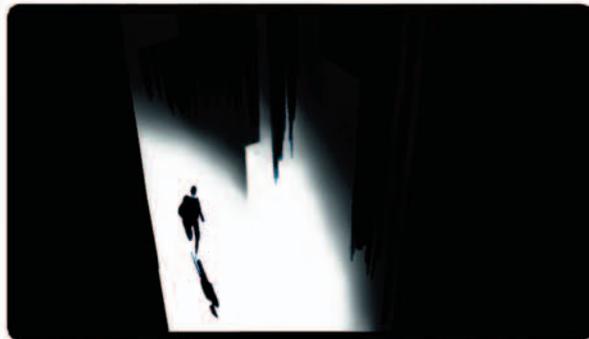
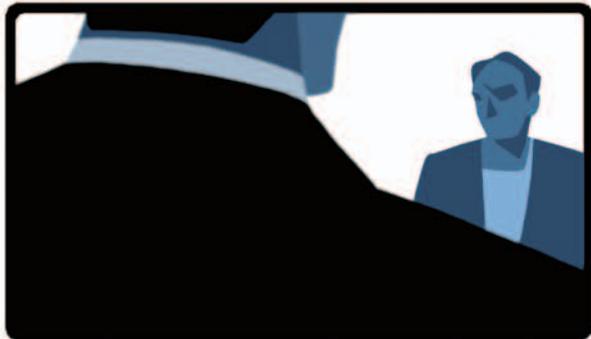
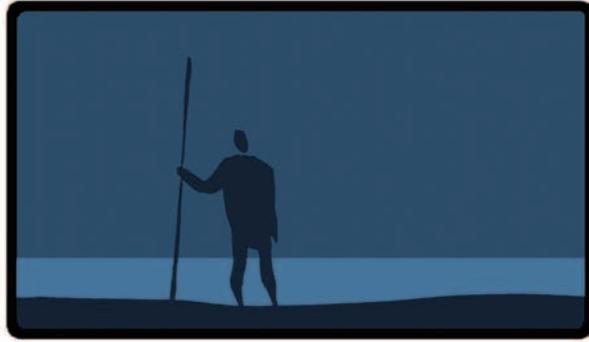
movie. These boards are just the other way around as they illustrate a finished film. In case there is a moving camera or the actors are moving, you need to do several key drawings to indicate the most important steps.

Depending on the length of the sequence, you may come up with several hundred sketches. Prepared pages with small storyboard frames helps a lot.

Don't forget to use the correct image ratio. The oldest film format is just 3:4. Today, we have Wide-screen – 1:1.85, Cinemascope – 1:2, and Panavision – 1:2.35. The correct image ratio is very important; other-wise, you get different composition results.

The next step is preparing the floor plans for the different environments in your sequence. This step is very important. Try to analyze and draw the details of the scenes such as in an architectural sketch, the main light sources with arrows, the position of the characters and their movements, and so forth. Then indicate the positions and movement of the camera.

You may need several pages with the same floor plan in case there are some complex moves.



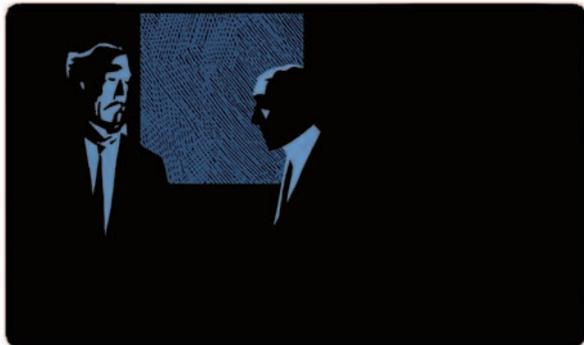
You will learn a lot about different lens sizes, as well as how to cut from one shot to the next. Wide-angle lenses are used to establish a sequence or to cover some major character movement. Close-ups are done with the camera close to the actor or with telephoto lenses. You will see the difference; a telephoto lens keeps even distant objects or characters closer together with an out-of-focus effect. A closer wide-angle has a deeper depth of field with a bigger size difference. I will explain that in more detail in another chapter.

Always note: Why did they use that lens here with that size and how did they cut from one shot to the next? How did they connect the characters following the dialogue and the story?

Camera-angles: How was the camera positioned? At eye-level? Or is it an up-shot, or a cut to a down-shot? And why? In a horror-movie, you will find a lot of scary up-shots together with some effective use of light.

Always indicate in your floor plan where the light source is. You will notice that light and shadow in a row of shots is very important for your orientation. It is useful as well to study how projected shadows onto characters or objects are used to create depth and additional texture. Hitchcock apparently had the scene designers paint shadows of furniture detail on the wall once in a while if they could not achieve that same effect with original light and shadow.







It is also interesting to analyze a moving camera. Antonioni is a master of that. Together with a very carefully choreographed move of his characters, he creates a voyeuristic effect; the audience is always in the center of the interaction between up to five actors.

We find a very different effect from that of a handheld camera in action sequences, together with a very fast editing and fast change of camera-angles.

Going through your thumbnails you can find out about composition rules, about the balance or un-balance in a shot, contrast and value, how the characters are staged and their integration in the environment.

The speed of editing creates a rhythm. Compare the length of different scenes. More emotional scenes have different lengths than action areas of a movie. Epic films such as *Lawrence of Arabia* have long established shots so that you feel the majestic power of the landscape images.

You will notice a lot of additional information in music-clips and commercials. Because of their restricted length and because they want to get all your attention within that short time, their rhythm- and composition-rules are different. And the images and their message are more important than a story. Often, you find crazy camera lens effects, manipulated colors, a shaky camera, grainy or ancient-looking film stock, as well as extremely fast cutting.

