

Point of View Shot

Point of view camera and editing is a key device through which filmmakers create audience identification with characters in a film. This technique is often used to place the audience in the position of the main character. The Point of View shot (POV) begins with a character looking off screen – we then cut to the object the character is looking at.

Clips mentioned in this section are not available to view on the website but are readily available to buy or rent from the usual outlets.

What distinguishes point of view editing is that the object is shown from the character's optical vantage point – i.e. directly through the character's eyes. (So if the character is drunk, for example, this might mean that the shot is deliberately out of focus with the camera moving from side to side – a rolling shot. Some of the most famous examples of the Point of View shot (POV) are to be found in the films of Alfred Hitchcock. (Martin Scorsese discusses Hitchcock's use of POV shots in part one of the documentary series, the American Cinema. This technique is also common in the horror genre where the director often places the viewer within the viewing position of the monster.

Rear Window (1954): (00:31:15 to 00:34:33)

Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* is an extended exercise in the use of Point of View camera and editing. The entire film takes place in one location as the main character is confined to a wheel chair and observes the world through his window. Throughout the film, we see events through the viewpoint of the main character as he spies on his neighbours. In this scene, a series of point of view shots allow us to see a murder mystery unfold.

Silence of the Lambs (1990): (00:11:19 to 00:13:17)

Point of view shots allow us to experience the emotions of the lead character, her anxiety and apprehension as she goes to meet the imprisoned serial killer, Hannibal Lecter, for the first time. Director Jonathan Demme discusses this scene and the influence of Alfred Hitchcock on the *Silence of the Lambs* in his interview with Mark Cousins as part of the BBC's *Face to Face* series. This scene is also an example of how the continuity style employs over-the-shoulder dialogue. In the classic continuity scene, the dialogue begins with a two-shot of the participants in the scene. The editing pattern then starts as a series of over-the-shoulder shots from one participant to the other. As Robert P. Kolker explains, in his essay 'The Film Text and Film Form' in the *Oxford Guide to Film Studies*: "The constant cutting across the gazes of the characters slips us into their narrative space because we are continually asked by the cutting to expect something more. Someone looks, and we

are primed to respond, 'What is the character looking at?' And the next shot inevitably tells us, by showing the person (or object) being looked at."

Silence of the Lambs (1990): (00:37:04 to 00:39:31)

The point of view shots here allow us to experience the emotions of the female lead character as she is left alone in a room full of policemen. In a very direct way, we gain an insight into the emotional vulnerability of the character played by Jodie Foster and empathise with her. This visit to the funeral home also triggers her childhood memory of the trauma she suffered when her father was killed. The point of view shot leads us into a flashback in a very subtle and seamless way – another example of the invisible storytelling of the continuity style.

Silence of the Lambs (1990): (1:37:15 to 1:45:03)

Often filmmakers will employ point of view shots to place us within the perspective of two characters – in this case, the heroine and the villain. This final scene from the Silence of the Lambs is filmed in the conventional style of the horror movie. First we experience the fear and anxiety of the lead character as we see the serial killer's lair through her eyes. The narrative tension is created by our knowledge that the man is the serial killer and so we wait anxiously to see when she will realise this fact and take action to arrest him. As an audience, we are allowed to see something that is withheld from the lead character (the fact that the serial killer has a concealed weapon). So we don't see everything that she sees, only what the director wants us to see to increase the dramatic tension.

In the climatic battle of wits between the heroine and the villain, we see the lead character through the eyes of the serial killer as he stalks her in the dark using night goggles. This is a terrifying moment in the film and a key feature of the horror genre – seeing the action through the eyes of the monster who stalks his prey.

The Terminator (1984): (00:35:00 to 00:36:00)

As our heroine and her protector are chased by an unstoppable killer, the director cuts between them and their pursuer's POV. The digitally processed look of the Terminator's POV shots reveal his robotic nature.