

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Shape of 1939

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This article extends further backwards to 1939 the survey of stylistic changes in American feature films which I began with *The Shape of 1999* and *The Shape of 1959*, previously published in *The New Review of Film and Television Studies*.

Keywords: film style; statistical analysis; US films of 1939

The Sample

The IMDb records 520 American feature films that were released in 1939, and of these, 171 were available on DVD or video tape at the time this research was carried out. The available films were scattered fairly evenly across the output of the studios and genres, so a random sample of twenty of these films was taken. This is the resulting list:-

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Title	Director	Studio
Another Thin Man	W.S. Van Dyke	MGM
At the Circus	Edward Buzzell	MGM
Blind Alley	Charles Vidor	Columbia
The Cat and the Canary	Elliott Nugent	Paramount
Destry Rides Again	George Marshall	Universal
Each Dawn I Die	William Keighley	Warner Bros.
Harlem Rides the Range	Richard C. Kahn	Hollywood Pictures
Heritage of the Desert	Lesley Selander	Paramount
The Invisible Killer	Sam Newfield	Producers Pictures
In Old Caliente	Joseph Kane	Republic
The Little Princess	Walter Lang	Paramount
Love Affair	Leo McCarey	RKO
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington	Frank Capra	Columbia
The Mystery of Mr. Wong	William Nigh	Monogram
Nancy Drew... Reporter	William Clemens	Warner Bros.
The Old Maid	Edmund Goulding	Warner Bros.
Rose of Washington Square	Gregory Ratoff	20th. Century-Fox
The Saint Strikes Back	John Farrow	RKO
Tower of London	Rowland V. Lee	Universal
Wuthering Heights	William Wyler	Goldwyn

This sample in its turn also shows a fairly even selection across the studios and the genres, although inevitably some of the small studios that made small numbers of B-pictures are not represented. Given the standard double feature method of film exhibition in the United States at this time, the total number of B-films produced was approximately equal to the number of A-films, and this is reasonably represented in the above sample, along with the fact that most of the major studios produced B-films alongside their A-film production. There are four Westerns in the sample because there were an awful lot of B-Westerns made in 1939, and given that he made nine films in 1939, the laws of chance have almost inevitably given me the No. 2 singing cowboy of the time, Roy Rogers,

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performing in *In Old Caliente*. (He made 9 films in 1939). But note that *Destry Rides Again* is not a B-Western, but one of the few A-Westerns made in 1939. I remind readers that B-features in this period were always about 60 minutes long, whereas A-features were about 90 minutes long. The major studios also made one or two 'Super-A' features a year in the 'thirties, and these had much bigger budgets than regular A-features, and were 110 minutes, or more, in length. In this sample, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* is such a film. Also in the sample are a couple of films -- *The Invisible Killer* and *Nancy Drew ... Reporter* -- about intrepid female newspaper reporters, which was another interest of the time. And another burgeoning interest appears in the first Hollywood film centering on psychoanalysis (of a kind): *Blind Alley*.

Method

My analytical procedure has been described in the previous articles in this series, but briefly it depends on ripping a DVD or videotape of the film to hard disk, and then using a non-linear editor to mark the boundaries of all the shots in the film, before making a series of passes through the film to count the totals of the other various stylistic variables that I study. These variables are derived from the terms used by film-makers in their construction of motion picture films. The sequential lengths of the shots in each of the twenty films in the sample are not studied in this paper, but they are available on the Cinemetrics web site at www.cinemetrics.lv

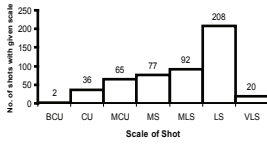
Scale of Shot

The Scale or Closeness of Shot is measured, as before, by the size of the human figure relative to the height of the frame. They are as follows: Big Close Up (BCU) shows head only, Close Up (CU) shows head and shoulders, Medium Close Up (MCU) includes body from the waist up, Medium Shot (MS) includes from just below the hip to above the head of upright actors, Medium Long Shot (MLS) shows the body from the knee upwards, Long Shot (LS) shows at least the full height of the body, and Very Long Shot (VLS) shows the actor small in the frame. As usual, the figures quoted are the number of shots of each scale per 500 shots in the film concerned. You can see the size of these shot scales illustrated in a diagram on page 253 in my book *Moving Into Pictures* (Salt 2006).

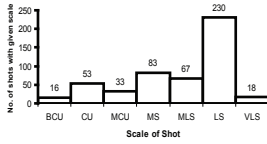
Below are the graphs showing the number of shots of each scale per 500 shots in each of the films in the sample. They are ordered from the film with the most emphasis on distant shots to the film with the greatest concentration on close shots of the actors. This ordering used the ratio between the number of shots with scales greater than Medium Shot to the number of shots with scale less than Medium Shot for each film. A crude measure, but I like to keep things simple.

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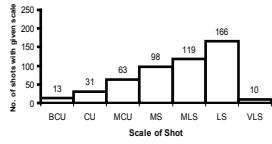
In Old Caliente



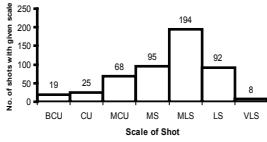
Harlem Rides the Range



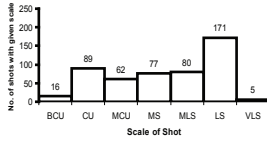
At the Circus



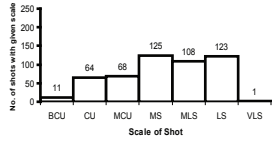
The Mystery of Mr. Wong



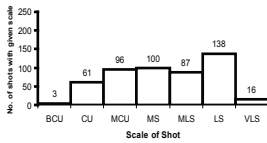
Wuthering Heights



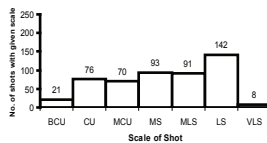
The Little Princess



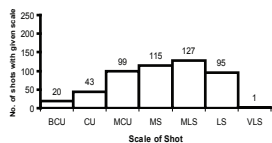
Heritage of the Desert



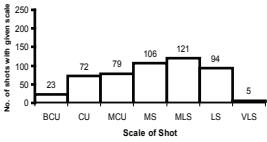
Tower of London



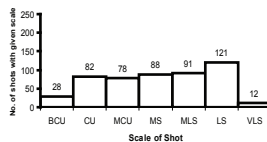
The Cat and the Canary



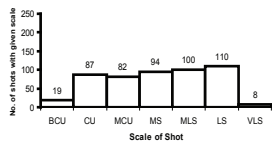
Destry Rides Again



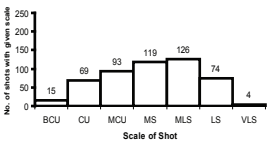
Rose of Washington Square



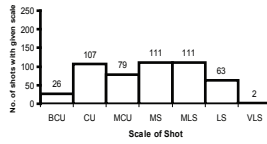
1939 Average Scales



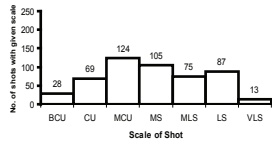
The Invisible Killer



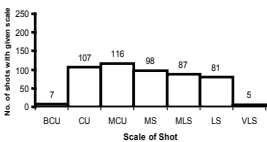
Blind Alley



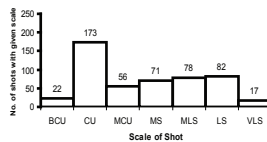
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington



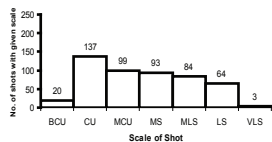
Nancy Drew...Reporter



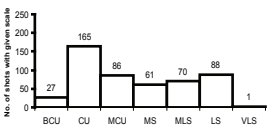
Love Affair



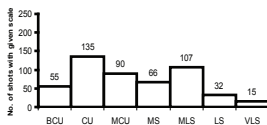
Another Thin Man



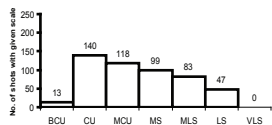
Each Dawn I Die



The Saint Strikes Back

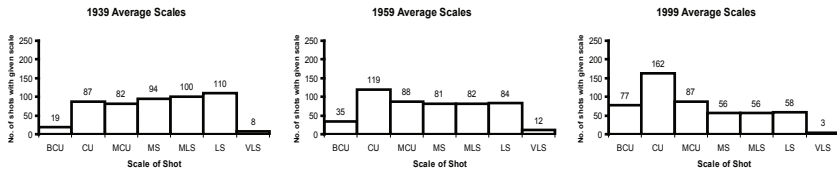


The Old Maid



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A graph of the average shot scales taken over the 20 films is also included. The bias applied by the genre of the film can be seen in that the three Westerns in the sample are shot from furthest back from the actors to allow for all the riding around in the wide-open spaces, but within this group there is considerable variation, with the most distantly shot being *Harlem Rides the Range*, which comes from the bottom of ‘poverty row’, while the A-western, *Destry Rides Again*, is pretty similar to the period children’s film, *The Little Princess*, the comedy thriller *The Cat and the Canary*, and indeed also to the average shot profile for this sample. The largest amount of close shooting occurs in the romantic dramas, *The Old Maid* and *Love Affair*, with getting on towards half the shots in the latter falling in the range BCU to MCU, showing the lovers yearning towards each other.



The average Scale of Shot distributions for 1959 and 1999, which are reproduced from my previous articles ‘The Shape of 1959’ (Salt 2009) and ‘The Shape of 1999’ (Salt 2004), show how the general trend in American cinema towards closer shooting has developed from 1939. Just taking the category of CU, the average for this goes from 87 per 500 shots in 1939 to 119 in 1959, to 162 in 1999, while the other shot scales decrease. The other stylistic variables have also shifted in general over the decades, though the changes in the use of camera movement are not strongly marked.

Camera Movement

Here is a table showing the proportions of the different types of camera movement in my sample from 1939. The categories of camera movement are pan, tilt, pan with tilt, track, track with pan and/or tilt, crane, and zoom. All of these are fairly self-explanatory, but my category of simple tracking shot includes only camera dolly movements in a straight line, including those sideways to the camera direction and subject, which is sometimes referred to as ‘crabbing’. Any tracking on a curved path invariably contains panning movements as well. Camera movements of small extent which are made to keep the actors well-framed as they move about a little are not counted, as these have been done effectively automatically by camera operators for the last eighty years at least, and are hence without significance. The same applies to small dolly adjustments of a foot or so made for the same reason. Camera movements are also normalized to

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the number per 500 shots for the film being dealt with. The table of camera movements also includes a final column adding up all the camera of all kinds per 500 shots for the film in question. There are also three final rows in the table which gives the average number of camera moves per 500 shots taken over the whole 20 films in my 1939 sample, and the same for my samples from 1959 and 1999 used in the previous articles.

Title	Pan	Tilt	Pan w. Tilt	Track	Tr. w Pan & Tilt	Crane	Zoom	Total moves
Another Thin Man	41	6	6	15	52	2		122
At the Circus	43	13	16	16	16	2		106
Blind Alley	49	0	19	32	47			147
The Cat and the Canary	59	4	18	24	39			144
Destry Rides Again	47	4	20	22	33	1		127
Each Dawn I Die	50	7	44	28	31			160
Harlem Rides the Range	55	1	3	6	3			68
Heritage of the Desert	50	1	15	4	4			74
The Invisible Killer	52	2	11	21	30			116
In Old Caliente	69	4	21	37	7			138
The Little Princess	48	3	12	36	33	7		139
Love Affair	29	2	7	13	34	4		89
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington	36	7	14	12	6	1	1	77
The Mystery of Mr. Wong	54	10	11	13	46			134
Nancy Drew... Reporter	56	4	13	15	39			127
The Old Maid	48	4	35	25	56			168
Rose of Washington Square	43	1	6	30	21	2		103
The Saint Strikes Back	52	6	10	24	42			134
Tower of London	22	7	10	12	16	4		71
Wuthering Heights	41	7	19	13	21	7		108
Average for 1939 sample	47	5	16	20	29	3	1	118
Average for 1959 sample	38	6	15	21	27	3	1	110
Average for 1999 sample	16	5	16	20	30	4	3	93

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There is no really significant change in the amounts of camera movement used over the 60 years from 1939 to 1999, with the exception of simple panning moves. Panning has decreased from about 47 pans per 500 shots, or nearly half of all camera movements in 1939, to 38 per 500 shots in 1959, and then to only 16 pans per 500 shots in 1999. The last figure represents only one sixth of the various types of camera movements used in 1999. From a film production point of view, panning shots need no extra time to set up, and not much time to rehearse, but in olden times any kind of tracking shot required quite a lot of time to set up, and also to rehearse. This applied even more so to crane shots. So this explains why cheap B-movies (those not made by major studios) such as *Harlem Rides the Range* have so few camera movements other than pans. The Republic Westerns were made on a six day schedule, as explained by Joseph Kane on page 320 of *Kings of the Bs* (Todd McCarthy & Charles Flynn 1975), and some of the others were made even faster. Even in big studio shooting, there were a limited number of cranes available, and they had to be ordered up specially, and charged to the production. For the nine films in the sample that have crane shots, these crane moves are not particularly large, and hence noticeable, with the exception of those in *The Little Princess*, and even here, there are only a couple of them that really draw attention of themselves.

The main deviations from the general norm that really stand out, because they are not constrained by budgetary considerations, are Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *Tower of London*, which both have markedly less camera movement than the norm. In the first case the amount of tracking in particular is well down, and for the latter, the amount of panning, and this difference has to be a matter of directorial choice. The other feature of these results is concealed behind the large numbers of tracking shots which are combined with panning and tilting in some of these films, such as *Another Thin Man*. These shots usually involve short dolly movements of only a metre or two, which don't force themselves on the viewer's attention, as they are integrated with natural actor movements. These are not Vincente Minnelli type 'forties tracks with panning, but they give the film an extra sense of liveliness of the kind I had previously assumed only appeared several years later.

Average Shot Lengths, Reverse Angles and Point of View shots

Below is a table showing the ASLs, as well as percentages of Reverse Angles (RAs), Point of View shots (POVs), and Inserts for my sample. The third last row in the table gives the average of these quantities for the whole sample, followed by two more rows giving the averages of the same quantities for the 1959 and 1999 samples I studied in my previous articles.

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TITLE	ASL (in sec.)	% RA	% POV	% INS
Another Thin Man	7.7	37	7	4
At the Circus	7.6	16	6	6
Blind Alley	10.1	41	7	4
The Cat and the Canary	11.3	29	11	8
Destry Rides Again	9.1	34	7	1
Each Dawn I Die	7.9	27	8	6
Harlem Rides the Range	7.3	15	14	6
Heritage of the Desert	7.8	30	9	4
The Invisible Killer	8.2	21	7	6
In Old Caliente	6.2	15	4	2
The Little Princess	7.5	30	7	4
Love Affair	11.3	47	4	8
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington	5.9	32	5	9
The Mystery of Mr. Wong	13.3	27	10	8
Nancy Drew... Reporter	6.6	42	10	4
The Old Maid	11.3	43	4	5
Rose of Washington Square	10.8	32	9	4
The Saint Strikes Back	8.4	27	7	9
Tower of London	6.6	19	2	4
Wuthering Heights	10.8	36	3	4
Average for 1939	8.8	30	7	5
Average for 1959	9.3	40	10	11
Average for 1999	5.5	40	8	10

I don't think there is anything particularly significant in the variation of the percentages of POV and Insert shots in this table, but the values for reverse angles and the Average Shot Lengths do need some discussion. Although the ASLs for this sample are spread over the range from 5 seconds to 14 seconds, there is a particular concentration on values between 7 and 8 seconds. The average value of 8.8 seconds is identical to that for the larger sample of 78 American features from 1939 used to chart the movement of this stylistic measure over time in *Film Style and Technology*, which is quite satisfying, and a minor validation of my sampling pro-

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cedure. As you can see illustrated in the book just mentioned, a slowing down of the cutting rate took place in the 'forties, but this had not really got going in 1939, although three of the directors in this sample, Edmund Goulding, George Marshall, and William Wyler, were already cutting a bit on the slow side in their films listed, and of course took this further in the 'forties. But it was directors not yet active in 1939, like Vincente Minnelli and Otto Preminger, who really led the way further towards the long take direction in the 'forties. After peaking in the late 'forties, by 1959 the mean ASL in American films had dropped back to near where it was in 1939, with the figure of 9.3 seconds given above.

The figures for the percentage of reverse shots are spread across the range from 15% to 47% fairly evenly. The low figures for 'poverty row' type B-movies are again a result of the production constraints operating. The number of camera set-ups has to be minimized, and this means shooting as much as possible from the same camera position, so that the master shot covers the whole group of actors in the scene in either Full Shot or Medium Long Shot, maybe with some panning, and the close shots to be cut into the master shot are filmed by just changing to a longer lens, not changing the camera position. This means of course that such close shots cannot be reverse shots. Big studio B-movies were not subject to these constraints to the same degree, because they used the same very efficient crews who also worked on the studio's A-films, who were able to change set-ups faster, and their production schedule was not quite so tight as that for the cheap B-movies. Hence the higher number of reverse angles in *The Saint Strikes Back*, *Nancy Drew* and *Blind Alley* compared to the 'poverty row' B-movies. The low percentage of reverse angles in *At the Circus* is a result of the loose and unpredictable way the Marx brothers worked, so that the easiest way to capture their performances was to stand off with the camera (see the Closeness of Shot graph), and pan with them as they lunged about the set.

Only in the case of *Tower of London* is the low percentage of reverses a stylistic choice, as it would have been possible for the director to shoot this material with rather more of them, if he had wanted to. At the other end of the range, the 47% reverse shots used in *Love Affair* is also a stylistic choice by Leo McCarey, since John Stahl had shown that it was possible to make successful romantic dramas with less use of this type of cutting. The average percentage of reverse angle cuts for the 1939, 1959 and 1999 samples shows clearly how the use of the device increased appreciably after the Second World War.

Dialogue Editing

It was obviously worth comparing the dialogue editing of these 1939 films with those made more recently which are studied in my article 'Re-

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action Time: How to Edit Movies' published a couple of years ago in *The New Review of Film and Television Studies*. The aim in my *Reaction Time* article was to study whether individual film editors had a personal style, and the editing of dialogue scenes was chosen for examination because such scenes are the only type of scene common to all sound movies, whereas only a few films have car chase scenes or musical stagings and so on that require their own special sort of editing.

The quantities studied were fully explained in the previous article, with the use of helpful diagrams. The most common type of dialogue cut from one shot to the next inside a dialogue scene is that made at the same point in time on the picture and sound tracks, somewhere inside the gap between one speaker finishing speaking, and another replying. This sort of cut is measured by counting the number of frames from the end of the last speech sound in the outgoing shot to the picture cut (length 'A'), and the number of frames from the picture cut to the first speech sound (length 'B') in the incoming shot. An alternative description of this measurement is that the A-length runs from the beginning of the pause between the voices of the two speakers to the picture cut, and the B-length runs from the picture cut to the end of the pause, when the second speaker begins to reply.

In the next most common type of dialogue cut, the sound of the voice of the person seen in the outgoing shot continues under the picture of the person who is eventually going to reply in the incoming shot, until that person replies. Again, I measure the exact placement of this cut in the picture with respect to the speeches by the lengths A and B from the cut in the picture to the end (or start) of the sounds, though in this case A is given a negative value. This sort of cut is nowadays called an 'L-edit', or 'L-cut'. The converse of this, and least common dialogue edit, has the sound of the speaker who is about to be shown full face in the next shot being first heard under the end of the outgoing shot. This is called a 'J-edit' or 'J-cut'.

There can also be cutaways to a listener in the middle of a speech, and the cuts to and from these reaction shots is counted as a percentage of the total cuts within the dialogue scene. The pause length is the distance in frames between the last sound of the first person's speech and the first sound of the second person's reply, without regard for where the cut in the picture occurs between the two shots. Remember that 24 frames corresponds to one second, so 12 frames is a pause of half a second, and so on.

Variation of the pause length is the principal means of accentuating the drama inherent in the script for a film scene, though increasing the pause length cannot create drama out of nothing. The second most useful device for accentuating the drama is the use of reaction shots.

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Film	Editor	% of L- edits	% of J- edits	Average Pause (in frames)	% of Reaction shots	% A- lengths<6 frames
Another Thin Man	Smith	26	12	11	15	70
At the Circus	Terhune	17	4	10	7	64
Destry Rides Again	Carruth	8	3	16	13	63
Each Dawn I Die	Richards	10	2	16	10	54
Harlem Rides the Range	?	24	7	18	29	52
Invisible Killer, The	Todd	14	8	15	20	59
Love Affair	Hively & Dmytryk	10	4	21	20	50
Little Princess, The	Loeffler	10	4	15	5	62
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington	Havlick & Clark	10	7	6	21	83
Mystery of Mr. Wong, The	Schoengarth	2	11	13	38	32
Old Maid, The	Amy	11	4	16	8	83
Rose of Washington Square	Loeffler	14	6	17	8	61
Average for 1939 sample		13	6	15	16	61
Average for 1959 sample		15	5	24	22	50
Average for 1999 sample		12	10	14	44	67

The points that stand out above the norm for my sample are firstly, the high number of L-edits in *Another Thin Man* and *Harlem Rides the Range*. The latter instance is a bit of a surprise, as the L-edit is quite a sophisticated device used if you want to keep the film moving fast, as it gives a bit more of a look at the reaction of the person who is about to reply to what is being said to them, without increasing the length of the pause, whereas

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in other respects *Harlem Rides the Range* is a pretty crude piece of work. Secondly, the significant deviations from the 15 frame norm for the pause length are *Love Affair* in the long pause direction, while *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* sets some kind of record for short pauses. In both cases the director was also the producer of the film, so we can be fairly certain that they wanted the extreme values of pause lengths that are observed. The pause length is much the most important way of affecting the dramatic situation, though there are limits to this, as I showed in my Reaction Time article. And it is quite easy for the director (or producer) to give instructions to the editor about it after they have made a cut of the film. You just have to say ‘Tighten the pauses’, or conversely ‘Lengthen the pauses in the dialogue scenes’, or something similar to the editor. Capra has the average pause right down to 6 frames in his relentless pursuit of speed, and this pursuit is also evident in the speed he has got into the actors’ movements inside the shots.

Another minor point is that one editor worked on two films in the sample. This is Louis Loeffler, who cut both the Fox films, *The Little Princess* and *Rose of Washington Square*. So it is not much of a surprise that the figures for L-edits, pauses, etc. given above are very similar for both films, and an expression of Loeffler’s cutting style. The ASL’s for the two films do differ noticeably, however, but this is more a matter of what the director has delivered in the rushes.

An interesting and unexpected historical trend emerges from comparing the averages for 1939, 1959, and 1999. The average pause length increased substantially, from 15 frames to 24 frames from 1939 to 1959, before dropping back to 14 frames in 1999. At the same time, the percentage of dialogue cuts made within 6 frames after the first speaker finished dropped from 61 percent to 50 percent and then went up to 67 percent across the same years. One could put this in more ordinary words by saying that the cutting of dialogue got markedly slacker (or looser) from 1939 to 1959, even though the general cutting rates throughout the whole length of the films (as shown by the mean ASLs) were quite similar in those two years. And then the cutting of dialogue tightened up again in the next forty years to 1999, as the cutting rate increased, and increased, and increased, to heights never seen before.

Continuity

Continuity of a special kind was also investigated in my paper ‘The Shape of 1959’. This form of continuity involves the number of cuts within a scene in which an actor was visible across the cut in both shots on either side of it. I defined two cases of this; one in which the actor’s face was at least partially visible, in focus, and properly lit, in both shots, and the other in which we see the back of their head out of focus and underlit in

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one of the shots. In the second case, which often occurs in a cut to the reverse angle close in over the shoulder of the actor nearest the camera, the film audience has to make an unconscious mental deduction that it is the same person who they saw full face in the first shot that they are now seeing from behind in the second shot. The first of these cases I refer to as 'Continuity', and the second 'Tighter Continuity', and what they look like is illustrated in the article referred to. In this case I consider all the cuts in the films, and the resulting figures for my 1939 sample are as follows:

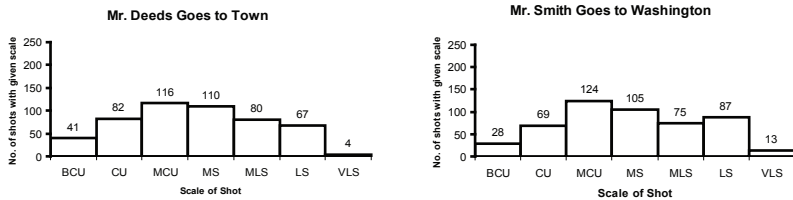
Title	Continuity	Tighter Continuity
Another Thin Man	36	29
At the Circus	52	44
Blind Alley	48	41
Cat and the Canary, The	40	32
Destry Rides Again	26	22
Each Dawn I Die	41	38
Harlem Rides the Range	36	33
Heritage of the Desert	23	20
Invisible Killer, The	26	22
In Old Caliente	37	34
Little Princess, The	51	42
Love Affair	35	29
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington	31	25
Mystery of Mr. Wong, The	26	23
Nancy Drew... Reporter	39	34
Old Maid, The	58	41
Rose of Washington Square	52	45
Saint Strikes Back, The	38	30
Tower of London	39	34
Wuthering Heights	54	48
Average for 1939 sample	39	33
Average for 1959 sample	34	29
Average for 1999 sample	30	22

B. Salt

There is a fair degree of variation in these values, with no clear association with budget or genre of the film, so it is again a matter of individual director's styles in handling this aspect of continuity. But the important result comes from the comparison of the averages for the sample from 1939 with those from 1959 and 1999. As you can see, this measure of continuity definitely increases as we go back into the past, or putting it round the other way, continuity of this sort has continuously decreased up to the present. Regarding another sort of continuity: there were no jump cuts in the 1939 movies in my sample, whereas there were just a few in 1959, and a large number in 1999, so that is another feature of the weakening continuity in general in American (and other) films.

Authorial Instincts

Now I take an opportunity to check for consistency in a director's style by throwing in the comparative figures for Frank Capra's 1936 film, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. As hinted by the titles of the two films, *Mr. Deeds* was the model, in script, incidents, characters, and other features for *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. The continuity figures are almost the same, with *Mr. Deeds* having 'Continuity' = 32% and 'Tighter Continuity' = 24%, compared to the 31% and 25% respectively for *Mr. Smith*. The Closeness of Shot profiles for the two films are also very similar, as you can see here:



The percentages of reverse angle cuts, POV shots, and inserts are also very close for both films:

Title	%RA	%POV	%INS
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington	32	5	9
Mr. Deeds Goes to Town	32	4	8

And the use of camera movement in the two films is also almost identical:

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Film	Pan	Tilt	Pan w. Tilt	Track	Tr. w. Pan & Tilt	Crane
Mr. Smith	36	7	14	12	6	1
Mr. Deeds	27	8	13	13	6	1

This is all very satisfactory so far, but there is a marked difference between the two films in the two stylistic measures not so far mentioned. The ASL for Mr. Deeds is 7.8 seconds, while it is 5.9 seconds for Mr. Smith, and the average pause length across dialogue cuts is a remarkably low 6 frames for Mr. Smith, while it is the more normal 13 frames for Mr. Deeds. Both these discrepancies are at least partly due to the one substantial difference between the content of the two films. This is that Mr. Deeds has four romantic scenes distributed through its length, while Mr. Smith has none at all. These extra scenes in Mr. Deeds follow the conventional pattern for romantic scenes in the way they are shot and edited, with slower cutting (longer ASL), and longer pauses across the cuts between speeches and responses. If we remove these scenes from Mr. Deeds the average pause length for the remaining dialogue scenes goes down to 10 frames, which is shorter than usual for the period, and moves towards the exceptional 6 frames of Mr. Smith.

Summing Up

Types of scene dissection well away from the norm are absent in this 1939 sample, although they are not in my 1959 and 1999 samples. If one just looks at films from the late 'thirties, the old standard idea that there is one normal way to shoot fiction films becomes more understandable. Nevertheless, close examination of the films does show some stylistic variation, and I have brought this out in the statistical results quoted. The main differences from later periods of American film making are a greater use of panning shots, and a more distant shooting style on the average. This survey, in conjunction with my previous work on 1959 and 1999, demonstrates that the changes in these things has been continuous and gradual over the seventy years up to the present. All of this was not a surprise to me, given my past investigations, but the slackness of the editing of dialogue scenes which appeared in the nineteen-fifties was quite unexpected.

Obviously, what is now needed to give the period from 1939 to 1999 more even analytical coverage is a survey of a sample of American films from 1979, and that is the next item on my programme. The zoom craze of the 'seventies may well show up in it.

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