3 Mise-en-scène criticism and statistical style analysis (*The English Patient*)

Introduction

A cursory glance at the literature on *mise-en-scène* criticism reveals a broad consensus on what *mise en scène* is: generally, it is understood as a study of the relation between subject matter and style (the relation between *what* and *how*). For example, a *mise-en-scène* critic may focus on the relation between how the cuts from shot to shot relate to the action and dialogue. More specifically, *mise-en-scène* criticism studies the relation between actors and decor, or foreground and background. Jacques Joly asks: 'What is *mise en scène*, if not precisely the confrontation of a character and a setting?' (Joly, quoted in Hillier 1986: 22). On a more abstract level, the *mise-en-scène* critic may focus on bodies and gestures in space (or abstracted from space), and the movement of actors and objects within a moving or still frame. Michel Mourlet understands *mise en scène* in a yet more abstract way, as the interplay of light and shadow, surfaces and lines in a moving or still frame: 'The mysterious energy which sustains with varying felicities the swirl of shadow and light and their foam of sounds is called *mise en scène*. It is on *mise en scène* that our attention is set, organizing a universe, covering the screen – *mise en scène*, and nothing else.' He adds that *mise en scène* consists of 'an incantation of gestures, looks, tiny movements of the face and body, vocal inflections, in the bosom of a universe of sparkling objects' (Mourlet, quoted in Hillier 1986: 117).

In contrast to this broad consensus is disagreement. In a narrow theatrical sense, *mise en scène* refers only to *what* appears in front of the camera – to the pro-filmic events, not to the procedures which transpose those events onto film. But for most critics *mise en scène* refers both to what is filmed and to how it is filmed. To avoid conflating the *what* and the *how*, Sergei Eisenstein invented the term *mise en shot*: 'For the designation of the particularities pertaining to cinematographic *mise en scène* ... I wish to introduce a special term that has been non-existent in film practice hitherto. If *mise en scène* means staging on a stage, the arrangement of the stage, then staging in the shot let us henceforth call *mise en shot*' (Eisenstein, quoted in Nizhny 1962: 139). However, film scholars have not adopted Eisenstein's new term, with the exception of Vlada Petric (see Petric 1982). In this chapter we shall use the term *mise en scène* in its broader definition, to designate both subject matter and film style – or, more importantly, their interrelationship.

Mise-en-scène criticism is the first approach to be outlined in this chapter. We shall outline several key strategies employed by *mise-en-scène* critics to analyse a film, and then apply one of these strategies (the 'same-frame heuristic') to *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1997). The second method to be presented in this chapter is statistical style analysis (also known as 'stylometry'). The function of statistics is to quantify data, and then represent its underlying pattern of regularity. In the analysis of literary and film texts, statistics is used to analyse – or, more accurately, quantify – style. Statistics has little presence or support in the humanities, for it is seen as a dehumanizing process that reduces experience to a set of numbers, bar charts, or tables. Yet film style is readily open to statistical analysis, once we identify the relevant data to quantify – 'relevant' in that they are good discriminators of a film's style. Following on from Eisenstein's comments on *mise en shot*, it becomes evident that style can be identified and quantified from the parameters of the shot, particularly those parameters directly under the director's control. One of the few film scholars to quantify style is Barry Salt (1974; 1992), whose work we shall review in section 3.5 and then apply to *The English Patient* in section 3.6. But we shall go further than Salt by using computer software to quantify film style and represent the results both numerically and visually. The outcome, as we hope to show, is a clear, systematic, and rigorous analysis of style that goes beyond the *mise-en-scène* critics' tendency to be selective and subjective. Some readers may find this statistical analysis too reductive and too abstract – too abstracted from the experience of the film. But such an analysis yields unexpected information that cannot be gained by simply watching the film. Furthermore, and to repeat the main theme behind this book, the statistical analysis of style is just one of many theories that can be applied to film. Like other theories, it consists of its own methods that yield unique information on the film being analysed.

3.1. *Mise-en-scène* theory

In the early days of *mise-en-scène* criticism (the early 1950s), *mise en scène* was defined in terms of film's immediate perceptual presence, its physical and concrete rendition of space and bodies on screen. These critics (Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rivette, François Truffaut) valorized immediacy and presence because, they believed, it relates to film's specificity, its visual and aural tactility, and, most importantly, its adherence to the truth of surface appearances (for a selection of their work, see Hillier 1985).

During the same period (the early 1950s), a number of the above critics mystified the concept of *mise en scène* by making it intangible, linking it to the notions of spirituality and to pure creativity. In effect, they reduced *mise en scène* to a director's individual vision or world-view, their unique inspiration that cannot be generalized. In opposition to this Romantic or existential view, we can develop a non-mystifying understanding of *mise en scène* by thinking of it in terms of a series of compositional norms from which directors choose how to construct their shots, scenes, and whole films. Individuality re-enters the 'non-mystificatory' critic's vocabulary when he or she focuses on how, in an individual film, its subject matter is translated into the specifics of *mise en scène* (rather than being translated by the director's 'unexplainable' vision). The *mise-en-scène* critic ideally focuses on an individual film's stylistic and thematic development, that is, the film's moment-by-moment progression as it concretely manifests or realizes its themes through its *mise en scène*. Fred Camper mediates between this spiritual and 'secular' view of *mise en scène* by focusing on the way inner spirituality is manifest and made visual and concrete – or tangible – in a film's visual style, as we shall see in his analysis of *Disputed Passage*.

Mise en scène names what is there on the screen and emanating through the loud speakers, before the spectator's eyes and ears. It is what the spectator looks at and listens to, but not necessarily what they see and hear. *Mise-en-scène* criticism is a form of connoisseurship that directs the spectator's awareness to the significance of certain elements of *mise en scène*. Victor Perkins notes: 'My standard for good criticism is not that I agree with it but that it tells me something I haven't noticed about a film, even if I've seen it a number of times.' He goes on to emphasize the position of the *Movie* critics: 'We are helping people not to know which are the right and wrong films, but to see what's in a film. . . . We're not concerned with the education of taste, but with the education of awareness' (Perkins *et al.* 1963: 34).

Mise-en-scène critics point out the significance of certain visual and aural elements of a film. The critic draws attention to the design of the *mise-en-scène*, highlighting the significance and importance of what the non-

connoisseur spectator takes for granted. For example, one fundamental assumption of *mise-en-scène* criticism is that foreground–background relations are significant; these relations are not pre-given – that is, 'natural' or purely denotational – but have to be designed by the director, and the choices he or she makes signify different meanings (connotations).

More generally, a fundamental assumption of *mise-en-scène* critics is that the relation between what and how, between style and theme or subject matter, is not arbitrary. *Mise-en-scène* critics dismiss the common-sense assumption that all a director needs to do is simply place the camera where the action can be seen best. Filming involves a productive relation between film style and subject matter, of style transforming the subject matter. This is where *mise-en-scène* criticism becomes evaluative, because its adherents evaluate films according to the skill and artistry in which subject matter is creatively transformed by the specifics of the film medium. *Mise-en-scène* critics valorize classical Hollywood films (particularly those directed by *auteurs*) on the basis of their successful (economical and significant) transformation of subject matter into film. But with the decline of the studio system and the ageing of the Hollywood *auteurs* in the 1960s, a number of the most prominent *mise-en-scène* critics (primarily the original writers for *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s – Godard, Chabrol, Rivette, Truffaut, but also Victor Perkins in *Movie*) detected in New Hollywood directors a decline in the creative use of *mise en scène*.

To place this shift in *mise en scène* in historical context, we shall use Adrian Martin's essay (1992) which establishes three basic categories of *mise-en-scène*, of the relation between style and theme: classical, expressionist, and mannerist *mise-en-scène*.

In Martin's definition, films that adopt a classical *mise en scène* 'are all works in which there is a definite stylistic restraint at work, and in which the modulations of stylistic devices across the film are keyed closely to its dramatic shifts and thematic developments' (1992: 90). In classical *mise en scène* the film style is unobtrusive, for it is motivated by the film's themes and dramatic developments. These films maintain a balance between showing and narrating, since style is linked to function, rather than being autonomous: 'stylistic effects and decisions *serve* the creation of a coherent fictional world. . . . what is crucial is that the fictional world be an *embodiment* and *dramatization* of a thematic particular to each film' (p. 100). Classical *mise en scène* results in a coherent film 'in which, under continued scrutiny, more and more of [a film's] elements can be seen to function as integral parts of the whole, reflecting (by comparison or contrast) aspects of the over-arching thematic' (p. 100).

Marc A. Le Sueur notes that classical *mise en scène* is based on what he calls the classical synthesis principle: 'There is an implication [in the classical

synthesis principle] that the content should necessitate the techniques used, and that, as Aristotle has maintained, none of these technical components could be reduced or changed except at the expense of the aesthetic whole. Form and theme are then meshed and synthesized in a unitary web' (1975: 326). The celebration of classical *mise en scène* parallels the work of art critics who celebrate High Renaissance art. Classicism in both film and painting is valorized because it does not distort the truth of appearances, but renders those appearances faithfully.

Victor Perkins is also an exponent of classical *mise en scène*, which he defines in terms of a film's credibility and coherence. Noël Carroll notes that, for Perkins, 'a narrative fiction film must *first* satisfy the realist requirement of credibility, *after which* it may go on to be as creative in terms of shaping meaning and significance as it can, while abiding by the basic restraint of credibility' (Carroll 1988a: 181). But what does Perkins mean by credibility? 'A narrative fiction film will be credible or not according to whether its images are consistently derived from the fictional world it depicts' (Carroll 1988a: 181). The concept of credibility therefore refers to a film's adherence to the truth of a fictional world. As Carroll points out, within the fictional world of Hitchcock's film *The Birds*, it is perfectly credible for birds to attack humans. We can refer to a more recent example: within the fictional world of Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*, it is perfectly credible to see dinosaurs walking about. However, is it credible to see them opening doors? It is at this point that the film's credibility begins to break down.

Although credibility is a necessary condition for analysing a film's *mise en scène*, it is not sufficient in itself. For Perkins, the second condition is coherence: the more coherent a film, the better it is. He identifies coherence with a film's heightened significance, derived from the creative transformation of the events onto film (what he calls 'cinematic elaboration'). Heightened significance is created by means of symbolism added to the events by the *mise en scène*. However, these attempts to create coherence by means of symbolism must not compromise credibility. The symbolism must therefore be implicit and unobtrusive: 'What happens on the screen must not emerge as a directorial "touch" detached from the dramatic situation; otherwise the spectator's belief in the action will decrease or disappear. The director's guiding hand is obvious only when it is too heavy' (Perkins 1972: 77). When symbolically enhancing a dramatic situation a director must not impose meaning on it. Instead, he or she needs to ensure that the additional meaning emerges from the drama. Perkins examines a scene from *Johnny Guitar*, where a group of mourners set out to capture the killers of the man who has just been buried. The sister of the dead man, Emma, leads the posse. As she advances, the wind blows off her black-veiled hat, and the camera follows it as in lands in the dust:

The 'action' of the hat amplifies our view of the character: grief for the loss of her brother is not the motive guiding Emma's actions, and her sorrow has been forgotten in the exhilaration of the chase.

Nothing in the story or dialogue obliged the director to include this action in the sequence. It was invented to convey a particular view of Emma's character and motives. But we can respond to it simply as information; within the film's world it happened because Emma was in such a hurry, not because it was significant.

(Perkins 1972: 78)

The scene remains intelligible whether or not the spectator is aware of the symbolism, since the credibility of the scene remains more important than the symbolism. But symbolism that can work within the boundaries of credibility becomes a valuable addition to the film.

Expressionist *mise en scène*, Adrian Martin's second category, is found in films 'whose textual economy is pitched more at the level of a broad fit between elements of style and elements of subject. ... general strategies of colour coding, camera viewpoint, sound design and so on enhance or reinforce the general "feel" or meaning of the subject matter' (Martin 1992: 90). Martin mentions the films of Robert Altman, Michael Mann, Abel Ferrara, the Coen brothers, and Alan Rudolph as representative examples of expressionist *mise en scène*, for they use film style to enhance particular meanings in the subject matter.

Finally, in mannerist *mise en scène*, 'style performs out of its own trajectories, no longer working unobtrusively at the behest of the fiction and its demands of meaningfulness' (Martin 1992: 91). Style is autonomous, for it is not linked to function, but draws attention to itself. In other words, style is not motivated or justified by the subject matter, but is its own justification. It is in such (predominantly post-classical Hollywood) films that the original critics of *Cahiers du cinéma*, as well as Perkins, see the concept of *mise en scène* being inoperative, precisely because the style does not serve the subject matter. Martin seems to be in partial agreement with these critics when he writes that, if post-classical Hollywood film 'gains something interesting and novel, it seems to also lose a great deal that has been associated with the lofty concept of *mise en scène*. In particular, it loses the capacity for a more subtle kind of "point-making" – the kind we associate with a certain critical distance installed between the director and the events that he or she shows' (Martin 1992: 90). However, Martin, Perkins, and the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics are simply lamenting the demise of classical *mise en scène* in mannerist films, not *mise en scène* itself.

Le Sueur also calls this type of filmmaking mannerist (1975). He finds a parallel between mannerist films and mannerist paintings of the sixteenth

century, which disregard the classical synthesis principle of Renaissance painting. Instead, mannerist painters worked to create a disjunction between form and theme, an unmotivated form that does not lead to coherence, but to disharmony.

The critics who valorize classical *mise en scène* do so because style productively conveys themes. And they criticize mannerism because style and techniques stand out as techniques, creating a dislocation between style and theme. In other words, mannerism replaces truth of appearances with artifice. But critics who valorize mannerism in the cinema argue that *mise en scène* becomes interesting once it is freed from theme and subject matter, from the need slavishly to represent subject matter accurately. One result is that *mise en scène* may start working against the subject matter, offering alternative information and subverting the film's dominant theme.

Le Sueur makes the now obvious point that such forms of classification are not absolute and watertight. This suggests that we can find moments of mannerism in films otherwise dominated by classical *mise en scène*, amongst which he includes the films of Josef von Sternberg, King Vidor, Vincente Minnelli, and Orson Welles, together with the mannerist aesthetic of musicals.

Another key dimension of *mise-en-scène* criticism is the opposition between the script and the activity of filming. François Truffaut clearly articulated this opposition in 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema' (Truffaut 1976), where he criticizes the dominant tendency in French cinema during the 1940s and 1950s – the 'tradition of quality'. This cinema is a contrived and wooden cinema that projects a bourgeois image of good taste and high culture. For Truffaut, the tradition of quality offers little more than the practice of filming scripts, of mechanically transferring scripts to the screen. The success or failure of these films depends entirely on the quality of their scripts. The privileging of the script in the tradition of quality deflected attention away from both the film-making process and the director. Truffaut (together with the other *Cahiers du cinéma* critics and the New Wave film-makers) defined himself against literature, against the literary script, and against the tradition of quality, and instead promoted 'the cinema' as such.

From this opposition of script and filming emerges the opposition between the director as *auteur* and the director as a mere *metteur en scène*. An *auteur* is a director who does not mechanically transpose a script onto film, but transcends the script by imposing on it his or her own style and vision. The script is the mere pretext for the activity of film-making, and an *auteur* film is about the film-making practices involved in filming a script, rather than being about the script itself. An *auteur* works out his or her own vision by establishing a consistent style of *mise-en-scène*, a style that usually works over and above the demands of the script. By contrast, a *metteur en scène* is a director whose films depend on the quality of their scripts – they make good

films from good scripts, and bad films from bad scripts. *Auteurs* consistently make good films because they transcend the script, whether it is good or not.

3.2. *Mise-en-scène* method

From the above 'theory' of *mise en scène*, we can begin to extract a method of analysis. David Bordwell has already begun to formalize the strategies of *mise-en-scène* criticism (1989, Ch. 8), although here we shall go much further. Bordwell identifies in *mise-en-scène* criticism an implicit use of the 'bull's-eye schema' and two 'heuristics': the expressivist heuristic and the commentative heuristic. (The term 'heuristic' refers to an informal strategy of reasoning that assists us in discovering ideas. It is therefore similar to Aristotle's topics, outlined in Chapter 1. A *mise-en-scène* heuristic enables the film critic to identify patterns of coherence in a film.) When critics draw correlations between different layers of a film – specifically, characters, settings, and elements of film discourse (such as camera movement and editing) – they are using the bull's-eye schema. Bordwell calls this a bull's-eye schema because, for *mise-en-scène* critics, characters are central to narrative films (the centre or bull's-eye of a 'target'), followed by the setting (the second ring of a target), and then film discourse (the outer ring of a target). There is a hierarchy between the all-important centre (the characters) and the less important periphery (film discourse), although the periphery is more encompassing than the setting, which is in turn more encompassing than the characters.

The primary purpose of the bull's-eye schema is to enable critics to ascribe coherence to a film by linking up these three levels. Bordwell identifies two ways critics have used this schema: the levels of a film are linked either from the core to the periphery, or from the periphery to the core. Critics who begin from the core and link it to the periphery are using the expressivist heuristic, while those who work in the other direction are using the commentative heuristic.

In the expressivist heuristic, 'Meaning is taken to flow from the core to the periphery, from the characters to manifestations in the diegetic world or the nondiegetic representation' (Bordwell 1989: 181). In other words, the setting or filmic discourse should carry the meaning the critic locates in characters' actions. The significance of the settings and of film discourse are justified by referring them to character traits. Bordwell quotes John Russell Taylor's claim that, in Fellini's films, the mental and spiritual state of characters is manifest and reflected in his films' landscapes.

The term 'commentative heuristic' 'suggests that something – narration, presentation, narrator, camera, author, filmmaker, or whatever – stands "outside" the diegetic realm and produces meaning in relation to it' (Bordwell

1989: 183). The critic who uses the commentative heuristic begins with film discourse (or sometimes the setting) and notes how it qualifies or frames the characters' actions. A clichéd example includes unbalanced framing, in which the skewed positioning of the frame in relation to a character suggests that the character is unbalanced. Framing and composition therefore comment on the character's state of mind. In an early essay on Hitchcock's *Notorious*, Bordwell uses the commentative heuristic to show how the setting comments on the relationship between Devlin and Alicia: 'The romantic balloon is deflated in a fine scene in their hotel. Alicia has burned the roast for their dinner; on the terrace, as the tension between them grows, they become more and more distant, until Alicia, saying , "It's cold out here," goes in to desperately down a drink; the transition from hot to cold mirrors the movement of their relationship' (Bordwell 1969: 7). The transition from hot to cold in the film's diegesis not only functions of a literal level, but on a symbolic level as well – as a symbol that comments on the relationship between the two characters.

A more general sign of commentary in the cinema is to be found in the way film discourse foreshadows future events, as when the camera is placed so as to capture the future unfolding of events. The camera (or other agent external to the events) 'knows' in advance how the events are going to unfold. Of course, such a technique can be overplayed, as Ian Cameron argues: 'In *The Wolf Trap*, a highly respected movie, the camera is placed more or less behind a character so that it will produce a "dramatic" effect when she turns away from the table and faces the camera. On the other hand the only reason for her to turn away from the table at the big moment is so that she can face the camera and produce the effect. Because it has all been rigged so that the action has been falsified, the effect is pointless' (Cameron, in Perkins *et al.* 1963: 34). In this example, style dictates the content rather than serving it. Other forms of commentary critics try to identify include irony and distancing.

The expressivist heuristic is suitable for making sense of films dominated by classical *mise en scène*, in which characters' actions and the settings motivate film discourse. Meaning arises from within the film's action, rather than being imposed from the outside by the director. By contrast, films dominated by a mannerist *mise en scène* are more suited for the commentative heuristic, because the work of an external agent such as a director is more evident in mannerist films, in which film discourse is not motivated by characters or settings, but is motivated from outside the film.

Referring back to the previous discussion, we shall now identify additional *mise en scène* heuristics, and then examine examples of *mise-en-scène* criticism that employ these heuristics.

1. Critics implicitly or, more rarely, explicitly, identify the type of *mise en scène* by which the film has been constructed. Adrian Martin's threefold

distinction between classical, expressionist, and mannerist *mise en scène* has heuristic value:

   1a. In classical *mise en scène* the film style is unobtrusive, for it is motivated by the film's themes and dramatic developments. These films maintain a balance between showing and narrating, since style is linked to function rather than being autonomous; the *mise en scène* functions as unobtrusive symbolism that confers upon the film heightened significance. The expressivist heuristic is used to praise classical *mise en scène*. Perkins uses the concepts of credibility and coherence to praise classical *mise en scène*.

   1b. In expressionist *mise en scène* (not to be confused with the expressivist heuristic), there is a broad fit between style and theme.

   1c. In mannerist *mise en scène*, style is autonomous, for it is not linked to function but draws attention to itself. In other words, style is not motivated or justified by the subject matter, but is its own justification. The commentative heuristic is typically used to praise mannerist *mise en scène*.

2. Script/filming: *mise-en-scène* critics privilege the filming over the script. An integral part of *mise-en-scène* criticism is therefore to downplay the film's plot and instead focus on the process by which the script has been translated onto the screen.

3. *Auteur/metteur en scène*: this heuristic directly follows on from (2). If the film has merit beyond its script – if it transcends the script – then it is said to be the work of an *auteur* (who therefore demonstrates mastery over *mise en scène*). If the quality of the film is dependent on the quality of the script (where filming is subordinate to the script, to translating the script to film), then its director is downgraded to a *metteur en scène*.

4. Foreground–background: using this heuristic, the critic determines if there is any significant relation between a film's foreground and background. One privileged example of this heuristic is the analysis of deep-focus cinematography in the work of Renoir, Welles, and Wyler, where several planes of action remain in play and in focus in the same frame. This heuristic is based on the bull's-eye schema, for it focuses on the relation between characters (usually in the foreground) and the setting (the background).

5. Foreshadowing heuristic: does the film discourse presage upcoming events? (Foreshadowing is part of the commentative heuristic.)

6. Same-frame heuristic: although we have not discussed it up to this point, this widely used heuristic posits that, if characters appear in the same

frame (either a static frame or linked by camera movement), they are united; but if they are separated by cutting, then they are in conflict, or isolated from each other. Bordwell (who named this heuristic) quotes the following example: 'Where the cutting is used to isolate the individual and his responses, the camera movement, as it reintegrates space, reunites the individual with his group to establish a sense of wholeness' (William Paul, in Bordwell 1989: 179).

7. Cutting or the long take: another very common heuristic to be found throughout the history of film criticism. Film makers have a choice of shooting a scene in one continuous take, where the camera is left rolling while the whole of the action takes place, and shooting the same scene with several shots. The first option involves the film-maker filming the action as it unfolds, uninterrupted. The second option involves breaking the action down into individual shots. Each new shot will include a change in camera position, camera angle, shot scale, and so on. Film makers have to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages in choosing one technique over another for each scene, since the choice of technique will influence the way spectators respond to the film.

3.2.1. Examples

Perkins has nothing positive to say about the British 'New Wave' directors of the 1960s – Tony Richardson, Karel Reisz, John Schlesinger, and Jack Clayton. He uses the foreground–background heuristic to criticize them: 'Richardson, Reisz, Schlesinger and Clayton are weakest exactly where their ambitions most demand strength: in the integration of character with background. Because of this weakness they are constantly obliged to "establish" place with inserted shots which serve only to strengthen our conviction that the setting, though "real," has no organic connection with the characters' (Perkins 1962: 5).

As an example, Perkins cites the following from Schlesinger's *A Kind of Loving*:

> the first 'love' scene in *A Kind of Loving* is filmed mainly in a medium shot which shows us the boy and girl necking in a park shelter. On the walls behind and to the side of them we see the usual graffiti of names and hearts. The setting makes, in this way, a fairly obvious but relevant comment on the action. But Schlesinger has no appreciation of the power of his décor; he destroys the whole effect by moving his camera to take the actors out of the shot and isolate the inscriptions in a meaningless close-up. As if he hadn't done enough damage he continues the movement until we come to rest on a totally gratuitous detail: a poster forbidding mutilation of the shelter.
>
> (Perkins 1962: 5)

In this example, Perkins argues that the director begins by making an obvious but coherent commentary on the action by placing the couple against the park shelter wall covered in graffiti. But when the camera moves away from the couple and focuses only on the wall, then the commentary becomes obtrusive and destroys the film's credibility.

Perkins employs the heuristic of opposing script to filming, and implicitly opposes *auteur* to *metteur en scène*, in his discussion of Seth Holt's film *Taste of Fear*: 'Excellent films have been made from mediocre scenarios – *Party Girl* is perhaps the *locus classicus* but there are plenty of other examples. *Taste of Fear* is a useful reminder that there is a level below which a scenario becomes untranscendable' (Perkins 1962: 7). Perkins recognizes the quality of Holt's film despite the poor quality of the script: 'What sets [*Taste of Fear*] apart from other British pictures? Simply that it reveals time and again a director who can create cinematically, where other directors are content with illustrating their scripts' (Perkins 1962: 7). Perkins then employs two additional and interrelated *mise-en-scène* heuristics to back up his claim – namely, praise for classical *mise en scène*, and the expressivist heuristic: 'The distinction [between *auteurs* and *metteur en scène*] is as easy to see as it is difficult to explain: it has, of course, nothing to do with those collections of cute tricks that currently pass for style. We must be able to respond to the rhythm of the film' (Perkins 1962: 7). Here we see Perkins praise classical *mise en scène* and critique mannerism, which he reduces to 'cute tricks' of style. One successful moment in *Taste of Fear* where the classical *mise en scène* works is 'the tracking shot where the camera accompanies [Ronald] Lewis down the cliff-path to the salvaged car and communicates, in its movement, the character's growing uneasiness' (Perkins 1962: 7). Here we see Perkins use the expressivist heuristic, in which the camera movement is not only motivated by character movement but, in addition, expresses that character's state of mind.

Fred Camper (1976) implicitly uses the distinction between *auteur* and *metteur en scène* in his analysis of Frank Borzage's *Disputed Passage* (1939). He begins by summarizing the film's plot, focusing on the main characters' relation to spirituality, of the transformations a number of them undergo towards spirituality. Such a summary, Camper argues, could just as well relate to the script, or to Lloyd C. Douglas's novel upon which it is based. Camper argues that the film has interest because Borzage successfully transcends the script: 'it is the profound visual beauty of Borzage's style that is the deepest expression of these [spiritual] ideas; and it is the style that makes him a true romantic artist rather than simply a translator or *metteur en scène*. His style is not simply representative of spiritual transcendence, but rather seeks ways of visually representing the world which in themselves might lead to transcendence' (Camper 1976: 340-41). Camper does not, therefore, reduce Borzage's *mise en scène* to ineffable and intangible concepts such as spiritual

transcendence, but analyses it in terms of concrete elements of film. The heuristics Camper uses are foreground–background relations, foreshadowing, and the same-frame heuristic. Camper argues that, to study how the film visually represents the spiritual transformation of characters, 'One might first direct one's attention to the visual position that the characters occupy in Borzage's conception of things' (p. 341). Camper argues that the characters in *Disputed Passage* are not firmly fixed in space, since they do not exert their physical presence in relation to their surroundings. He gives the example of Dr Forster lecturing to students: 'The shot of [Dr Forster] with students in the background lack the kind of depth which would give him, by separating him from the students he is lecturing, physical force. The extreme high shots in the scene hardly add to his presence. All the characters have presence only in two dimensions; as real beings they seem almost weightless, floating in abstracted surroundings' (p. 341). The significance of this *mise en scène* is that it foreshadows the characters' conversion to the spiritual world, renders this conversion inevitable, because the characters' weightless presence means they do not belong to the physical world.

Closely associated with characters' lack of presence is their lack of fixed location in the frame. In a scene depicting Dr Forster and Dr Cunningham, Camper writes:

> In the graduation scene, while Cunningham is making a speech, we see Forster seated at the right of the frame. One could say it is logical to show Forster there because his beliefs are so at odds with Cunningham's. But due to shallow depth of field his face is a little out of focus, we do not see him reacting specifically to the speech; most importantly, Borzage then cuts to close-ups of Forster's face during the speech, then back to shots of Cunningham with him in the background.
>
> (p. 342)

Camper notes how this scene could have been filmed otherwise (i.e. more conventionally): the scene would contain an establishing shot showing Forster and Cunningham in the same space, but would then proceed to show the two characters separately. But on this occasion (and many other occasions in the film) Borzage keeps the two characters in the same shot, but films them from different angles and distances, creating the effect that their position in space is not fixed, which again illustrates their spirituality. But an additional effect of this cutting which keeps characters in the frame but alters their position is that it links them together, or creates connections between them. For Camper, cutting is therefore used to unite characters, not to oppose or isolate them. While employing the same-frame heuristic, Camper has nonetheless reversed its meaning – or at least the meaning Bordwell imposes on it. Walter Murch offers one solution to these contradictory readings of the same frame

heuristic: 'In the States, film is "cut," which puts the emphasis on *separation*. In Australia (and in Great Britain), film is "joined," with the emphasis on *bringing together*' (Murch 1995: 5).

Richard Jameson implicitly defines Mamoulian as a mere *metteur en scène*, for his direction cannot transcend the script: 'Mamoulian keeps faith with the triviality of his ostensible subjects; he dresses them to advantage but he does not transcend them; he can be bright and clever, but when his material is turgid (*Blood and Sand*) or intractable (*We Live Again*), so will his film be' (Jameson 1980: 10). By contrast, in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Lewis Milestone focuses on an important subject, and attempts to employ the important techniques of *mise en scène* to realize this subject on screen, including 'key cinematic principles' such as 'visual unity of foreground and background planes (*All Quiet*'s soldiers-to-be in their classroom while troops drill outside the window), linking camera energy to character energy (admiringly tracing Adolphe Menjou's Walter Burns through the roaring print shop), the possibilities for syncopation in camera movement and montage (countless troops tracked laterally as they march into all-embracing battle)' (Jameson 1980: 10). Jameson goes on to highlight two moments in the same sequence, one exemplifying Milestone's direction, the other exposing its limitations:

> When enemy troops charge the German trenches, a lateral track along a barbed-wire barrier is synchronized with the collapse of charging men as they come into camera-range; it is as though the camera itself were a machine gun (the previous shot was of a machine-gun crew opening fire), and when the Germans' counter-attack is photographed in the same manner a few moments later, a lucid statement is made about war as a machine indifferently chewing up lives.
>
> But midway between these shots comes a spate of hand-to-hand combat. Milestone again tracks, this time from a slightly raised camera position looking down into the trenches. As his camera arrives at each defender's position, an enemy soldier likewise arrives to leap in on his opposite number. Unlike the camera-as-machine-gun ploy, this shot lacks organic, intrinsic logic; or, more accurately, it is based on a logic at variance with that controlling the rest of the sequence. The careful synchronization of camera's-arrival is entirely a function of the desire for distinctive spectacle. The moralist behind the camera has been displaced by an obscene choreographer. Technical bravura has outrun stylistic sense. And style is conscience – even conscience in default.
>
> (Jameson 1980: 10).

Jameson is therefore another apologist for classical *mise en scène*.

3.3. *Mise en Scène* analysis: *The English Patient*

The English Patient is a highbrow mega-movie that combines technical virtuosity with a large-scale story. The technical credits include veterans such as cinematographer John Seale ASC, ACS, whose credits include *Witness* (1985), *The Mosquito Coast* (1986), *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988), *Rain Man* (1988), *Beyond Rangoon* (1995), *City of Angels* (1998), and *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999); and editor Walter Murch, ACE, who edited *The Conversation* (1974), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Ghost* (1990), *The Godfather, Part III* (1990), and *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999) (he also worked as sound editor on many of these films). In the following analysis we shall focus on Seale's (and, to some extent Murch's) input to the creation of a classical *mise en scène* in *The English Patient*, plus the applicability to his work of a number of the *mise-en-scène* heuristics listed above. What emerged as the analysis progressed was the pertinence of applying the same-frame heuristic to this film, and the need to refine it to include the function of selective focus and pull focus (where the selective focus changes as the shot progresses).

In the introduction to an interview with John Seale after the release of *The English Patient*, Mary Colbert wrote:

> Seale maximised his brilliant use of natural landscape metaphors of emotional and psychological states, in the juxtaposition of the dual narrative strands: warm glowing tones for the pre-war African passion-filled sequences, and the more sombre, bleaker look and lighting in the Italian end-of-war scenes when Count de Almásy (Ralph Fiennes), close to death, and cared for by the Canadian nurse, Hana (Juliette Binoche), in an old Tuscan monastery, reflects on past passion and political intrigue.
>
> (Colbert 1997: 7)

The colour of the *mise en scène* therefore functions on a connotative level, for the warm, glowing oranges and yellows in the pre-war desert sequences 'express' desire and passion, while the bleak, cold greens and browns of the Italian sequences 'express' the death of desire, hope, and love. Colbert uses the foreground–background and expressivist heuristics to establish a relation between landscape and characters, to indicate how the landscape carries the meaning of the characters' psychological states. Furthermore, the transition between these two landscapes is also coded as psychological: as Almásy in the Tuscan monastery remembers the past, slow dissolves to the desert landscape mark the transfer. The slow dissolves therefore function as Almásy's change of consciousness, from his present surroundings to his memories of his past.

In the interview with Colbert, John Seale indicated the need to establish a balance between foreground and background:

> Anthony [Minghella] and I discussed the fact that the desert, ultimately, is not a performer in this picture. It is the proper – and colourful – stage for the characters. We deliberately avoided the temptation to lapse into travelogue or picture-postcard photography. It's not my rôle to be overpowering with these visuals. I never panned the landscape unless it continued the storyline. Each image was always connected to the story. Compositions kept the people up front. . . . This was a film about people in the desert, not the desert with people.
>
> (Colbert 1997: 8)

In an interview in *American Cinematographer*, Seale explained how the choice of lens kept the people up front: 'We wanted to feature the characters in the foreground, so we tended to use medium to long lenses. This helped to reduce distortion on the actors and "pull up" the background. In this way we were able to surround the characters with the environment, keeping it a "presence" rather than featuring it as another character or subject' (quoted in Oppenheimer 1997: 31). This balance between foreground and background, in order to allow characters to dominate the frame, is one indication of Seale's (and Minghella's) adherence to classical *mise en scène*. (Seale also mentioned that filming the landscape for its own sake – in autonomous shots not related to the story – would simply have increased the length of an already long film. It may have also tipped the *mise en scène* into mannerism.)

In another indication of his adherence to classical *mise en scène*, Seale said, responding to a question about his dislike for obvious camera movement: 'I prefer to think the camera is moving to enhance the physical positioning of actors within the scene or set, and is being used to heighten some movement by the actor or machinery, not just to track around somebody for the sake of creating visual energy because maybe the words aren't good enough. . . . if you're cutting correctly in your mind, and the performance is right, the audience will be transfixed. Moving the camera can distract both audiences and actors' (Colbert 1997: 8–9). Here we see Seale's clear adherence to classical *mise en scène*, which he further clarified when he criticized Michael Ballhaus's cinematography in Scorsese's *The Color of Money* (particularly the 360 degree shots around actors, which function simply to create visual energy) (Colbert 1997: 9).

Finally, Seale's adherence to classical *mise en scène* is evident in his practice of '[using] the zoom as much as possible as a "fixed" lens. I try to hide the movement of the zoom in a pan, dolly or track so that the audience is never aware of the movement' (quoted in Oppenheimer 1997: 36).

In the following analysis of *The English Patient* we will first focus on the opening credit sequence and determine how it relates to the rest of the film; identify key moments in the film where the *ménage à trois* between Almásy, Katharine, and her husband, Geoffrey, is articulated in the *mise en scène* (with

particular emphasis on the same-frame heuristic); and briefly employ other heuristics to analyse key moments of the film's *mise en scène*.

3.3.1. The credit sequence

The credit sequence consists of a close-up of a piece of paper, upon which a figure is gradually painted. As the credits finish, the image of the painted figure slowly dissolves into an aerial view of the desert landscape. The two-dimensional brown painted figure changes to a grey colour, and then begins to interact with the undulating sandscape. When the figure finally disappears, the shadow of a biplane takes its place. The camera moves back to reveal the biplane flying over the sandscape. It has two passengers, whom we later find out are Almásy and Katharine.

The soundtrack of the film's opening is equally complex. Before the credits even begin, we hear a percussive sound, which we can later locate in the film as the clatter of small vials of medicinal oils. In addition, we hear male voices chanting, a Hungarian folk song, non-diegetic orchestral music, and the diegetic sound of an aeroplane engine. These opening shots and sounds contain a wealth of associations, which we shall attempt to unravel.

We could argue that the rest of *The English Patient* simply elaborates and extends the elements of the *mise-en-scène* condensed in the credit sequence and opening shot. The painted figure is the same as the figures Katharine paints in the Cave of Swimmers. We can therefore suggest that this image derives from the scene in the Cave of Swimmers, and that Katharine is painting the figure. The Cave of Swimmers is important to Katharine because it is her tomb, the place where she dies at the end of the film.

The sand dunes and the painted figure momentarily superimposed over them are similar in shape. The similarity in shape creates the metaphor that the sands take on a human form. Heightened significance or implicit symbolism is therefore created through the superimposition (through cinematic elaboration, in Perkins's terms). This metaphor is relevant to Almásy's first flashback scene. In the foreground of the shot, we see him sitting talking to a desert tribesman about how to locate the Cave of Swimmers. Almásy is seen drawing the cave, and translates the tribesman's words – 'It is shaped like a woman's back'. But just before the tribesman gives this metaphorical description of the cave, a biplane lands in the background. The tribesman pauses, sees the plane, and then offers his description, which Almásy then translates. A few shots later, we realize that Katharine and her husband are in the plane. The associations established in the film's opening, between Katharine and the Cave of Swimmers, is therefore strengthened at this moment in the film.

Furthermore, we can use the foreground–background heuristic to identify

the significance of the play between foreground and background. The superimposition in the film's opening links the figure being painted by Katharine to the desert (more specifically, to the Cave of Swimmers, which can be identified because it resembles a woman's back) to the shadow of the biplane carrying Almásy and Katharine. By the end of the film we realize that this image shows Almásy flying away from the Cave of Swimmers after retrieving Katharine's body. Moments later the plane is shot down and Almásy is badly burnt. Katharine is further linked to the painted figure and the Cave of Swimmers when Geoffrey describes her as being like a fish in that she loves water and can swim for hours.

The painted figure is significant in a further respect: Katharine's paintings mark the initiation of Almásy and Katharine's love affair. When the two of them are stranded in the desert, Katharine offers Almásy several of her paintings, to put in his copy of Herodotus' *History*, which serves as a scrapbook of his life. At first Almásy politely refuses them. But by the next morning, he changes his mind and says he will be honoured to put them in his book.

The sounds in the credit sequence are equally significant, although not so straightforward to explain. The sound of the bottles of medicinal oils is located in the film at the moment when a tribesman attends to Almásy's burns. He uses some of the oil to cover Almásy's face. The Hungarian folk song is located in the moment when Katharine stays the night with Almásy in his hotel room. In the morning he plays on a gramophone the folk song which, he says, was sung to him when he was a young boy.

3.3.2. *Ménage à trois* and the same-frame heuristic

When Geoffrey and Katharine's plane arrives at the desert base camp of the Royal Geographical Society's team of map-makers (who call themselves 'the International Sand Club'), the whole team travel in a truck to greet them. However, Almásy remains behind with the truck and watches from afar. The same frame heuristic is relevant in describing this moment, as the whole team plus Katharine and Geoffrey are portrayed in one shot, and Almásy is shown alone in another shot. Because he remains aloof, he is introduced to Geoffrey, and then Katharine, in the following scene. The scene consists of 17 shots and lasts 60 seconds. Almásy appears in eight shots, including the opening establishing shot, and Katharine appears in seven (she does not appear in the opening shot). Other people appear in the first five shots featuring Almásy (1, 2, 4, 6, 8), which means he is isolated in his own shots as the scene progresses (shots 10, 12, and 16). Katharine is never isolated in her shots, for she appears in the frame with other members of the team, and with her husband (in shots 15 and 17). Towards the end of the scene, the discussion centres on different

types of love. In shot 15 Geoffrey mentions his favourite type of love – 'excessive love for one's wife', and then kisses Katharine. In shot 16, Almásy turns away and says, 'There you have me.' This could have been a justified end to the scene. But shot 17 is added, almost an extra shot that lingers on Geoffrey and Katharine. Geoffrey simply smiles after his comment, while Katharine turns her head away with a bemused, or perhaps embarrassed, smile. This extra, lingering shot emphasizes in purely visual terms possible differences between Geoffrey and Katharine on the subject of love. Although they are depicted in the same frame, Katharine's gestures indicate possible discord between her and Geoffrey. But perhaps another heuristic takes precedence over the same frame heuristic.

The editor of *The English Patient*, Walter Murch, has written: 'by cutting away from a character *before* he finishes speaking, I might encourage the audience to think only about the face value of what he said. On the other hand, if I linger on the character *after* he finishes speaking, I allow the audience to see, from the expression in his eyes, that he is probably not telling the truth, and they will think differently about him and what he said' (Murch 1995: 67). In the scene under discussion, shot 17 represents the lingering moment after the talking is over. The scene could well end on shot 16, cutting immediately after Almásy's admission that he is unmarried. Shot 17 can be understand it in terms of the commentative heuristic of foreshadowing, for it consists of a moment of cinematic elaboration that foreshadows the future ménage à trois.

In the following scene of Geoffrey and Katharine flying in one plane, and Almásy and Madox in the other, there is a significant exchange of looks between Katharine and Almásy. Katharine looks up toward Almásy, who looks and waves back. However, Katharine simply looks at him for a moment before turning away, refusing to acknowledge his wave.

The next exchange between Katharine and Almásy takes place around the camp fire. Each character entertains the others in various ways. Katharine recites the story of Gyres, from Herodotus' *History*. The story in effect is about a *ménage à trois* involving the husband's murder and the lover taking his place. As Katharine recites the story, a slow tracking shot gradually unites her and Almásy in the same frame, with Almásy in the foreground and Katharine in the background. However, the shot is constructed using selective focus, with Katharine initially in focus and Almásy out of focus. But as Katharine recites '. . . and she [the Queen] was more lovely than he [Gyres] could have imagined' she looks towards Almásy, and the focus is pulled so that Almásy is now in focus, and Katharine out of focus. The focus is reversed a few moments later, when Katharine recites the part of the story where the Queen realizes Gyres is watching her: '. . . although she said nothing, she shuddered.' Katharine then pauses as she exchanges a gaze with Almásy, depicted in a

quick shot/reverse shot pattern. The shot of Katharine in focus in the background, and Almásy out of focus in the foreground, is repeated a few moments later, as Katharine recites that Gyres must kill the king and take his place. The shots, selective focus, and editing do not simply depict the events, but offer commentary. They function to relate the events being recounted to the as yet unspoken events currently unfolding between Almásy, Katharine, and Geoffrey. The same-frame heuristic can be used to explain how pull focus works to separate Almásy and Katharine in the same frame (they are not in focus at the same time, and the quick shot/reverse shot separates them further). And the commentative heuristic can be used to explain how the action and film discourse are united, or how the film discourse transfers the meaning of the recounted story to the current events.

The next significant shot depicting the *ménage à trois* occurs in the hotel, where the Sand Club meet up and toast the absent wives of the other members. Katharine proposes a toast to Almásy. Looking at him, she toasts future wives. As she does so, there is a cut to Almásy in the background of the shot, but in the centre of the frame and in focus, with Geoffrey and Katharine in the foreground at the edge of the left and right frame, and out of focus. Geoffrey turns to Katharine and raises his glass, while Katharine's expression remains hidden, and Almásy looks off-frame, clearly uncomfortable with Katharine's comment. Geoffrey's expression suggests that he is still ignorant of the sexual attraction between Almásy and Katharine. Furthermore, the *mise en scène* adds more foreshadowing: Almásy is literally (i.e. spatially) depicted coming between Katharine and Geoffrey in the same shot. The framing, camera position, and selective focus position the three characters in the same frame, but does not unite them. Instead, these elements of the film discourse signify the future dramatic conflicts that are to unfold. Again, the same-frame heuristic and the commentative heuristic are relevant to an analysis of this film.

In the following scene, however, a number of the Sand Club members take turns to dance with Katharine. The shots of Almásy and Katharine dancing are briefly interrupted by an insert of Geoffrey, who occupies the foreground, while Katharine and Almásy occupy the background with other dancers. Again pull focus is used (this time very quickly) to shift focus from the background to the foreground. Geoffrey's expression, as he turns away from the dance floor, shows signs that he is uncomfortable with Almásy dancing with Katharine. But there is no dialogue to suggest his unease. Instead, his feelings are conveyed simply by inserting the shot of him into the scene at the right moment.

In the scene where Geoffrey temporarily leaves to take aerial photographs, an additional exchange of looks between Almásy and Katharine is depicted. As Geoffrey leaves, Almásy advises him not to leave Katharine behind in the

desert environment. Geoffrey simply asks him why 'you type of people are threatened by a woman', and walks away. The scene ends with an exchange of looks between Almásy and Katharine. We cut from behind Almásy's shoulder to behind Katharine's shoulder. However, they are at least 200 feet apart. Each in turn appears in the foreground and extreme background. Such an unusual spatial disposition (reminiscent of the extreme shot/reverse shots in *Citizen Kane*) is ambiguous: using the expressivist heuristic, we can argue that the huge space covered by the shot/reverse shot can signify either that the two of them are still far apart emotionally, or that they are fated to come together with the temporary absence of Geoffrey.

One of the most significant scenes where the same-frame heuristic can be used to analyse the *ménage à trois* is the International Sand Club's farewell dinner scene. By this time, Katharine has attempted to end her affair with Almásy. Furthermore, everyone around the table appears to know that the affair took place. Almásy turns up late to the dinner, and is very drunk. The main characters (Almásy, Katharine, Geoffrey, Madox) are primarily isolated in single shots. But on three occasions Katharine is filmed in profile with Geoffrey in the background. Selective focus is used, and Katharine is kept in focus on all three occasions, while Geoffrey is out of focus in the background. On two occasions Geoffrey is filmed in profile in the foreground, with Katharine in the background. Selective focus is again used to construct these shots. However, Geoffrey is in focus in the first shot but out of focus in the second.

The first of these 'profile' shots occurs when Almásy directs a question to Madox, who is sitting between Katharine and Geoffrey. The shot consists of Katharine in the foreground, Madox in the middle ground, and Geoffrey in the background. However, even though the question is directed to Madox, he does not dominate the frame, and is out of focus (only Katharine is in focus). A conventional way to film Madox would be to continue filming him in isolation in his own shot. But Seale's deviation from this standard is conveying, via cinematic elaboration, the distance between Katharine and Geoffrey, plus Madox's attempt to mediate.

The second 'profile' shot is the reverse of the first, with Geoffrey occupying the foreground, with Katharine in the background. Madox has left the table to try and control Almásy. Although Geoffrey is in the foreground, he is out of focus; only Katharine, in the background, is in focus.

The third profile shot repeats the first, except that Madox is still absent. But the focus remains on Katharine. The fourth shot repeats the second, with Geoffrey in the foreground and Katharine in the background. Madox is shown sitting down, occupying the middle ground. However, the focus has now switched from Katharine to Geoffrey. The fifth and final profile shot repeats shot 1 with Katharine in the foreground in focus, Madox in the middle

ground, and Geoffrey in the background. In keeping with his dislike for unnecessary camera movement, Seale has decided to use a still camera and selective focus rather than, say, a panning movement from Katharine to Geoffrey (or vice versa). In the interview in *American Cinematographer*, he indicates why he used framing and focus in these profile shots: 'We never related the two [Katharine and Geoffrey] by pulling focus. In fact, we *isolated* them by *not* pulling focus. I love that. It visually tells the story of these two – the infidelity between them' (quoted in Oppenheimer 1997: 37).

This is the first scene where we see Almásy and Katharine together after she has attempted to end the affair. The camera focuses on Geoffrey's and Katharine's individual reaction to Almásy's presence and comments. In the previous moments mentioned above, we have detected a discrepancy between Katharine's and Geoffrey's reactions to Almásy, from the first meeting in the desert to the scene where Geoffrey flies off, leaving Katharine in the desert with Almásy. Only the inserted shot of Geoffrey reacting to Katharine and Almásy dancing has previously indicated any discomfort he may feel, but the shot is ambiguous and brief. In the five profile shots, both Katharine's and Geoffrey's disapproval of Almásy is clearly evident, although their disapproval is not united (we only experience their disapproval separately, even though they appear in the same shot five times), and Katharine's disapproval is privileged over Geoffrey (Katharine is in focus for four of the five shots). The sequence is in keeping with the previous scenes mentioned in this section because it continues to emphasize the emotional conflict and tensions the main characters feel – particularly Katharine, who is in love with two men at the same time. Furthermore, these two men are sitting around the same table with her, and the scene is focusing on her unspoken reactions and conflicts.

3.3.3. Additional heuristics

At the exact moment Hana learns about the death of her fiancé, the army hospital tent where she is located is suddenly bombed. The bombing is not part of some larger offensive, nor are any consequences indicated in the film. On a literal level, the bombing functions as an element of verisimilitude (it is an event that happens in war). But beyond this, its primary aim is to express Hana's extreme state of mind at hearing the news. In Perkins's terminology, the bombing is first and foremost a credible element within the film, and can function on this level only. Beyond this literal meaning, however, the bombing serves to express a character's state of mind. We can use the expressivist heuristic to read the bombing as an event in the film that expresses character psychology.

Another element of cinematic elaboration that takes place in the film are the transitions effected from the present in Tuscany to the pre-war past in the

desert. We have already noted that these transitions can be understood psychologically, as representing Almásy's change of consciousness. In addition, many of Almásy's memories are triggered, in Proustian style, by small cues. The first flashback is triggered by Almásy knocking over his copy of Herodotus, and the contents spilling out on the floor. Slow dissolve to Almásy holding the open book and drawing the Cave of Swimmers. The transition back to the present is marked by a visual analogy, not a memory. As the two biplanes fly over the desert, the camera focuses on the rugged landscape. This slowly dissolves into a shot of Almásy's crumpled sheets as he lies in the monastery bed. The dissolve is 'motivated' by the visual similarity between the landscape and the sheets. The second transition is effected via sound. Hana is outside the monastery playing hopscotch. The sounds she creates, which are heard by Almásy, motivate his flashback to the desert campsite, which begins with a drumming sound similar to the sound Hana creates. (Sounds trigger several additional flashbacks.) The third flashback is triggered by Caravaggio, who asks Almásy if the name Katharine Clifton means anything to him. The transition back to the present takes place as Almásy and Katharine are dancing. The close body contact brings Almásy back to the present, where Hana has fallen asleep on him.

As one final example of the foreground–background and same-frame heuristics, we shall simply quote Seale's description of a shot in the monastery with Hana and Caravaggio (played by Willem Dafoe):

> In another scene set in the Italian monastery, Hana, with lantern in hand, walks into the monastery's kitchen to wash herself, only to collapse in tears of stress and emotion. 'In the background, Willem Dafoe comes through the door,' Seale says. 'Juliette throws her head on the table, and even though we only had focus on the top of her head, we still didn't throw it [the focus] back to Willem. Because it's *her* scene, *her* emotion, *her* moment, and he's intruding upon it. If you pull [focus] to him, you include him in her moment. By not pulling, you keep him back and force him to come forward, which he does. He walks forward and leans down, and just his face and hands are sharp.'
>
> (quoted in Oppenheimer 1997: 37)

3.4. Statistical style analysis: theory

The statistical style analysis of motion pictures is primarily a systematic version of *mise-en-scène* criticism – or, more accurately, *mise-en-shot* criticism. We have already seen that Eisenstein invented the term *mise en shot* to focus attention on the way shots are staged – that is, the way the parameters of the shot translate the actions and events into film. The advantage of

statistical style analysis over *mise-en-scène/shot* criticism is that it offers a more detached, systematic, and explicit mode of analysis. Statistical style analysis characterizes style in a numerical, systematic manner – that is, it analyses style by measuring and quantifying it. At its simplest, the process of measuring involves counting elements, or variables, that reflect a film's style, and then performing statistical tests on those variables.

More specifically, there are three standard aims of statistical style analysis: (1) to offer a quantitative analysis of style, usually for the purpose of recognizing patterns, a task now made feasible with the use of computer technology. In language texts, the quantitative analysis of style and pattern recognition is usually conducted in the numerical analysis of the following variables: word length, or syllables per word, sentence length, the distribution of parts of speech (the different percentage of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and so on in a text), calculating the ratio of parts of speech (for example, the ratio of verbs to adjectives), or by analysing word order, syntax, rhythm, or metre; (2) for the purposes of authorship attribution, in cases of disputed authorship of anonymous or pseudonymous texts (see Foster 2001); and (3) for purposes of identifying the chronology of works, when the sequence of composition is unknown or disputed (e.g. Plato, Shakespeare's plays).

The first aim, the quantitative analysis of style, involves descriptive statistics, and the second and third (authorship attribution and chronology) involve both descriptive and inferential statistics. As its name implies, descriptive statistics simply describes a text as it is, by measuring and quantifying it in terms of its numerical characteristics. The result is a detailed, internal, molecular description of the formal variables of a text (or group of texts). Inferential statistics then employs this formal description to make predictions. That is, it uses this data as an index, primarily an index of an author's style, or to put the author's work into chronological order on the basis of measured changes in style of their work over time. Whereas descriptive statistics produces data with complete certainty, inferential statistics is based on assumptions made by the statistician on the basis of the descriptive data. These assumptions only have degrees of probability rather than certainty.

3.4.1. The quantitative analysis of style

One of the few film scholars to apply statistical style analysis to film is Barry Salt. In his essay 'Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures' (1974), and later in his book *Film Style and Technology* (1992), he describes the individual style of directors by systematically collecting data on the formal parameters of their films. Salt then represents the quantity and frequency of these formal parameters in bar graphs, percentages, and average shot lengths (there will be more on these methods in section 3.5). When he compares and contrasts the

form of the films of different directors, he moves into the realm of stylistic analysis. Style in this sense designates a set of measurable patterns that significantly deviate from contextual norms. As just one example, Barry Salt calculated that the average shot length of a film in the 1940s is around nine to ten seconds. A 1940s film with an average shot length of 30 seconds therefore significantly deviates from the norm, and is thus a significant indicator of style.

3.4.2. Authorship attribution

Authorship attribution is a long-standing, traditional subject in New Testament scholarship, study of the classics, and literary scholarship as well as in the legal context (for inferring whether the defendant wrote his or her confession, or whether it was 'co-authored' with the police, for example). Statistical style analysis has contributed its computerized statistical methods to these areas with controversial results.

One of the principles behind authorship attribution of written texts is that the stylometrist should not focus on a few unusual stylistic traits of a text, but on the frequency of common words an author uses – particularly minor or function words, the use of which is independent of the subject matter or context. These include words such as prepositions (*of, to, in*) as well as synonymous function words such as *kind* vs *sort*, or *on* vs *upon*. One author may be prone to use *on* instead of *upon*, or *kind* rather than *sort*. (Stylometric analysts usually look for dozens of synonymous pairs in an author's work.)

At first it may seem odd to distinguish writing style by analysing an author's consistent use of frequent function words, which he or she is not conscious of using. But as A.Q. Morton argues, these words offer the stylometrist a common point of comparison between authors: 'A test of authorship is some habit which is shared by all writers and is used by each at a personal rate, enabling his work to be distinguished from the works of other writers' (Farringdon 1996: 274). So it is the quantity, or personal rate, of common words that is important, rather than their absence or presence in an author's writing. Furthermore, we can argue that a stylometric analysis is analogous to fingerprinting or to DNA testing. Humans share an enormous amount of DNA with other animals. It is only the minute details that distinguish humans from animals. Furthermore, human beings can be distinguished from each other on the basis of DNA testing or, more conventionally, on the basis of other small details – particularly fingerprints. One of the most common metaphors of stylometric authorship attribution is that it 'fingerprints' authors. Anthony Kenny writes: 'What would a stylistic fingerprint be? It would be a feature of an author's style – a combination perhaps of very humble features such as the frequency of *such as* – no less unique to him [or

her] than a bodily fingerprint is. Being a trivial and humble feature of style would be no objection to its use for identification purposes: the whorls and loops at the ends of our fingers are not valuable or striking parts of our bodily appearance' (1982: 12–13).

A writer's style can therefore be measured in terms of a constant use of language features, or a combination of features. Just one example, on Raymond Chandler:

> Chandler's style, like that of any author, consists of the *conjunction* of its constituent elements . . . . Much of the action and color in Chandler's stories is conveyed by dialogue, which comprises, on average, 44% of all the words in a story; for every thousand words of text, there are, on average, approximately 30 verbal exchanges, which last approximately 15 words apiece. For every thousand words of text, Chandler's stories also contain approximately one argot word, three similes, one vulgarity, no obscenities at all, and 38 coordinating injunctions.
>
> (Sigelman and Jacoby 1996: 19)

This information identifies Chandler's style – at least from a quantitative perspective – and can be used as the norm by which to attribute an anonymous story to Chandler.

If we think of the descriptive possibilities of stylometric authorship studies for film analysis, we note that, as with *mise-en-scène* criticism, statistics can be used to make *auteur* criticism more rigorous – that is, detached, systematic, and explicit. The *auteur* critic should then focus on the frequency of the common stylistic parameters a director uses – the use of which is independent of the subject matter or context – rather than on a few unusual stylistic traits of a film. In other words, it is possible to use the descriptive dimension of authorship attribution to identify the series of invariant stylistic traits in a director's work (again, the traits linked to the parameters of the shot, in the first instance). It is imperative to think of a director's unique style in terms of the combination of all the parameters related to the shot (what statisticians call multivariate analysis).

The inferential dimension of authorship attribution has a more limited application to film, but some films such as *Poltergeist* have disputed authorship (was it directed by Tobe Hooper or Steven Spielberg?). By systematically analysing the parameters of the shots in *Poltergeist*, and then comparing the results to samples from Hooper's and Spielberg's other films, it may be possible to identify the film's authorship (defined in terms of *mise en shot*, i.e. the parameters of the shot). Of course, because we move from descriptive to inferential statistics, then the result can never be certain, but only predicted with a degree of probability. Only the descriptive aspect of the analysis remains beyond doubt.

On a cautionary note, the variables chosen to determine a director's style need to be valid (Salt has covered this problem by collecting data on the variables under a director's control). And the results need to be statistically significant, rather than due to chance occurrence. Many statistical tests are in fact tests for significance.

3.4.3. Chronology

The third area of statistical style analysis is chronology. Here again the statistics used can be either descriptive or inferential. A description quantifies and measures the changes in a body of work, usually of a single author. The point here is that an author's work changes in a predictable manner. An inferential study uses these descriptions of change to place an author's work into chronological order where that chronology is unknown or disputed. By identifying a pattern of change, and by measuring and quantifying that change, the author's work can then be put in chronological order. An assumption underlying inferential chronological studies is that an author's work is rectilinear, in other words, there is a linear progression in the change in an author's style. Furthermore, the idea of change needs to be reconciled with the idea of the author's style remaining constant in author attribution studies.

In film, chronology studies can be used descriptively to identify a change in style across a director's work. The most obvious example is charting the change of any shot parameter across a director's career, such as average shot length, distribution of shot scales, or use of camera movement.

3.5. Statistical style analysis: method

In his *Film Quarterly* essay 'Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures' (1974), Barry Salt aimed to identify the individual style of a director by systematically collecting data on the formal parameters of films, particularly those formal parameters that are most directly under the director's control, including:

- duration of the shot (including the calculation of average shot length, or ASL);
- shot scale;
- camera movement;
- angle of shot;
- strength of the cut (measured in terms of the spatio-temporal displacement from one shot to the next).

Salt collected data from these parameters by laboriously going through the film shot by shot. For most of his analyses, he in fact collected data on all the

shots that appear in the first 30 minutes of each film, because this is a representative sample from the film. We shall employ (and test the viability of) this practice in our statistical style analysis of *The English Patient* in section 3.6. Salt is also interested in combining the results of each parameter. For example, he argues that it would be useful to combine 'duration of the shot' with 'shot scale' for each film (or indeed, a director's entire output), in order to determine 'the relative total times spent in each type of shot' (Salt 1974: 15), 'giving an indication of the director's preference for the use of that type of shot' (p. 15). So, a director may use close-ups for a total of 20 minutes during a film, long shots for 30 minutes, and so on.

After analysing a sample of films from four directors, Salt finds that both shot scale and ASL are significant and defining characteristics of a director's style. (Calculating the ASL involves dividing the duration of the film by the number of shots.) However, the distribution of shot scale is similar for the four directors he analyses.

In a statistical style analysis of the films of Max Ophuls (Salt 1992: ch. 22), Salt uses standard stylometric tests to analyse the distribution of stylistic parameters in each film. First, histograms, or bar charts, represent the number of each shot type in each film (the number of close-ups, long shots, etc.). Second, he takes equal lengths of film, calculates the expected number of shots and shot types in each section, and then counts the actual number of shots and shot types in that section, to determine whether they conform to the average (the mean) or deviate from it. There are several ways to select the equal section intervals:

1. Salt recommends intervals of one minute (i.e. 100-ft intervals on 35mm film).
2. If calculating shot types one can define the intervals in terms of number of shots (e.g. 50) and calculate the expected number of shot types, and the actual number of shot types.
3. Take the ASL of the whole film, and then analyse it scene by scene (each scene is defined in terms of spatio-temporal unity and in terms of events). Work out the expected number of shots and shot types for each scene, and count the actual number of shots. If the ASL is ten seconds, and the scene lasts two minutes, the expected number of shots for that scene is 12.

In his analysis of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Salt notes:

> For instance, in scene 1 five shots would be expected if the cutting were even throughout every part of the film, but in fact there are only three shots. Contrariwise, in scene no. 5, while only seven shots would be expected, there are actually fourteen.

> (Salt 1992: 309)

This type of analysis can also be applied to the expected number and the actual number of shot types in each scene and the number of shot types. Salt's analysis of Ophuls' film *Caught* shows how this information can be useful in analysing a film's style:

> *Caught* is the first Max Ophuls film in which there is a very definite reduction in the amount of variation in Scale of Shot and cutting rate from scene to scene, and this becomes very apparent if a breakdown into 100ft sections is made on a 35mm. print. After the point in the film at which Leonora has married Smith-Ohlrig and been left alone in his mansion, we have for the next half hour of screen time very little departure from the average Scale of Shot distribution, and the cutting rate is also very steady for lengths of several minutes at a time, despite the occurrence of scenes of quite varied dramatic nature. It is only in the last 12 minutes of the film, when the most dramatic twitches of the plot take place, that there are any strong deviations from the norms.
>
> (Salt 1992: 310)

Salt is able to determine not only how the shot lengths and scales are distributed across the whole film, but also how this film compares to Ophuls' other films ('*Caught* is the first Max Ophuls film in which there is a very definite reduction in the amount of variation in Scale of Shot and cutting rate from scene to scene'). Salt develops this historical analysis by considering Ophuls' later films, and notes that Ophuls pares down variation in shot scale even more (relying more and more on the medium long shot), and using longer and longer takes, often combined with extensive camera movements.

For example, in *La Ronde*,

> with the scene between The Young man and The Chambermaid we get, after the first 11 shots, long strings of up to 10 shots each with the same camera distance in every shot. Most of these are also in the Medium or medium Long Shot scale, and the film continues in the same manner after this scene. At one point there is a string of 15 consecutive close ups, which is the sort of thing that just did not happen in other people's films in the same period, as a little checking will show.
>
> (Salt 1992: 311)

In summary, statistical style analysis is a very precise tool for determining both the stability and the change in style that takes place across a film-maker's career. Statistical style analysis focuses the research on how films are put together, rather than how they are perceived or comprehended.

Barry Salt carried out his statistical analysis by hand, which limited the types of test he could perform on the data he collected. With the exponential growth in computer technology and software over the last decade, statistical

style analysis can now be carried out using computer technology and powerful software programs. In the following analysis of *The English Patient*, data was still collected by hand, but it was then entered into the software program SPSS for Windows (Statistical Package for Social Scientists). SPSS is a spreadsheet program, with rows and columns. In film analysis, each row (which is automatically numbered) represents a shot, and each column represents a parameter of that shot. The parameters recorded include: shot scale, shot length, camera movement, direction of moving camera, and camera angle. Once the data has been entered, it can be represented both numerically and visually, and numerous statistical tests can then be performed on it.

The following analysis of *The English Patient* will consist of both the visual and numerical representation of data (particularly bar graphs and frequency and percentage tables). Then a few simple statistical tests will be applied: measure of the mean or average shot length; measure of the standard deviation of shot length; and the skewness of the values for shot length and shot scale. (The results will also be compared to a similar analysis of *Jurassic Park*.) The mean is a measure of central tendency, of the average value of a range of values. Standard deviation is the reverse of measuring the mean, for it is a measure of dispersion, or distribution spread of values, around the mean; if the value of the standard deviation is large, this means that the values are widely distributed. Skewness measures the degree of non-symmetrical distribution of values around the mean. If the values are perfectly distributed, then the skewness value will be zero. If more of the values are clustered to the left of the mean (i.e. if their value is less than the mean), then the distribution is positively skewed. If the values are clustered to the right of the mean, the distribution is negatively skewed.

These tests properly apply only to ratio data (where zero is an absolute value – zero weight, zero time, etc.). Only shot length is, strictly speaking, ratio data. In the shot scale, numbers have been assigned to the categories, which means that they constitute a nominal scale (Very Long Shot is 7, but there is not reason why it couldn't be 1). However, by using the nominal scale consistently (1 = big close up, 2 = close up, 3 = medium close up, etc.) the norm, standard deviation, and skewness do at least have some heuristic value.

Other stylistic issues that can be raised (but won't be for this exercise) is to enter the number of scenes in the SPSS program, and then calculate the average number of shots per scene, and therefore calculate the expected number of shots per scene, and the actual number. Other useful data can be collected on positional reference (for example, what position do close ups typically take in a film? – the first, second, third shot?) or contextual reference (do close ups usually follow long shots?). Percentiles are also a useful tool. They measure the number of variables at regular intervals of a text. For example, at every 5 per cent, count the number of variables (e.g. close-ups) in

the film. This will reveal whether the variables are evenly distributed throughout the film, or concentrated in a particular part of it. One of the most interesting tests, however, is to determine the correlation between variables. For example, what is the correlation between shot length and shot scale? We would expect some correlation, because close-ups usually appear on screen only for a short time, whereas a very long shot usually has a long duration on screen. But we can determine if there is a correlation between any of the variables – camera movement and shot length, or camera movement and shot scale, for example.

3.6. Statistical style analysis: *The English Patient*

Data was recorded from the following five parameters of the shot over the first 30 minutes of *The English Patient*: shot length, shot scale, camera movement, camera direction, and camera angle. For comparative purposes, the same data were recorded from the first 30 minutes of *Jurassic Park*. Barry Salt has already argued that 30 minutes is a representative sample to analyse. To test this hypothesis, we shall compare the results of the statistical style analysis of the first 30 minutes of *Jurassic Park* with the statistical style analysis of the whole film.

The statistical tests applied in this section to the collected data are the simplest ones available on SPSS: calculating the frequency of variables (i.e. counting them), representing those frequencies as percentages, calculating the mean, the standard deviation, and the skewness of the results.

The first 30 minutes of *The English Patient* (up to the moment where Caravaggio introduces himself to Hana, and they go into the kitchen of the monastery) comprise 356 shots. In terms of shot length, the main values are to be found in Table 3.1 (on p. 113).

The first column indicates shot length values (1 second, 2 seconds, and so on); the second column the number of times this shot length appears in the first 30 minutes of *The English Patient* (1-second shots appear 41 times, 2-second shots 84 times); and the third column indicates the percentage of shots with each value (1-second shots constitute 11.5 per cent of all the shots in the sample, while 2-second shots represent 23.6 per cent of all the shots in the sample).

Table 3.1 only represents shots of length 1–10 seconds. There are additional values, up to 129 seconds (the opening credit sequence shot), but the frequency of shot lengths above 10 seconds is usually very small – one or two examples. Shots of length 1–10 seconds constitute 92 per cent of all the shots in the sample.

Table 3.2 shows that the mean (the average) value of shot length of this sample is 5.1. In other words, the average shot length (ASL) of the film is 5 seconds (there is, on average, a cut every 5 seconds). The standard deviation

of shot length is 8, indicating a wide dispersion of values around the mean, while the skewness of values is 10.97, indicating a very strong positive skewedness of values, favouring those values below the mean. What this means is that there are a large number of shots in the range 1–4 seconds. All of this information can also be represented visually (Fig. 3.1, on p. 112).

The value of this information may not be readily apparent. One of the best ways to make sense of it is to conduct a comparative analysis. The first 30 minutes of *Jurassic Park* (up to the end of the scene where Grant, Sattler, Malcolm, and Gennaro see a dinosaur egg hatch in the lab) consists of 252 shots, in comparison to *The English Patient*'s 356, a difference of 104 shots. This indicates that *The English Patient* has 40 per cent more shots than *Jurassic Park*, a surprising result considering that *The English Patient* is a highbrow mega-movie imitating art cinema aesthetics, while *Jurassic Park* is a blockbuster full of fast action.

We can make many other comparisons. *Jurassic Park*'s values for shot length can be found in Tables 3.3 and 3.4 (on p. 113). The shot lengths in the range 1–10 seconds only constitute 80 per cent of all the shots in the sample, suggesting that Spielberg's film has a wider variety of shot lengths. This is reflected in a skewness value of 2.68 (the mean value is 7 seconds and standard deviation is 6.69). Whereas the skew value of *The English Patient* is 10.97, in *Jurassic Park* it is only 2.68. This shows that the shot length values are more evenly distributed around the mean of 7. There is still a bias towards lower values (lower than the mean), but the bias is far smaller than in *The English Patient*. This information can also be represented visually (see Fig. 3.2).

We can explore further this difference in shot length values. In *The English Patient*, 52 per cent of the shots fall in the range 1–3 seconds. In *Jurassic Park*, only 35 per cent of the shots fall within this range. We have to include the values up to 5 seconds before *Jurassic Park* reaches the same percentage (in fact shots falling in the range 1–5 seconds constitute 54 per cent of the film's total). However, by looking at the bar graphs we can detect a similar pattern: a low value for 1 second, rising steeply for 2 seconds, and then falling gradually for the values 3 and 4 seconds. Furthermore, no shot length above 4 seconds in *The English Patient* and no shot length above 6 seconds in *Jurassic Park* constitute more than 10 per cent of the total values. Whether these results only represent patterns common to *The English Patient* and *Jurassic Park*, are common in film-making, or are an anomaly will require further research.

With the above tests we are simply scratching the surface of what can be achieved with statistical style analysis. It is also possible to apply the same tests to the results obtained from the other four parameters of the shot. But because this would make this chapter even longer, we shall instead consider camera movement and shot scale. With the data collected on camera movement, we
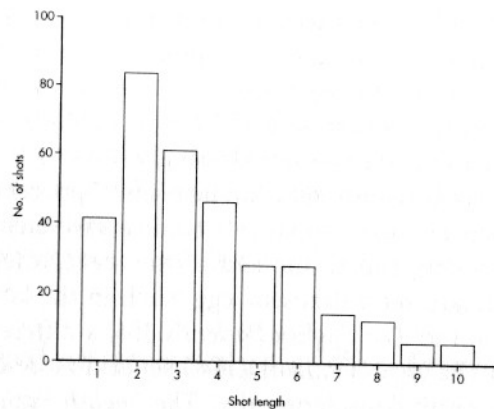
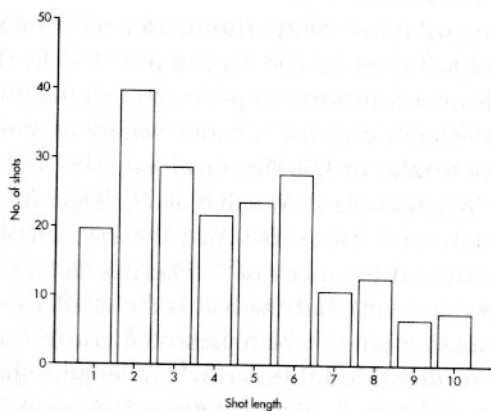**Fig. 3.1.** Shot length for the first 30 minutes of *The English Patient*

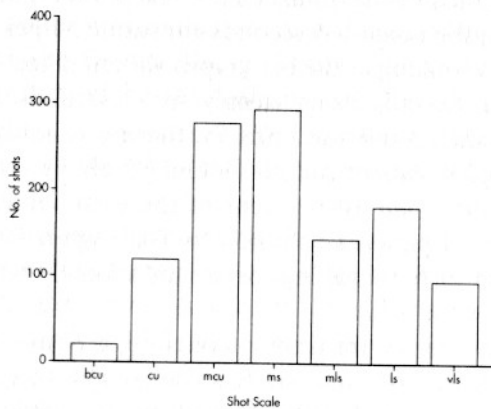**Fig. 3.2.** Shot length for the first 30 minutes of *Jurassic Park*

Fig. 3.3. Distribution of shot scale in *Jurassic Park* (whole film) (bcu = big close-up; cu = close-up; mcs = medium close shot; ms = medium shot; mls = medium long shot; ls = long shot; vls = very long shot)

Table 3.1. Frequency and percentage of shots in the first 30 minutes of *The English Patient*

Shot length (seconds)	Frequency	%
1	41	11.5
2	84	23.6
3	61	17.1
4	46	12.9
5	28	7.9
6	28	7.9
7	14	3.9
8	12	3.4
9	6	1.7
10	6	1.7

Table 3.2. Mean, standard deviation, and skewness of shot length in the first 30 minutes of *The English Patient*

No. of shots	356
Mean	5.1
Standard deviation	8
Skewness	10.9
Standard error of skewness	0.129

Table 3.3. Frequency and percentage of shots in the first 30 minutes of *Jurassic Park*

Shot length (seconds)	Frequency	%
1	20	7.9
2	40	15.9
3	29	11.5
4	22	8.7
5	24	9.5
6	28	11.1
7	11	4.4
8	13	5.2
9	7	2.8
10	8	3.2

Table 3.4. Mean, standard deviation, and skewness of shot length in the first 30 minutes of *Jurassic Park*

No. of shots	252
Mean	7
Standard deviation	6.69
Skewness	2.68
Standard error of skewness	0.153

can test John Seale's claim that he avoids moving the camera unless absolutely necessary (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.5. Camera movement values in the first 30 minutes of *The English Patient*

	Frequency	%
Still camera	302	84.8
Pan	31	8.7
Track	22	6.2
Crane	1	0.3

The still camera is by far the most common value (85 per cent of all shots), with only 15 per cent of the shots containing camera movement. This seems to confirm John Seale's claim that he likes to keep the camera still.

In comparison, *Jurassic Park* contains the values shown in Table 3.6. These results may surprise some readers, especially the high percentage of still shots in an action blockbuster. But the percentages are significantly different to *The English Patient*, since *Jurassic Park* has 11 per cent more moving shots than *The English Patient*.

Table 3.6. Camera movement values in the first 30 minutes of *Jurassic Park*

	Frequency	%
Still camera	187	74.2
Pan	33	13.1
Track	26	10.3
Crane	4	1.6
Pan and track	2	0.8

Finally, in terms of shot scale, the distribution in both films conforms to what statisticians call a 'normal distribution', with high values in the middle (the mean) and progressively lower values on either side (see Fig. 3.3, p. 112). The result of these normal distributions is that the standard deviation and skewness values are low. Both directors favour medium close-ups (28 per cent in *Jurassic Park*, and 33 per cent in *The English Patient*) and medium shots (21 per cent in *Jurassic Park*, and 20 per cent in *The English Patient*), although *Jurassic Park* only contains half as many close-ups as *The English Patient* (9 per cent in *Jurassic Park*, 18 per cent in *The English Patient*). *Jurassic Park* compensates with almost three times as many long shots as *The English Patient*.

In summary, *The English Patient* contains a short range of shot lengths

averaging out at 5 seconds, heavily biased towards shots of 1–3 seconds, with a very high percentage of still shots. *Jurassic Park* has a much wider distribution of shot lengths, which average out at 7 seconds, with a bias (but not as much as in *The English Patient*) towards shots below this value, with a slightly higher percentage of camera movement. Seventy-one per cent of shots in *The English Patient* are at eye level, compared to 81 per cent in *Jurassic Park*. Furthermore, 7 per cent of shots in *The English Patient* are from a low angle, compared to 11.5 per cent in *Jurassic Park*. This similarity is surprising, for Spielberg is well known for using low camera angles. The values for shot scale are more 'stable' in both films, and conform to the normal distribution of values.

One final task needs to be carried out to check the viability of the above results – the representative nature of the first 30 minutes of a film. Here we shall simply note major similarities and differences between a statistical style analysis of the first 30 minutes of *Jurassic Park* and an analysis of the whole film. (When two figures are quoted, the first one always refers to the 30-minute sample and the second to the whole film.) First, shot length. The mean for the first 30 minutes is 7 seconds (252 shots divided by 1,800 seconds), whereas for the whole film it is 6 seconds (1,145 shots divided by 6,870 seconds), suggesting that the cutting rate increases as the film progresses. This increase in cutting is not surprising for an action film with its usual climatic ending, but what is surprising is that the increase is small. Standard deviation remains stable between the two samples, whereas skewness increases from 2.68 to 3.58, suggesting a increase in bias towards shots of shorter length in the whole film. And indeed, when we look at the percentage of 1- second shots, we note that, in the 30 minute sample, they constitute 8 per cent of shots, whereas in the whole film, they constitute 14.5 per cent. The other low values of shot length also increase slightly in the whole film. Whereas, as reported above, 54 per cent of shots in the 30-minute sample fall between 1 and 5 seconds, in the whole film 54 per cent of shots fall between 1 and 4 seconds. Put another way, shots between 1 and 5 seconds in the whole film constitute 63 per cent of shots (as opposed to 54 per cent in the 30-minute sample). Shot scale remains almost identical in both samples, as does camera movement (surprisingly, the number of still shots only falls 1 per cent to 73 per cent in the whole film, despite the increase in action). Significantly, the percentage of low camera angles almost doubles when we take into consideration the whole film – from 11.5 per cent to 21 per cent.

The information that the SPSS software has yielded is simply the raw material for writing about the style of *The English Patient*, and for comparing its style to that of other films. The above analysis only presents a small sample of data and even fewer tests on the stylistic patterns to be found in the film. The primary difference between this analysis and more conventional *mise-en-*

scène analysis is that statistical style analysis is more systematic and rigorous, and is more narrowly focused, for it exclusively analyses shot parameters. When reading the results of a statistical style analysis, we need to keep in mind that both the computer and statistics are merely tools, means to an end to analysing data on style, a way of quantifying style and making easier the recognition of underlying patterns.

4 From thematic criticism to deconstructive analysis (*Chinatown*)

Introduction

Common questions film spectators ask themselves (and each other) after watching a film include: What does this film mean? What is it trying to tell us? Does this film have any significance, or is it simply a form of harmless entertainment, containing as much substance as the popcorn and carbonated drinks consumed while watching the film? All these questions are trying to identify on an informal level the film's 'theme', a term originating from literary criticism. Whatever type of text we are referring to – a novel, poem, or film – the theme refers to that text's substance, its principal idea, what it is about. However, themes are usually implicit or indirect, which makes for lively discussions after a screening, for each spectator attempts to make the film's implicit theme explicit and direct. Disagreements arise when some spectators link up particular elements in the film and unify them under a general idea, while others, although privileging the same elements, may try to unify them under a different general idea. Different spectators may then disagree over the selection of elements to privilege, and come up with their own list. Such an activity is also characteristic of thematic criticism, to be outlined in the first half of this chapter. We shall explore thematic criticism by summarizing two thematic analyses of Roman Polanski's films, and then analysing the themes in *Chinatown* (1974).

In the second half of the chapter we shall return to *Chinatown*, but this time from the perspective of deconstructive analysis. On the way, we shall review the main premises of the *auteur* theory, which has many similarities to thematic criticism, particularly its privileging of a coherent, unified text. By contrast, deconstruction privileges excess, deferral, dispersal, dissemination, contradiction, undecidability, unlimited semiosis, and supplementation, the elements of a text that escape unification. As with all theories, thematics and