2

"WHERE DO YOU PUT THE CAMERA?"

CONSTRUCTING A FILM (A COLLABORATION WITH STUDENTS IN THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY FILM SCHOOL)

MAMET: Let's make a movie out of the situation we're in now. A bunch of people are coming to a class. What's an interesting way to film this?

STUDENT: From above.

MAMET: Now, why is that interesting?

STUDENT: It's interesting because it's a novel angle and it gives a bird's-eye view of everybody coming in, sort of accentuating the numbers. If there are a number of people coming in, you may want to suggest that that's significant.

MAMET: How can you tell if this is a good way to film the scene? There are any number of ways to film it. Why is "from above" better than any other angle?

How are you going to decide what's the best way to shoot it?

STUDENT: It depends what the scene is. You could say the scene is about a really tempestuous meeting and have people pacing around a lot. That would dictate a different scene than one in which the tension is underlying.

MAMET: That's exactly correct. You have to ask, "what is this scene about?" So let's put aside the "follow the hero around" way of making movies and ask what the scene is about. We have to say our task is *not* to follow the protagonist around. Why? Because there are an infinite number of ways to film a bunch of people in a room. So the scene is not simply about a bunch of people in a room; it's about something else. Let us suggest what the scene might be about. We know nothing about the scene other than it's a first meeting. So you're going to have to make an election as to what this scene is about. And it is this election, this choosing not "an interesting way" to film a scene (which is an election based on novelty and basically a desire to be well-liked) but rather saying, "I would like to make a statement based on the meaning of the scene, not the appearance of the scene," which is the choice of the artist. So let's suggest what the scene might be about. I'll give you a hint: "what does the protagonist want?" Because the scene ends when the protagonist gets it. What does the protagonist want? It's this journey that is

going to move the story forward. What does the protagonist want? What does he or she do to get it—that's what keeps the audience in their seats. If you don't have that, you have to trick the audience into paying attention. Let's go back to the "class" idea. Let's say it's the first meeting of a series of people. A person, in the first meeting, might be trying to get respect. How are we going to address this subject cinematically? In this scene the subject wants *to earn the instructor's respect*. Let's tell the story in pictures. Now, if you have trouble addressing this thing, and your mind draws a blank, just listen to yourself telling the story to a guy next to you in a bar. How would you tell that story?

STUDENT: "So this guy comes into the class and the first thing he does is sit right next to the professor and he started to look at him very carefully and . . . and listen very carefully to what he's saying and when the professor dropped his prosthetic arm, he reached down and grabbed it and gave it to the professor."

MAMET: Well, yes. This is what the writers do today, the writers and directors. But we, on the other hand, want to keep everything that's "interesting" out of the way. If the character is not *made* to be interesting, then the character can only be interesting or uninteresting as it serves the story. It's impossible to make a character "interesting in general." If the story is about a man who wants to earn the respect of the instructor, it's not important that the in-

structor have a prosthetic arm. It's not our task to make the story interesting. The story can only be interesting because we find the progress of the protagonist interesting. It is the *objective of the protagonist* that keeps us in our seats. "Two small children went into a dark wood . . ." Okay; somebody else? You're writing the film. The objective is *to earn the respect of the instructor.*

STUDENT: "A guy in film class, who arrived twenty minutes early, sat at one end of the table. Then the class came in with the instructor, and he picked up his chair and moved it, trying to sit near the instructor, and the instructor sat on the other side of the room."

MAMET: Good. Now we've got some ideas. Let's work with them a little bit. A fellow arrived twenty minutes early. Why? *To earn the respect of his instructor.* He sat at one end of the table. Now, how can we reduce this to shots?

STUDENT: Shot of him coming in, shot of the classroom, shot of him sitting, shot of the rest of the class coming in.

MAMET: Good. Anybody else?

STUDENT: A shot of a clock, a shot of the moment when he comes in, hold on this until he decides where he's going to sit, a shot of him waiting alone in the empty room, a shot of the clock, and a shot of many people coming in.

MAMET: Do you need a shot of the clock? The smallest unit with which you most want to concern yourself is

the shot. The larger concept of the scene is to win the respect of the instructor. This is what the protagonist wants—it's the superobjective. Now, how can we figure out the first beat of the scene? What do we do first?

STUDENT: Establish the character.

MAMET: The truth is, you never have to establish the character. In the first place, there is no such thing as character other than the habitual action, as Mr. Aristotle told us two thousand years ago. It just doesn't exist. Here or in Hollywood or otherwise. They always talk about the character out there in Hollywood, and the fact is there is no such thing. It doesn't exist. The character is just habitual action. "Character" is exactly what the person literally does in pursuit of the superobjective, the objective of the scene. The rest doesn't count.

An example: a fellow goes to a whorehouse and comes up to the madam and says, "what can I get for five bucks?" She says, "you should have been here yesterday, because . . ." Well, you, as members of the audience, want to know why he should have been there yesterday. That's what you want to know. Here, however, we tell the story, full of characterization.

A fellow, trim, fit, obviously enamored of the good things of life but not without a certain somberness, which might speak of a disposition to contemplation, goes to a gingerbread gothic

whorehouse situated on a quiet residential street, somewhere in a once-elegant part of town. While walking up the flagstone steps . . .

This is one of those American movies we make. The script and the film are always "establishing" something.

Now, don't *you* go "establishing" things. Make the audience wonder what's going on *by putting them in the same position as the protagonist.*

As long as the protagonist wants something, the audience will want something. As long as the protagonist is clearly going out and attempting to get that something, the audience will wonder whether or not he's going to succeed. The moment the protagonist, or the *auteur* of the movie, stops trying to *get* something and starts trying to *influence* someone, the audience will go to sleep. The movie is not about establishing a character or a place, the way television does it.

Look at the story about the whorehouse: isn't that how most television shows are formed? A shot of "air," tilt down to frame a building. Pan down the building to a sign that says, "Elmville General Hospital." The point is not "where does the story take place?" but "what's it about?" That's what makes one movie different from another.

Let's go back to our movie. Now, what's the first concept? What is going to be a *building block that is necessary to "achieve the respect of the instructor"?*

STUDENT: . . . The guy arrives early?

MAMET: Exactly so. The guy arrives early. Now, the way you understand whether the concept is essential or not is to attempt to tell the story without it. Take it away and see if you need it or not. If it's not essential, you throw it out. Whether it's a scene or a shot, if it's not essential throw it out. "The guy says to the madam . . ." Well, obviously you can't start the whorehouse scene like that. You need something before that. "A guy goes to a whorehouse and the madam says . . ." In this example the first building block is "a guy goes to a whorehouse."

Here's another example: you have to walk to the elevator in order to get downstairs. In order to get down, you have to go to the elevator and get in there. That's essential to get downstairs. And if your objective is *to get to the subway* and you begin in an elevated floor of the building, the first step will be "to get downstairs."

To win the respect of the instructor is the superobjective. What steps are essential?

STUDENT: First, *show up early.*

MAMET: Good. Yes. How are we going to create this idea of earliness? We don't have to worry about *respect* now. *Respect* is the overall goal. All we have to worry about now is earliness; that's the first thing. So let's create the idea of earliness by juxtaposing uninflected images.

STUDENT: He starts to sweat.

MAMET: Okay, what are the images?

STUDENT: The man sitting by himself, in a suit and tie, starting to sweat. You could watch his behavior.

MAMET: How does this give us the idea of earliness?

STUDENT: It would suggest that there's something he's anticipating.

MAMET: No, we don't have to worry about anticipating. All we have to know in this beat is that he's early. Also, we don't have to watch behavior.

STUDENT: An empty room.

MAMET: Well, there we go, that's one image.

STUDENT: A shot of a man by himself in an empty room juxtaposed with a shot of a group of people coming in from outside.

MAMET: Okay, but this doesn't give us the idea of earliness, does it? Think about it.

STUDENT: They could all be late.

MAMET: Let's express this in absolutely pristine, uninflected images requiring no additional gloss. What are the two images that are going to give us the idea of *earliness?*

STUDENT: A guy is walking down the street and the sun is rising and the street cleaners are going by and it's dawn and there's not a lot of activity on the street. And then maybe a couple of shots of some people waking up and then you see the guy, the first man, come into a room and other people are in there finishing up a job that they were doing, maybe finishing the ceiling or something like that.

MAMET: Now, this scenario gives the idea of early morning, but we've got to take a little bit of an overview. We have to let our little alarm go off once in a while, if we stray too far off the track; the alarm that says, "Yes—it's *interesting*, but does it fulfill the objective?" We want the idea of *earliness* so that we can use it as a building block to *winning respect*. We do not absolutely require the idea *early in the morning*.

STUDENT: Outside the door you could have a sign saying "Professor Such-and-such's class" and giving the time. Then you could have a shot of our guy obviously sitting by himself with the clock behind him.

MAMET: Okay. Does anybody feel that it might be a good idea to stay away from a clock? Why might we feel that?

STUDENT: Cliché.

MAMET: Yeah, it's a little bit of a cliché. Not that it's necessarily bad. As Stanislavsky told us, we shouldn't shy away from things just because they are clichés. On the other hand, maybe we can do better. Maybe the clock ain't bad, but let's put it aside for a moment just because our mind, that lazy dastard, jumped to it first and, perhaps, it is trying to betray us.

STUDENT: So you have him coming up, and he's in the elevator, nervous and maybe looking at his watch.

MAMET: No, no, no, no. We don't need this in there, do we? Why don't we need this?

STUDENT: Maybe a *small* clock . . . ?

MAMET: . . . He doesn't even have to look nervous. This gets down to what I tell the actors too, which we'll discuss later. You can't rely on the acting to tell the story. He doesn't have to be nervous. The audience will get the idea. The *house* has to look like a house. The *nail* doesn't have to look like a house. This beat, as we described it, had nothing to do with "nervousness"; it is about *being early*, and that is *all* it is about. Now, what are the images here?

STUDENT: We see the guy come down the hall and he gets to the door and is trying to rush in and he finds that it's locked. So he turns and looks for a janitor in the hall. The camera stays with him.

MAMET: How do you know he's looking for a janitor? All you can do is take pictures. You can take a picture of a guy turning. You can't take a picture of a guy turning to look for a janitor. You've got to tell that in the next shot.

STUDENT: Can you cut to a janitor?

MAMET: Now the question is, does a shot of a guy turning and a shot of a janitor give you the idea of earliness? No, it doesn't. The important thing is *always apply the criteria*. This is the secret of filmmaking.

Alice said to the Cheshire Cat, "which road should I take?" And the Cheshire Cat said, "where do you want to go?" And Alice said, "I don't care." And the Cheshire Cat said, "then it doesn't matter which road you take." If, on the other hand, you *do* care where you're going, it does matter which road you take. All you have to think about now is *earliness*. Take a look at the idea about the locked door. How can we use this, because it's a very good idea. It's already more exciting than a clock. Not more exciting in general, but more exciting as applied to the idea of *earliness*.

STUDENT: He comes to the door and it's locked, so he turns, he sits and waits.

MAMET: Now, what are the shots? A shot of the man coming down a hall. What's the next shot?

STUDENT: A shot of a door, he tries it, it's locked, it doesn't open.

MAMET: He sits down?

STUDENT: That's it.

MAMET: Does this give us the idea of earliness? Yes?

STUDENT: What if we combine them all. Start with the sun rising. The second shot is of a janitor mopping in the hall, going down the hall, and as he goes down, there's someone sitting in front of the door and the guy gets up and points to the door and the janitor could look at his watch and the guy points to the door again and the janitor looks at his watch and shrugs and unlocks it.

MAMET: Which sounds cleaner? Which gives us more clarity in this instance? The toughest thing in writing and directing and editing is to give up preconceptions, and apply those tests you have elected are correct for the problem.

We do that by applying ourselves to our first

principles. The first principle, in this case of the scene, being it's not a scene about guys coming into a room, it's a scene about trying to win the respect of the instructor; the second small principle being this *beat* is about *earliness*. That's all we have to worry about, *earliness*.

Now, we have two plans here. Which is simpler? Always do things the least interesting way, and you make a better movie. This is my experience. Always do things the least interesting way, the most blunt way. Because then you will not stand the risk of falling afoul of the objective in the scene by being interesting, which will always bore the audience, who are collectively much smarter than you and me and have already gotten up to the punch line. How do we keep their attention? Certainly not by giving them *more* information but, on the contrary, by *withholding* information—by withholding *all* information except that information the absence of which would make the progress of the story incomprehensible.

This is the kiss rule. K.I.S.S. Keep it simple, stupid. So we have three shots. A fellow is walking down the hall. Tries the handle of the door. Close-up of the door handle being jiggled. Then the fellow sits down.

STUDENT: I think you need one more shot if you want to show his earliness. He opens up his briefcase, pulls out a handful of pencils, and starts sharpening them.

MAMET: Okay now, you're getting ahead of yourself. We've finished our task, right? Our task is done when we've established the idea of earliness.

As William of Occam told us, when we have two theories, each of which adequately describes a phenomenon, always pick the simpler. Which is a different way of keeping it simple, stupid. Now, you don't eat a whole turkey, right? You take off the drumstick and you take a bite of the drumstick. Okay. Eventually you get the whole turkey done. It'll probably get dry before you do, unless you have an incredibly good refrigerator and a very small turkey, but that is outside the scope of this lecture.

So we've taken the drumstick off the turkey—the turkey being the scene. We've taken a bite off the drumstick, the bite being the specific beat of *earliness*.

So let us posit the identity of the second beat. We don't have to follow the protagonist around, do we? What's the next question we have to ask?

STUDENT: What's the next beat?

MAMET: Exactly so. What's the next beat? Now, we have something we can compare this next beat to, don't we?

STUDENT: The first beat.

MAMET: Something else, which will help us to figure out what it's going to be. What is it?

STUDENT: The scene?

MAMET: The *objective* of the scene: exactly. The question the

answer to which will unerringly guide us is, "what's the objective of the scene?"

STUDENT: Respect.

MAMET: *To win the respect of the instructor* is the overall objective of the scene. That being the case, if we know the first thing is *to arrive early,* what might be a second thing? A *positive* and essential second beat, having arrived early. In order to do what . . . ?

STUDENT: To earn the respect of the instructor.

MAMET: Yes. So what might one do? Or another way to ask it is why did he arrive early? We know *to win the respect of the instructor* is the superobjective.

STUDENT: He might get out the instructor's book and brush up on the instructor's methodology.

MAMET: No. That's too abstract. You're on too high a level of abstraction. The first beat is *earliness.* So on the same level of abstraction, what might be the second beat? He was early in order to do what?

STUDENT: Prepare.

MAMET: Perhaps *in order to prepare.* Anyone else?

STUDENT: Now, don't we have to deal with the locked door? He has an obstacle: the door is locked; he has to respond to that obstacle.

MAMET: Forget about the protagonist. You have to know what the protagonist wants because that's what the film is about. But you don't have to take a picture of it. Hitchcock denigrated American films, saying they were all "pictures of people talking"—as, indeed, most of them are.

You tell the story. Don't let the protagonist tell the story. *You* tell the story; *you* direct it. We don't have to follow the protagonist around. We don't have to establish his "character." We don't need to have anybody's "back story." All we have to do is create an essay, just like a documentary; the subject of this particular documentary being *to win the respect of.* The first essay is on earliness; what's the second thing?

STUDENT: Could it be *to wait?*

MAMET: *To wait?* What's the difference between *to wait* and *to prepare?*

STUDENT: The protagonist is more active.

MAMET: In which?

STUDENT: The second.

MAMET: In terms of what?

STUDENT: In terms of his action. It's stronger to have the actor *do* something.

MAMET: I'll tell you a better test. *To prepare* is more active in terms of *this particular* superobjective. It's more active in terms of *to win the respect.*

This class is about one thing: learning to ask the question "what's it about?" The film is not about a guy. It's about *to win the respect of.* The beat is not about *a guy coming in.* It's about *earliness.* Now that we've taken care of earliness, let's say the next beat is *to prepare.* Tell the idea of *to prepare* as if you're telling it to somebody in a bar.

STUDENT: So this guy was sitting on a bench waiting, waiting,

just waiting. And he pulled out of his briefcase a book written by the professor.

MAMET: Now, how do you shoot that? How do you know it's a book written by the professor?

STUDENT: We could have the name of the professor on the door, and in the same shot see the name on the book.

MAMET: But we don't know that he's preparing for the class. You don't have to put in all this literary narration—see how narration weakens the film? You *do* have to know the beat is about *preparing*. It's a very important distinction. We don't have to know it's *preparing for the class*. That's going to take care of itself. We *do* have to know it's *preparing*. The boat has to look like a boat—the keel does not.

We don't need waiting. Waiting is trying to reiterate. We've already got *earliness*. We took care of that. All we have to do now is *preparing*. Listen to yourselves when you describe these shots. When you use the words "just," "kind of," and "sort of," you're diluting the story. The shots shouldn't be just, kind of, or sort of anything. They should be straightforward, as straightforward as the first three shots in the movie.

STUDENT: He starts to comb his hair, straighten his tie.

MAMET: Does this fall under the heading of *preparing?*

STUDENT: It's like *grooming*.

MAMET: Preparing could be preparing *physically* or it could be preparing for the subject matter at hand—*to win the respect of*.

Which is going to be more specific to the scene? What is going to be more specific to the overall superobjective, *to win the respect of the instructor?* To make oneself more attractive, or to prepare?

STUDENT: He pulls out his notebook, reads through it very fast, then thinks, no, then he goes back and looks at a certain page.

MAMET: Now, this falls afoul of one of the precepts we have been discussing, which is: tell the story in *cuts*. We're going to adopt this as our motto.

Obviously there are some times when you are going to need to follow the protagonist around for a bit; but only when that is the best way to tell the story; which, if we are dedicated in the happy application of these criteria, we will find is very seldom the case. See, while we have the luxury of time, here in class or at home making up the storyboard, we have the capacity to tell the story the best way. We can then go on the set and film it.

When we're on the set, we don't have this luxury. Then we *have* to follow the protagonist around, and we'd better have ourselves a Steadicam.*

*The Steadicam is no more capable of aiding in the creation of a good movie than the computer is in the writing of a good novel—both are labor-saving devices, which simplify and so make more attractive the mindless aspects of a creative endeavor.

So what we're trying to do is find two or more shots the juxtaposition of which will give us the idea of *preparing*.

STUDENT: How about: this guy has a three-ring binder. And he takes a little piece of white cardboard and rips off the perforated edges, folds them in half, puts them into the little plastic tabs that divide the pages in the three-ring binder.

MAMET: This is an interesting idea. Let's say it in shots: he takes his notebook, he takes out a piece of paper, which is one of those little tabs. We cut to the insert (a tight shot on his hands). He's writing something on the tab. He sticks the piece of paper in the plastic thing. Now we cut back out to the master (the main shot of the scene). He closes the notebook. This is all uninflected, isn't it? Does this give us the idea of *preparing?* I'll ask you another question: which is more interesting—if we read what he's writing on the tab or if we *don't* read what he's writing?

STUDENT: If we don't.

MAMET: Exactly so. It's much more interesting if we don't read what he's writing. Because if we read what he's writing, then the sneaky purpose of the scene becomes *to narrate,* doesn't it? It becomes to tell the audience where we are. If we don't have any sneaky purpose in the scene, then all that beat has to be about is *preparation.* What's the effect of this on the audience?

STUDENT: It arouses their curiosity.

MAMET: Exactly so, and it also wins their respect and thanks, because we have treated *them* with respect, and have not exposed them to the unessential. We want to know what he's writing. It's obvious that he was *early*. It's obvious that he is *preparing*. We want to know: early for what? preparing for what? Now we've put the audience in the same position as the protagonist. *He's* anxious to do something and *we're* anxious for him to do something, right? So we're telling the story very well. It's a good idea. I have another idea, but I think yours is better.

My idea is that he shoots his cuffs and that he looks down at his cuff, and we cut to an insert and we see the shirt has still got the tag on it. So he rips the tag off. No, I think yours is better, because it goes more to the idea of *preparedness.* Mine was kind of cute, but yours has much more to do with preparedness. If you have the time, as we do now, you compare your idea to the objective, and as the good philosophers we are, as followers of the ways of both the Pen and the Sword, we choose the way that is closer to the objective, discarding that which is merely cute or interesting; and *certainly* discarding that which has a "deep personal meaning" for us.

If you're out on the set, and you don't have any leisure at all, you may choose something simply because it's a cute idea. Like mine about the cuffs—

in your imagination you can always go home with the prettiest girl at the party, but at the party sometimes that is not true.

Now let's go on to the third beat. What's the third beat? How do we answer that question?

STUDENT: Go back to the main objective, *to win the respect of the instructor.*

MAMET: Absolutely. Now: let's approach this differently. What's a *bad* idea for the third beat?

STUDENT: *Waiting.*

MAMET: *Waiting* is a bad idea for the third beat.

STUDENT: *Preparing* is a bad idea for the third beat.

MAMET: Yes, because we already did it. It's like climbing the stairs. We don't want to climb a stair we've already climbed. So *preparing again* is a bad idea. Why play the same beat twice? Get on with it. Everybody always says the way to make any movie better is burn the first reel, and it's true. All of us have this experience almost every time we go to the movies. Twenty minutes in, we say, "*why*, they should have started the movie *here*." Get on with it, for the love of Mike. Get into the scene late, get out of the scene early, tell the story in the cut. It's important to remember that it is not the dramatist's task to create confrontation or chaos but, rather, to create order. *Start* with the disordering event, and let the beat be about the attempt to restore order.

We're given the situation: this fellow wants such and so—he has an objective. That's enough chaos for you right there. He has an objective. He wants *to win the respect of his teacher.* This fellow *lacks* something. He's going to go out and get it.

Entropy is a logical progression toward the simplest, the most ordered state. So is drama.* The entropy, the drama, continues until a disordered state has been brought to rest. Things have been disordered, and they must come back to rest.

The disorder is not vehement in this case, it's fairly simple: someone wants a guy's respect. We don't have to worry about creating a problem. We make a better movie if we worry about restoring order. Because if we worry about creating problems, our protagonist's going to do things that are interesting. We don't want him to do that. We want him to do things that are logical.

What's the next step? What's the next beat going to be about? We're talking in terms of our particular progression. The first beat being *to arrive early.* The second one being *preparation,* to prepare. And the third one being? (Always thinking in terms of the superobjective of the movie, which is *to gain the respect of.* That's your test. That's the litmus test: *to gain the respect of.*)

STUDENT: To introduce himself?

*I know the dictionary defines entropy as a progression toward the most disordered state—but on this point, I take issue with that most excellent book.

MAMET: Mayhap the beat is about *greeting*. Yes, what do we call that kind of greeting?

STUDENT: Acknowledgment . . . ?

STUDENT: Ingratiation . . . ?

MAMET: To ingratiate, to pay homage to, to acknowledge, to greet, to make contact. Which, of all these, is most specific to the superobjective *to gain the respect of?*

STUDENT: I think *homage*.

MAMET: All right, then. Let's make up a little photo essay about *homage* here. The deeper you can think, the better it's going to be. Deeper in the sense of writing means "what would it be like to me?" Not "how might anyone pay homage?" but "what does the idea of homage mean to *me?*" That's what makes art different from decoration.

What would be real homage?

STUDENT: The professor arrives, and our guy goes to shake his hand.

MAMET: Okay. But this is like the watch, isn't it? Earliness—*watch*. Homage—*handshake*. There's nothing wrong with it, but let's think a little bit deeper, because we might as well, now that we have the luxury of time.

What would be a lovely way to show homage, a way that really *means* something to you? Because if you want it to mean something to the audience, it should mean something to you. They are like you—they are human beings: if it don't mean something to *you*, it ain't going to mean something to *them*. The movie is a dream. The movie should be *like* a dream. So if we start thinking in terms of dreams instead of in terms of television, what might we say? We're going to have a little photo essay, a little documentary about *homage*.

STUDENT: When you say a dream, you mean it doesn't have to be believable in the sense that someone would actually do it in real life?

MAMET: No, I mean . . . I don't know how far we can stretch this theory, but let's find out, let's stretch it till it breaks. At the end of *Places in the Heart*, Robert Benton put a sequence that is one of the strongest things in an American movie in a long time. It's the sequence where we see everyone who was killed in the film is now alive again. He's created something that is like a dream in this. He is juxtaposing scenes that are discontinuous, and that juxtaposition gives us a third idea. The first scene being *everyone's dead*. The second scene being *everyone's alive*. The juxtaposition creates the idea of *a great wish*, and the audience says, "oh my God, why can't things be that way?" That's like a dream. Like when Cocteau has the hands coming out of the wall. It's better than following the protagonist around, isn't it?

In *House of Games*, when the two guys are fighting about a gun in the doorway and we cut away to a shot of the sidekick, the professor character, looking on, *then* you hear the gunshot. That's pretty good

filmmaking. It wasn't great filmmaking, maybe, but it was a lot better than television. Right? It gives us the idea. They're fighting; you cut to the guy looking. The idea is *what's going to happen* and *we can't do anything about it.*

It conveys the idea of *helplessness,* which is what the beat is about. The protagonist is helpless: we get it without following her around. We put the *protagonist* in the same position as the *audience*—through the *cut*—by making the viewer create the idea himself, in his own mind, as Eisenstein told us.

STUDENT: How about if the student presents something to the professor? Some kind of special present. Or he bows when the guy comes in, and offers him a chair?

MAMET: No, you're trying to tell it in the *shot.* We want to tell it in the cut. How about this—the first shot is at the level of feet, a tracking shot of a pair of feet walking. And the second shot is a close-up of the protagonist, seated, and he turns his head quickly. What does the juxtaposition of the two things give us?

STUDENT: Arrival.

MAMET: And?

STUDENT: Recognition.

MAMET: Yeah; it's not quite *homage,* it's attentiveness or *attention.* At least, it's two shots creating a third idea. The first shot has to contain the idea of where the feet are. The feet are a little bit distant, right? With the idea that the feet are distant and the fellow hears them anyway, what does the juxtaposition of these two things give us?

STUDENT: Awareness.

MAMET: *Awareness;* perhaps not *homage,* but *awareness* or great attention, which might just sneak up on *homage.* What about if we had the long shot of the feet coming down the corridor and then a shot of our guy standing up? It shows a little bit more homage, in that he's standing up.

STUDENT: Especially if he were to stand up in a humble way.

MAMET: He doesn't have to do it in a humble way. All we have to show is him standing up. He doesn't have to stand up any way at all; all he has to do is stand up. The juxtaposition of that and the shot of the other guy far off gives the idea of homage.

STUDENT: How about when the guy stands up he bows his head?

MAMET: It doesn't really tell any more. And it's more inflected, which is to say worse for the purpose of filmmaking. The more we "inflect" or "load" the shot, the less powerful the cut is going to be. Anyone else?

STUDENT: A shot over the protagonist with a notebook. He looks up, stands up, and runs out of the shot. A shot of our hallway and the door in the hallway, which has a glass window to it. Protagonist runs into the shot and opens the door just as a man walks in the other direction.

MAMET: Yes. Good. I see you like that. Two questions we