and to put the results into proper screenplay format. Follow the master-scene format of *Dangerous Liaisons*, but don't be daunted by Hampton's elegant style, as he is a professional writer, more gifted than most, with many plays and screenplays to his credit. Still, if you are going to learn by imitating and analyzing, as we suggest, then it makes sense to imitate and analyze the work of a master.

Aim at leaving yourself enough time before handing in the work to put it away for a day or two before doing the final revision—you will gain some detachment from the material and may see possibilities that you'd previously overlooked.

NOTES

1. Jean Cocteau, *Three Screenplays* (New York: Viking Press, 1972).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Frederick Luhr, *Raymond Chandler and Film* (New York: Ungar, 1982).
5. Christopher Hampton, "Dangerous Liaisons," unpublished screenplay, 1988.

FILMS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

Beauty and the Beast, directed by Jean Cocteau, 1945.
Dangerous Liaisons, directed by Stephen Frears, 1989.
Incident at Owl Creek, directed by Robert Enrico, 1962.
Orpheus, directed by Jean Cocteau, 1950.
The Red Balloon, directed by Alfred Lamorisse, 1955.
Two Men and a Wardrobe, directed by Roman Polanski, 1957.

3
USING SOUND TO TELL THE STORY

Besides conveying what (as we have noted) philosopher Susanne Langer calls "the feeling-tone" of a film or tape, aural images can expand the frame in terms of offscreen space and extend the meaning of what is being shown, by using sound as metaphor.[1] When these images are an integral part of the story, they usually originate in the script.

The great French director Robert Bresson, whose films are known for the quality of their visual images, is a master at extending the frame through sound. In his chapbook, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, he states that sound always evokes an image, although an image does not always evoke a sound.[2] He applies this principle to great effect in a scene from his film *Pickpocket*, in which the impoverished hero stands behind a prosperous-looking couple at a racetrack, trying to get up the courage to make an attempt on the wallet in the woman's pocketbook. We hear the blaring announcement of the next race over a loudspeaker, a bell's loud clanging, the pounding of hooves, and cries of a crowd we can't see but that seems to be all around us. Meanwhile, the camera steadily regards the man and woman facing us and also the young man standing just behind and between them. Because of the background sound, as well as the reactions of the couple as they follow the race, we believe that it is going on somewhere "behind" us and so are able to focus our entire attention on the inner struggle of the main character.

Another example, which uses offscreen sound to create a rising sense of unease in both main character and audience, is from an independent feature called *The Passage*, which was written and directed by Pat Cooper, one of the authors of this book.

In the film, a ghost story, a writer called Michael Donovan has left his wife in New York and gone to a desolate part of Cape Cod to do research on 19th-century shipwrecks. He rents a handsome old cottage on a dune overlook-

ing the sea at a spot where shipwrecks once were common, and he immerses himself in the history of the place. The sequence that follows describes his first encounter with the ghost.

(The abbreviation "POV" stands for point of view, and all descriptions of offscreen sounds are capitalized.)

38 INT. PARLOR. DAY
In the morning, MICHAEL at the dining table, typing from his notes.
SOUND OF FAINT RUSTLING ON THE STAIRS.
He looks around, then goes back to his work as THE SOUND DIES.
Again, SOUND OF RUSTLING.
THE RUSTLING FADES TO SILENCE as he gets up from the table and goes upstairs.

39 INT. FRONT BEDROOM. DAY
MICHAEL glances about the untidy room, then crosses to the looking glass and gazes into it. As in his dream of the previous night, the door under the eaves is open in the reflected image. He turns to stare at it.

DOOR, MICHAEL'S POV
It is closed.

He crosses to pry it open, and finds a long low dark space that runs the length of the room. He strikes a match, and in its flicker, we glimpse an old-fashioned seaman's trunk behind several ancient electric heaters. He hauls it out into the bedroom and lifts the heavy lid.

INSIDE THE TRUNK is a bundle wrapped in yellowed tissue paper; he takes this out and carefully unwraps it, revealing a folded paisley shawl in soft glowing colors. FAINTEST SOUND OF RUSTLING, which he is too absorbed to hear.
He unfolds the shawl and finds inside it a black feather fan with a horn handle. He strokes the fan softly with his finger-tips, then moves it slowly down over his face. AGAIN, THE RUSTLING.
Michael looks up, and around the room, but there is nothing. Shaken, he replaces the fan, folding the shawl carefully over it. He returns them both to the trunk and closes the lid, then straightens up to catch sight of himself in the looking glass.

MICHAEL
(to his reflection)
Easy. Easy . . .

He goes out of the room, closing the door after him.

PAN AROUND THE ROOM AS WE HEAR HIS FOOTSTEPS DESCENDING THE STAIRS. Behind us, THE RUSTLING—CONTINUOUS, as if someone were crossing the room—THEN FADING TO SILENCE.[3]

Long before we first glimpse the ghost, we are aware, with Michael Donovan, of her presence. While the objects Michael finds may give us the sense that she in some way continues to exist, it is the rustling of her silk dress that "proves" it to us.

A brilliant example of extending the frame can be found in Jacques Tourneur's low-budget horror classic *Cat People*. In it, the heroine has inherited a curse by which she is transformed, when agitated or jealous, into a panther. The scene we have chosen has her panther self stalking a young woman whom she sees as a threat to her own relationship with her fiancé.

It is night, and the young woman is walking down a deserted city street when she realizes that she is being followed. As her footsteps quicken, the branch of a nearby tree sways ominously under the weight of an invisibly moving something. The woman breaks into a run, sees an open door ahead, and dashes through it.

The building turns out to be an almost-empty YMCA. With the invisible panther padding along behind her, growling, she races to a large swimming pool in the basement and throws herself in. She quickly swims to the middle of the pool and begins to scream for help, as the echoing sound of the invisible cat's snarls ricochets off the tiled walls of the big room.

The entire sequence has the disturbing quality of a nightmare, and the images that we as the audience conjure up for ourselves are at least as terrifying as the actual visual of any live panther would be. Well-thought-out images and carefully orchestrated sound do it all.

USING SOUND AS METAPHOR

The sound of a ticking clock in a scene may be simply part of ambient sound, or, as in *High Noon*, serve as a metaphor for the passage of time, bringing the hero inexorably closer to a showdown he does not want. Sometimes the long wail of a locomotive reminds us that our character lives near railroad tracks;

sometimes it serves as a metaphor for a character's yearnings to escape the confines of his or her life.

Sound used as metaphor can create a whole dimension of meaning not immediately apparent in the visual images of a scene. It is one of the more powerful tools available to us in writing the short screenplay.

The following example is a brief description of a short film made in 1970 by Ken Dancyger, coauthor of this book, when he was a graduate student at Boston University. Titled *The Class of '75*, it is a futuristic story about the last five traditional students in a traditional university. Although the filmmaker used images of college uprisings at Columbia University and elsewhere at the start of the short, his primary objective was to create, without using much dialogue, a sense of his characters' day-to-day lives.

Within the university, the five students lead monastic, bookish lives with their dean. Outside, a war rages for control of the university. When the dean dies, these last holdouts for tradition leave the building; the past that they and their dean had represented is over and done with.

The writer/director wanted to create a world that would appear, on one level, to be sheltered and monastic but on another level suffocating and jail-like. He was able to accomplish this by using sound to establish both images. The sounds of photocopying and microfiche machines, and so on, suggest that the university is essentially a library, but on another level, a synthesized music track provides a distancing, troubling effect—a sense that what goes on in that library is not entirely "bookish" but something patterned, repetitive, and destructive.

The clang of metal doors as the students are shut into their sleeping areas at night and the tone and pitch of the alarms that awaken them in the morning create a strong sense that the university/library in which they are living is in actuality a prison. The use of offscreen sound has altered the images, pointing them away from their surface existence as a university and toward their true meaning—that the place is a prison.

MORE ON SCREENPLAY LANGUAGE

In an essay called "The Language of Screenwriting," the playwright and scriptwriter Ronald Harwood writes, "A screenplay cannot be judged by form and technique, or by the abandonment of either. In his attempt to realize in its initial form a story that is, in the end, to be told in pictures, the writer must discover or invent a language that is both personal and effective, and that, above all, stimulates the mind's eye."[5]

The following description by Harwood is the first sequence in the screenplay for the film *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. It is somewhat more "literary" in its choice of words than many fine screenplays—perhaps because it is adapted from a famous novel—but it is wonderfully visual all

the same. He evokes for us both the formidably grim *gulag*, which is itself a major character in the script, and the nature of Denisovich's own day-to-day situation. (This script, from a very late draft, uses the master-scene format referred to previously with somewhat more camera instructions than usual, and it appears to have been compressed for publication.)

> FADE IN:
> 1. EXT. THE CAMP—HIGH ANGLE (HELICOPTER SHOT) BEFORE DAWN
> From a distance the camp looks like a solitary star in the cosmos: it glows a sickly yellow; its circles of light are no more than a luminous blur. Beyond the star, as far as the eye can see, is snow. It seems like the middle of the night. It is intensely cold.
>
> THE CAMERA MOVES IN VERY SLOWLY.
> SUPERIMPOSE MAIN CREDITS AND TITLES.
> Gradually it becomes possible to distinguish more of the area of the camp: two powerful searchlights sweeping from watchtowers on the perimeter; a circle of border lights marks the barbed wire fences; other lights are dotted about the camp. Now, slowly, the shapes of the huts and other buildings become discernible: the gates, the near watchtowers with their guards and machine guns, the prison block, the mess hall, the staff quarters.
>
> END CREDITS AND TITLES.
>
> A Russian SOLDIER, wearing the regulation long winter overcoat and fur cap, emerges from the staff quarters, pierced by the cold. He makes his way to where a length of frosted rail hangs.
>
> THE SOLDIER takes up a hammer in his gloved hands and beats on the rail: a grating, clanging sound—
>
> CUT TO:
>
> 2. INT. HUT 9 BEFORE DAWN
> Under a blanket and coat lies IVAN DENISOVICH, bathed in sweat ...[6]

If the setting in which a hero finds him or herself is to serve as antagonist, it is essential that its features be described in a way that evokes it vividly. When the setting is not key to the story or would be familiar to us from life (or other movies), the architect Mies Van der Rohe's statement that "less is more" is the advice to follow. The following graduated series of exercises and assignments has been worked out with the idea of helping you to discover—or invent, if necessary—the screenwriting language that will best serve the kind of short script that you want to write. It is essential that the exercises be done in order, and with an open mind.

EXERCISE 3: LOCATION DESCRIPTION

Go for a long walk or ride in a bus or car to find an unfamiliar location that interests you as a storyteller—one that appeals to you as a film location for any reason. (Keep in mind that just about any location can be shot in an arresting manner.) Study the scene carefully and list the details that you find compelling, or even just interesting. Before moving on, check to be sure you haven't missed anything you might want to use; if you have, add it.

As soon as possible, find a place where you can write undisturbed for 15 minutes or so. Look over your notes and underline those bits of description that seem most likely to give the flavor or feeling-tone you would like to convey. Then, in 10 minutes or less, write a short descriptive paragraph, using the present tense of scriptwriting. When your 10 minutes are up, check quickly to see if you have overlooked anything essential; if you have, quickly add it to your description.

Put away the exercise and notes for at least 24 hours of "seasoning" time.

THIRD ASSIGNMENT: LOCATION DESCRIPTION IN FORMAT

Take out your description, read it over carefully, and cross out whatever seems irrelevant or needlessly repetitive. In revising, you want to keep only those few details that are necessary to evoke the location—as you see it—in the mind's eye of a reader.

When you have done this, rewrite your final version in the master-scene format used in screenplay manuscripts. (Look at the examples in previous chapters or in the Appendices.) At this point, it would be wise to check grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Again, put away the material for 24 hours before going on to the next exercise.

EXERCISE 4: USING SOUND IMAGES

Find a fairly quiet place and close your eyes. If indoors, sit by an open window. Take a few deep breaths, relax, and try to become aware of the layers of sound that surround you, night or day, city or country. As you begin to focus on these, you will be able to sort out those that are close by from those farther off, and background sounds that tend to be almost unnoticeable at first (the steady hum of machines or traffic) from those that declare themselves clearly. When you feel ready, list all the sounds that you can hear.

EXERCISE 5: USING SOUND IMAGES

Now think of 10 sounds that are particularly evocative for you (and that may have unpleasant or ominous associations, as well as pleasant ones) and quickly list them on paper. When done, scan the list and add any additional sounds that occur to you.

FOURTH ASSIGNMENT: LOCATION DESCRIPTION USING SOUND

Take out your location description from the third assignment and reread it. One by one, imagine each of the sounds on your list, along with this image. Some of the results may be quite surreal, but they should all be interesting. When you have found the sound or combination of sounds that appeals to you most, add it to your location description. Annotate it at the beginning if it is to be heard throughout the scene or most of it (e.g., SOUND OF FOGHORN CONTINUING or SOUND OF FOGHORN THROUGHOUT), or at whatever point is appropriate (e.g., SOUND OF GLASS BREAKING).

Remember that offscreen sound is generally afforded a separate line in the script and printed in capital letters.

EXERCISE 6: INTRODUCING THE X FACTOR

If you feel inspired to go on, this writing exercise can be done as soon as you have added sound to your location description, or later the same day. It is best not to wait longer than a few hours before going on, because we are after what might be called a "unity of feeling-tone" in the piece you are writing.

Take out and reread the introductory scene you wrote as an exercise and then revised at length for the second assignment, in Chapter 2. In this revision, the character X was given a name, so use that name in this exercise.

Set your timer for 10 minutes. Reread your location description, imagining the sounds. "Then *X* walks or runs, rides a skateboard, or drives a Model T Ford into the scene." No need to describe *X*—you've done that in the earlier assignment. *X* may remain alone or meet someone: let things happen as they will while you are writing, and allow yourself the great pleasure of being surprised. GO!

At the end of 10 minutes, put the exercise in your folder and disregard it for 24 hours, at least.

FIFTH ASSIGNMENT: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Read and revise this last exercise, changing what happens and how it happens, if you want, and eliminating all unnecessary details. Use few adjectives and make those few count. (*Roget's Thesaurus* can often be more useful than a dictionary in finding the right word to make a scene or physical action come alive.) Now type out the whole scene in proper format, after which it would be helpful to have your teacher, classmates, or friends who are knowledgeable about film read the work and respond to it.

NOTES

1. Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art* (New York: Scribner's, 1953).
2. Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer* (London: Quartet Books, 1986). trans. Jonathan Griffen.
3. Pat Cooper, "The Passage," unpublished screenplay, 1987.
4. Harold Pinter, *Accident, in Five Screenplays* (New York: Grove Press, 1973), 219–220.
5. Ronald Harwood, "The Language of Screenwriting," in *The State of the Language*, ed. Leonard Michaels and Christopher Ricks (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 296.
6. Ronald Harwood, "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," in *The State of the Language*, ed. Michaels and Ricks, 292.

FILMS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER

Cat People, directed by Jacques Tourneur, 1942.
The Class of '75, directed by Ken Dancyger, 1970.
One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, directed by Caspar Wrede, 1971.
Pickpocket, directed by Robert Bresson, 1959.

—————— 4 ——————

DISCOVERING AND EXPLORING A MAIN CHARACTER

The story for Thelma and Louise discovered me. Two women go on a crime spree: the idea came with the velocity of a sixteen-ton weight hitting me. It hit me that hard.... It was then a question of discovering/exploring who these two women were and how they came to go on a crime binge.

CALLIE KHOURI[1]

Callie Khouri chose the journey structure to tell her story. *Thelma and Louise* is a direct descendant of such films as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, just as these are descendants of classics like *They Drive by Night*. The originality of the film and much of its energy stem from its humorous, sympathetic, and totally unsentimental portrayal of Khouri's protagonists, the two characters whom she discovered and explored, her "two women on a crime binge."

ON CHARACTER AS HABITUAL BEHAVIOR

In his work on psychology, Aristotle described character as "habitual behavior."[2] You are what you ordinarily do—that is, until some occurrence leads you to do something you would *not* ordinarily do. In general terms, this is what makes for a dramatic situation.

In the scene that follows, which is from the first pages of the second draft of *Thelma and Louise*, we are given in a few well-chosen lines a good deal of