RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cinematic Shot Size as a Percentage-Based Rhetorical Option

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Abstract

Cinematic shot sizes have traditionally been classified according to the dominant visual element in a frame—most often a human subject. The framing typically delineates a person at certain horizontal points, forming the basis for naming shot types (e.g., Medium Long Shot, Medium Close-Up). However, when the primary focus is a non-human object or creature (e.g., an ant), these human-centric classifications break down. This raises a critical question: can an alternative classification system better reflect the essence of visual storytelling, especially in automated and digital contexts? This paper proposes a percentage-based paradigm, which quantifies subject size relative to the frame and provides a more universal and intuitive approach to cinematic shot naming—regardless of the subject's nature. This new framework aims to enhance digital tools for automatically recommending optimal framing strategies for varied contexts.

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1-Introduction:

The size of the shot greatly affects how the viewer perceives the content of the image and the amount of information they receive. This relationship depends on two factors: the amount of detail provided by the image and the viewer's ability to absorb it.

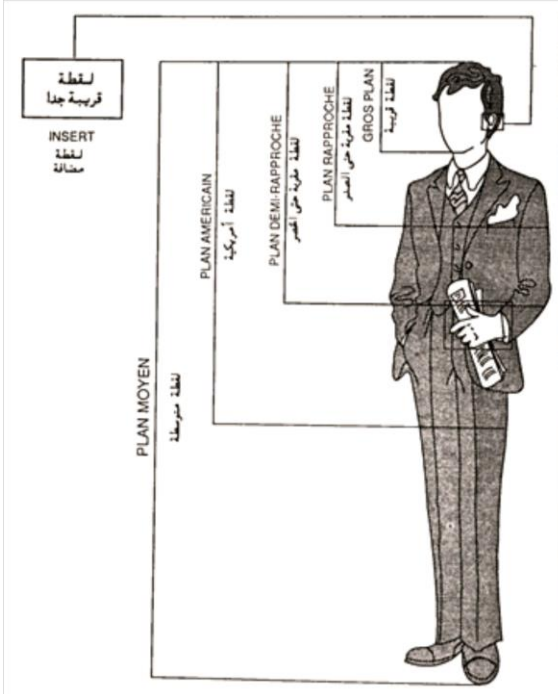
The wider and more comprehensive the shot (wide shot), the more information and detail it contains. This requires a slower pace of presentation so that the viewer can take in all aspects of the scene. In contrast, detailed or close-up shots carry less information and can be perceived at a faster pace. These shots allow the viewer to focus on the main visual element, highlighting the finer details and evoking more vivid and authentic emotions.

- The sizes of shots and angles used to convey visual meaning vary just as much as the use of words and sentences in linguistic text. Not every shot size, camera movement, or angle is suitable for every visual content. This is where the director's skill and mastery in using these directing tools comes into play. For example :

- **High Angle:** Can be used to belittle the subject in the eyes of both the viewer and the protagonist.
- **Wide Shot:** Used to convey more comprehensive information about the location of the event or to reinforce the idea of dispersion and loss.
- **Dutch Angle:** creates an atmosphere of tension and instability.
- **Low Angle:** shows strength and power and magnifies the photographed character.
- **Camera Movement:** Can express a specific meaning depending on the context of the scene.

In other words, the size of the film frame is used to expand or reduce the visual meaning, or to intensify the visual elements that the viewer receives at a given moment. The goal may be to distract the viewer, direct their attention to a specific visual target, show the relationships between characters, or reinforce certain feelings in the viewer. Detailed close-ups also help highlight the importance of the details of the subject being filmed.

Based on the above, choosing the appropriate film shot size is a crucial factor in producing an attractive film shot that excites viewers. Experience and skill in determining the appropriate shot size and angles for filming a cinematic event are among the most important factors that influence the success of a film and the director's excellence.



In English	In French	In Arabic		
باللغة الإنجليزية	باللغة الفرنسية	باللغة العربية		
Extreme Long Shot (E.L.S) or Very Long Shot (V.L.S)	Plan Général (P.G)	1. لقطة عامة (ل.ع)	لقطات وصفية Descriptive shots	لقطات منسوبة إلى الديكور Shots attributed to the setting
Long Shot (L.S)	Plan d'Ensemble (P.E) ou Plan du Grand Ensemble (P.G.E)	2. لقطة الجزء الكبير (ل.ج.ك) أو لقطة جامعة (ل.ج)		
Medium Long Shot (M.L.S)	Plan du Petit Ensemble (P.P.E) ou Plan du demi-Ensemble (P.D.E)	3. لقطة الجزء الصغير (ل.ج.ص) أو لقطة نصف جامعة (ل.ن.ج)		
Medium Shot(M.S)	Plan Moyen (P.M)	4. لقطة متوسطة (ل.م)	لقطات حكائية Narrative shots	لقطات منسوبة إلى جسم الإنسان Shots attributed to the human form
American Shot (A.S)	Plan Américain (P.A)	5. لقطة أمريكية (ل.أ)		
	Plan Rapproché: - Plan Rapproché Taille (P.R.T) ou Plan du Demi-RapprochéP.D.R	6. لقطة مقربة : . لقطة مقربة حتى الخصر (ل.م.خ)		
Medium Close-Up (M.C.U)	- Plan Rapproché Poitrine (P.R.P)	. لقطة مقربة حتى الصدر (ل.م.ص)		
Close-Up (C.U)	Gros - Plan G.P)	7. لقطة قريبة (ل.ق)	لقطات سيكولوجية Psychological shots	
- Extreme Close Up (E.C.U) or Very Close-Up (V.C.U) - Insert	Très - Gros - Plan (T.G.P) ou Insert	8. لقطة قريبة جدا (ل.ق.ج) أو لقطة مضافة (ل.م).		

Image1: Shot size, Mohamed Ibraqen, Functional Elements of Cinematic Language (Ibraqen, 1997, 181-219)

Image 2: Empire of the Ants 2020, a high-definition documentary produced by the BBC Empire of the Ants 2020 BBC Documentary HD. The link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yn9hZb9M2U

2-Research problem

The size of visual information and how it is presented and received in a film is extremely important in terms of shaping the cinematic image and conveying its meanings to the viewer. The challenge lies in adjusting the intellectual visual content to match the innate semantic system of humans in their interaction with audiovisual elements. Failure to control this aspect, which may seem simple, negatively affects the visual meaning of cinematic content. Viewers often feel confused when watching certain films because the images do not correspond to the content that is intended to be conveyed.

This study seeks to analyse the mechanism of cinematic language at the level of shot sizes and aims to develop a method to facilitate the selection of the appropriate frame for the context of the visual event in the film, as an integral part of the communicative system of the cinematic image.

To achieve this, the research seeks to address the following questions :

- What is the nature of the innate semantic systems that govern the reception of the cinematic image?

- Is it possible to create a logical system that governs the selection of cinematic frame sizes that optimally match the intended visual data to be communicated?

3-Importance of the study

While numerous studies have addressed cinematic shot sizes, this research introduces a novel shot classification concept aimed at simplifying visual expression in film. To achieve this, the study seeks to develop a mathematical methodology that links rhetorical elements with shot sizes, thereby contributing to the precise conveyance of visual meaning and offering new, innovative tools for filmmakers.

This study aims to find a logical system for selecting cinematic framing that is rhetorically appropriate for visual sentences that serve the meaning to be conveyed. This approach will pave the way for dealing with the selection of shot sizes in a mathematical (digital) way at the level of cinematography.

4-Topic

Studies indicate that sight is the primary source of most of the information that reaches the brain from the outside world, with visual perception constituting the largest part of an individual's perception process (Du'aa, 2019, pp. 33-40). This process relies heavily on the sense of sight as a means for humans to comprehend the characteristics of visuals, such as shape, size, colour, position, and other visual qualities reflected on the retina. These reflections affect the central nervous system, prompting the recipient to interpret what they have seen in order to understand what they have seen.

Perception here is a complex process involving successive stages that lead to the construction of the appropriate meaning of what has been seen. It is well known that every image, or any size of snapshot, is essentially a visual sentence that carries direct and implicit information. The viewer's perception of this information depends on their ability to remember, compare, and analyse visual information. The eloquence and accuracy of the scene play a decisive role in successfully conveying this information to the viewer in the best possible way.

5-The Visual language

From a communication perspective, language is defined as a code system that requires implicit agreement between the sender and receiver on its vocabulary and meanings. This agreement ensures that the intended meaning is successfully conveyed. On this basis, visual language is a language of communication that relies on images, shapes, symbols, colours, space and other elements to express ideas, feelings and visions.

Jack Debes points out that “visual language has its own grammar rules that differ from those of verbal language, in addition to its vocabulary of images, symbols, and icons,” which, according to him, “makes it completely independent of spoken and written language.” Debes considers caricature without a written caption a good example of visual language. He also cites sign language for the deaf as another example of a highly developed visual language, although it represents a distinct form of linguistic expression through gestures (Azmi, 2015, p. 180).

Visual language differs from spoken and written language in the way information is conveyed. It relies on the visual and aesthetic impact of images and on the density of the elements, shapes, and colours that make up the visual sentence. The position of the compositional elements in front of the viewer's eye also plays an important role in the overall meaning. Visual expression varies from person to person based on their ability to employ elements such as lines, shapes, colours, textures, and the principles of repetition, contrast, balance, harmony, and order.

Like any ordinary language, visual language aims to achieve communication between the sender and the receiver, and its understanding is based on the need to decode the visual content. It is no coincidence that in language in general, we associate words and names with images in our minds that are synonymous with those words. For example, the word ‘mountain’ is understood by every recipient by conjuring up the image of a mountain in their mind. It is important to know that every process of evocation or recollection that a person performs is done by dealing with sequences as a mental arrangement of certain images. The process of deep thought and solving intellectual problems is often done by processing these mental image sequences.

6-The film shot

The shot is one of the most commonly used terms in cinema, representing the smallest meaningful unit of a film. Shots are combined to form scenes, which in turn make up larger parts of the film, leading to the final film. A shot is defined as the specific part of the film reel that the camera captures from reality, regardless of content, from the

moment the camera is turned on to the moment it is turned off. A change in shot (the transition from one shot to another) usually refers to a change in the position of the camera relative to the subject, a change in the angle of view, or a change in the size of the shot.

Critic Jean Mitry defined the film shot as 'the field of space framed by the event at a specific angle of view of the camera,' summarising it as 'the minimum film limit.' For his part, Sergei Eisenstein considered it a manipulable piece regardless of its size, position, and formal characteristics. Christian Metz described it as a 'filmic fragment' (Ventura, 2012, p. 23), meaning that it is the smallest component of a film that carries the same characteristics and general specifications in terms of creation and reception.

However, Fran Ventura believes that Metz's latter definition is inaccurate, attributing it to the remnants of semiotic theory, which attempted to understand the audiovisual phenomenon based on the study of language. This view is reflected in the perspective of researcher Mona Al-Haddidi, who considers the shot to be the building block of film as an audiovisual text, similar to the role of the word in the construction of linguistic text (Al-Haddidi, 2000, p. 100), comparing the shot to the word, the scene to the sentence, and the film to the linguistic text.

A critical objection to Al-Haddidi's claim lies in the nature of linguistic units. In language, words typically function as fixed, abstract units of meaning. For instance, the word *pen*, regardless of its specific type, conveys an abstract concept. Linguistically, it is regarded as a *morpheme* or *moneme*—that is, the smallest functional unit of meaning. Its internal components (*p*, *e*, *n*) are *phonemes*, which represent distinct sounds but carry no semantic content on their own. In contrast, a cinematic shot comprises multiple elements—such as objects, gestures, lighting, and composition—that retain their individual semantic weight even when isolated. This capacity for visual elements to bear meaning independently challenges the structural parallel Al-Haddidi draws between language and visual media.

Image 3: The cinematic moment '1:55:20' .from the film Sheikh Bouamama, produced in 1985. .Link to the film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lIjZVhwofDE

For example, in image 3 taken from the film 'Sheikh Bouamama' by director Ben Omar Bakhti, this cinematic moment shows a tent in front of which Sheikh Bouamama's council is held on a bed spread out on the ground. Bouamama is talking to a man who collects alfa plants (he appears to be Spanish from his clothing), and one of Bouamama's men is standing in front of them, with the desert mountains visible in the background. All these visual elements appear in a single image at the same time.

Each element in the shot—such as the ground, the dirt, the rug, the mountains, Sheikh Bouamama in his distinctive clothing, the rosary around his neck, the Spaniard in his uniform, the tent, and the fire—functions as part of a broader visual sentence. However, each of these components retains an independent semantic identity. The man standing in the scene, for instance, may represent a separate subject with his own significance, not necessarily dependent on the surrounding elements or even on the cinematic context. A tent remains a tent in its physical sense, and a rosary remains a rosary—objects that can be used in another shot or left out entirely, without losing their inherent meaning. These visual items are not expressive terms exclusive to the cinematic language; rather, they are semantically loaded elements whose meaning precedes and exceeds their cinematic usage. This notion applies broadly to all visual components integrated into an image, regardless of their size, position, or material nature.

As mentioned earlier, every language needs specific rules that connect the sender and the receiver in order to convey the content of the message being sent. Cinema, as 'the art of writing with images that transcend all boundaries,' in the words of critic Marcel Martin, is also 'a special language that conveys its message through audio and visual material.' Josef von Sternberg emphasizes the visual aspect of cinema more than the auditory or verbal, asserting "the necessity for the director to recognize the unique pictorial nature of cinema by imposing his own style, interpretation, and symbolism, without succumbing to the reality captured by the camera." (Daadouch, 2014, p. 125).

7-Classification of types of film shots

The various classifications of film shots are based primarily on the human body as a reference for their measurements. The human element is considered the essence of the dominant subject and the focus of the main events in the shot. Although the names of these shots vary among researchers, the goal of these classifications remains the same: to enhance the visual content of each shot. In the context of this research, we will not delve into the details of these different names as long as the concept and goal are unified among film studies specialists.

In general, a shot is defined based on the element that represents the main event and the dominant element in it. When filming a person performing an action, that person's body is taken as a reference for classifying the shot:

A- Shots in which the body of the person being filmed represents a small proportion of the total image size aim to identify the location of that person, i.e. the subject of the shot focuses on the features of the surrounding area.

B- Shots in which the body of the person being filmed represents a significant proportion of the total image size aim to identify what that person is doing at the moment of filming.

C – Shots in which the subject fills the frame are designed to convey the character's immediate emotions, drawing attention to subtle details—such as tears, beads of sweat, or a trembling lip—that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Based on this, shots can be divided into three main groups:

- **The first group: spatial and temporal shots:**

These shots focus on defining the context of the event in terms of place and time (e.g., day or night). They are mainly used when there is a change in location or time period, in order to clarify this change within the sequence of events in the film.

- **The second group: event actor shots:**

This group focuses on the central character of the event, highlighting their characteristics and actions. These shots are the most common and widely used in cinematic narration due to their importance in conveying the details of the film's plot and identifying its main characters.

- **Group 3: Emotional expression shots :**

These shots are concerned with conveying the actor's subtle emotions (such as fear, anxiety, or joy). The impact of these shots increases significantly when they are used sparingly and precisely at the right cinematic moment, due to their power to elicit an emotional response from the viewer.

8- Total shots for the time and place of the event

8 - 1 Circumstantial shots with their common names:

The most common classification is based on a series of shots that start with wide shots and gradually become closer and more detailed.

8-1-1 Circumstantial shots (place and time)

- Establishing Shot – ES: This shot is usually used at the beginning of a scene. Its main purpose is to show the general context of the event or action, providing a framing for the entire area. This gives the viewer a comprehensive impression of the general location where the events are taking place, such as identifying the city or region.

- Extreme Long Shot – ELS: This shot comes after the establishing shot and focuses on presenting an important part of the overall setting. This shot greatly helps in defining the spatial and temporal context of the event. For example, it may highlight one part of a large street where the events of the film take place.

8-1-2 Character shots

- Long Shot – LS: This shot is used to introduce the protagonist and characters within the new dramatic setting. For example, it can be used to depict a fight taking place in a neighbourhood or a narrow alley between buildings.

- Medium Long Shot – MLS: In its early days, cinema relied mainly on this shot to introduce the event. This shot shows the character's entire body. It provides a space that allows the viewer to feel a sense of intimacy with the actors, similar to the experience of watching a play (Abragan, 2001, p. 175).

9- The purpose of classifying shots according to percentage (%)

9-1 Cinematographic shots: the challenge of traditional classification and the proposed solution

Cinematographic shots are often classified based on parts of the human body, as mentioned earlier. For example, when we say ‘close-up head and shoulder,’ the meaning is clear and understandable if we are filming a person.

9-2 The problem with the current classification

But what if we are filming something else? Imagine we are filming a whale, a flower, Or a mountain. How do we assign the "head and shoulders" to these things? This highlights a clear problem with naming shots, especially in languages such as French, which uses similar expressions such as ‘close-up of the chest’ (Plan Rapproché Poitrine). This flaw means that the current system is not comprehensive enough.

9-3 The solution in smart percentages

To solve this problem, we propose a new system based on the percentage of the main subject's area (whatever it may be) compared to the total area of the shot. This is easy to implement; the director or cinematographer can easily estimate this percentage.

9-4 The Future of Cinematography: Artificial Intelligence in the Camera

This concept can be developed digitally and integrated into modern cameras that use artificial intelligence. Camera sensors can automatically recognise the main subject in the shot and determine its size in relation to the entire frame. This is already happening in current autofocus technologies that use sensors to detect shapes, but in adjusting the contrast in the image to determine the depth of focus as a technique (Phase Detection & Contrast Sensors) Image 11. The technology of automatically recognising the dominant element and its size will help to accurately determine the type of shot during shooting, without the need to rely on parts of the human body To divide the shots currently in use.

The contrast-based activation to focus on the foreground and ignore the background A cinematic moment from the trailer for the film ‘Arrival’ (2016) by director Denis Villeneuve.

10-2 Classification of setting shots by percentage (%)

- As shown in Figure 4 of the study, setting shots in cinema are concerned with determining the place and time of the dramatic action. They help to inform the viewer of the general location of the event, whether it is a city or a village,

and specify the time period in which the action takes place (past or present), the time of day (day or night), as well as any other temporal references that indicate the timing of the overall dramatic action. This group includes the following types:

10-3- Setting Shot (SS) 1

- The place and time shot (SS) 1 is an opening shot used to provide the viewer with as much general information as possible without going into minute details. This shot can be used intermittently throughout the film when there is a change in the time or place of the event, or both. In literary narrative, this shot parallels the narrator's phrase: 'Once upon a time, in a certain place.' This shot does not usually highlight a distinctive visual element in itself, but relies on spatial cues such as famous landmarks to indicate a particular city, or temporal cues such as sunrise or moonrise to indicate the time.

A Cinematic moment 4:20 - Setting shot
Cinematic setting shots From the film Sheikh Bouamama (op. cit)

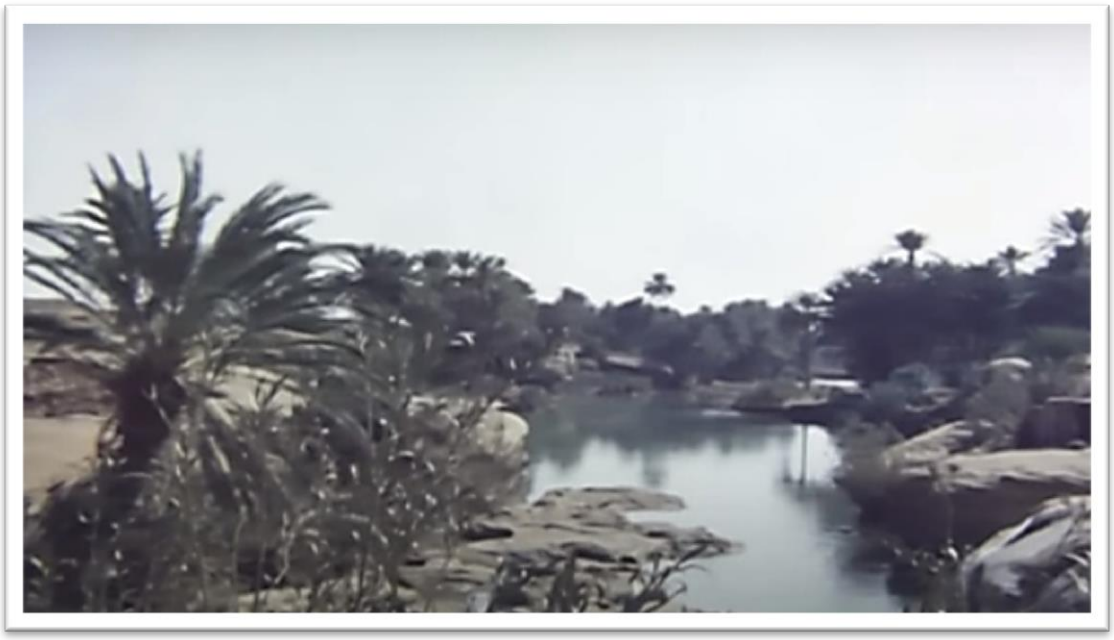


Image 5 A cinematic moment 4:33 - Setting shot 1. Cinematic setting shots From the film Sheikh Bouamama (op. cit) . 10-4 Setting Shot (01 % < SS > 20%)

This shot is defined as one that more accurately defines the spatial and temporal context of the event. Instead of focusing on the overall view, this shot focuses on one part of it, such as a street, and highlights the essence of the shot or the protagonist of the shot, who occupies between 1% and 20% of the total shot size. Abbreviate **(01 % < SS > 20%**) .This shot is usually used at the beginning of a scene to clarify where the event is taking place, with most of the frame devoted to showing the surrounding environmental features.Images 5 and 6.

Image 5 A film moment 4:43 A film moment 31:07
Cinematic setting shots from the film "Sheikh Bouamama" (op. cit)

11 - Dynamic shot

11 - 1 Dynamic shots by their common names

A medium shot (MS) is defined as showing one or more characters in full length. Cinema relied heavily on this shot in its early days, when it resembled theatre (Cinéthéâtre), with the aim of highlighting the actor's movements and actions (Abraguen, 2001, p. 177).

Also included in the action shot classification is the medium close-up (MCU). These shots focus on a key part of the character to show secondary details more closely and clearly, such as shots that show three-quarters or half of the human body.

This is followed by the close-up (CU), which is frequently used in dialogues (Brunel, 2017, p. 32). In this shot, the focus is on the character's head from the shoulders up, in order to reveal ambiguous features or elements necessary to resolve a particular plot point in the dramatic structure. Eisenstein described it as 'Allowing the viewer to immerse themselves in what is being shown on the screen.' (Abragan, 2001, p. 177). Sometimes, this shot is used to focus on the character themselves in order to hide what is happening in front of them from the viewer, and then reveal the hidden event in the next shot.

11-2 Dynamic shots according to percentage (%)

These shots are the most commonly used in cinema, especially when it comes to characters and the relationships between them. They are best suited to conveying the 'dramatic action' and what is going on between the characters, as they allow more than one character to be shown together, while maintaining sufficient proximity to show what is happening between them. These shots are similar to action sentences in literary texts, as they focus on identifying the actor of the event and the action they are performing, or which is happening in front of them.

11-2-1 Dynamic shot (20 % < DS > 30%)

This shot shows the subject (usually the main character) occupying between 20% and 30% of the total image size. Image 7 This size is sufficient to provide comprehensive information about the characteristics of the dominant element. If the shot depicts a living being, it enables us to understand its physiological dimensions, shape, physical condition, and other details. **Image 7.**

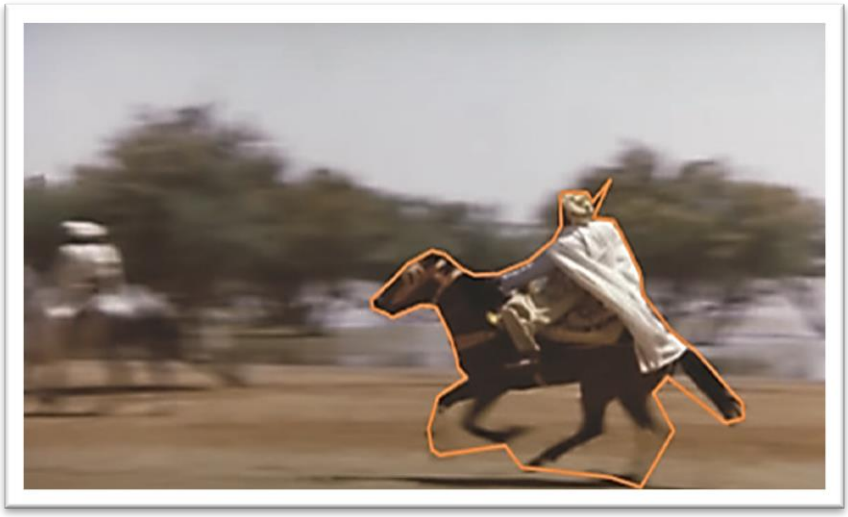


Image 7 Film moment 31:12 Dynamic shot (20 % < DS > 30%) from the film Sheikh Bouamama (op. cit)

11 -2-2 Dynamic shot (30% < DS > 45%)

This shot shows the subject (often the main character) occupying 30% to 45% of the total shot area. This size allows the subject to be filmed moving from one place to another. If it is a living being, you can see three-quarters of its body and follow its movements, whether horizontal, vertical or diagonal. It is very important to remember that each cinematic shot contains only one dominant element at any given moment, even if there are several other similar elements in the same image. Image 8.

Image 8 Film moment 22:52 Dynamic shot (30% < DS > 45%) from the film Sheikh Bouamama (op. cit)

11 – 2-3 Dynamic shot (45%< DS >60%)

This shot focuses on a specific action or movement occurring in one place. In it, the main subject of the shot (the dominant element) is clear and occupies between 45% and 60% of the total shot area. This focus allows the viewer to see the fine details of the living creature's movement, such as turning around or eating Image 9.

Image 9 Film moment 23:10 .Dynamic shot (45%< DS >60%) from "film Sheikh Bouamama"(op. cit)

11-2-4 Dynamic sot (60%< DS > 80 %)

This shot focuses heavily on small, subtle movements. In it, the main subject (the dominant element) fills most of the frame, ranging from 60% to 80% This allows us, when photographing a living being, to observe its subtle movements, such as facial expressions while speaking or head movements. Image 10.

Image 10 Film moment 23:39 Dynamic sot 60%< DS > 80 % .from film "Sheikh Bouamama"(op. cit)

12- Detail Shots

12- 1 Psychological shots, commonly known as

Extreme Close Ups (ECU) The subject of the shot fills the entire screen to focus on a very small detail of the object being photographed.

- If we are filming a person: this shot will focus on a specific part, such as the eyes, lips, or fingers, to highlight a particular expression or piece of information.

- If we are filming something other than a person: The shot will focus on a visual detail that is important to the story, such as a newspaper headline, clock hands showing a specific time, a message on a phone screen, or any small part that is of great importance to the narrative.

This shot differs not only in technique from other shots that focus on the setting (or decor) or the character more broadly, but also in its profound dramatic effect. For this reason, it is sometimes known by names such as descriptive shot (because it describes a detail), narrative shot (because it provides important information for the story), or psychological shot (because it reveals a psychological state or deep feeling).

12- 2 Detail Shot according to percentage (%)

12- 2 -1 Detail Shot (80%< DS >100 %)

This shot is considered the most intimate of all shots because it brings the viewer very close to the subject being photographed, highlighting its most dramatic details. In this shot, a small part of the photographed element becomes the Main axis (the dominant element) and fills the screen frame..

When photographing a living being, this shot focuses on the psychological aspect expressed through facial expressions, eyes, or even subtle movements of the limbs. The subject occupies between 80% and 100% of the

entire screen. This extreme closeness to the subject allows us to see very fine details such as sweat, tears, veins pulsing under the skin, or even the movement of fine hairs (down). These extremely fine details have the power to strongly attract the viewer's attention and take their breath away, and their final impact depends on their role in the dramatic narrative of the film Image 11.

Image 11 Film moment 2:36:18. Detail Shot (80%< DS >100 %) from film "Sheikh Bouamama"(op. cit)

Conclusion:

Towards a revolutionary classification of film shots

The choice of shot size in cinema is very important; it is the tool that directs the viewer's attention to the most important element in the image, thereby achieving the dramatic and narrative goals of the film. This utmost importance calls for continuous research and development in the field of shots, especially with the tremendous technical development in the film industry.

The type and size of the shot used significantly impacts the visual expression of the story, as well as the audience's engagement with and evaluation of the film. To facilitate the director's task and improve the quality of the cinematic scene by selecting appropriate shots that accurately and beautifully convey the intended meaning of the film, this study has come up with an innovative idea.

We propose here to reclassify shots based on the percentage of the total shot area occupied by the main subject (or dominant element). This new classification eliminates the need for traditional ambiguous labels such as 'close' or 'medium,' or those based on parts of the human body, which do not make sense when filming non-human objects or inanimate objects.

More importantly, this approach gives the shot size a precise numerical value that reflects the proportion of the dominant element. In the future, this will allow artificial intelligence to automatically match the desired visual meanings with the proposed digital shot size, which will facilitate the handling of variations between shots used in the film and enhance the aesthetics of the visual narrative.

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