

David Mawel  
On Directing Film  
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“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 unrelated 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 carliness?

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 carliness, 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 carliness?

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 carliness 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: Cliche.

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 bastard, 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 *hall* 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 dictated 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 afraid 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 *erlenea*. 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 cuffs, 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 *preparation*. Mine was kind of cute, but yours has much more to do with preparation. 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: Maybe 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? Fairness—*match*. 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 win*, 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.*

STUDENT: 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. 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, scared, 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

might ask ourselves—one question is *does it convey the idea of homage?* and the other is *do I like it?* If you ask the second question, you say, well, heck, I don't know if I like it or not. Am I a fellow with good taste? Yes. Does this have as much good taste in it as I think I have in myself? Gosh, I don't know. I'm lost.

The question you do want to ask is *does it convey the idea of homage?* If it does convey the idea of homage, then go on to the next step: *do I like it?* There is the inner ability Stanislawsky called the "judge of yourself," which one might characterize as a certain amount of artistic good taste. That's going to function anyway because we all have good taste. It's the nature of the human being to please. We all want to please one another. Nobody doesn't want that. There's no one who doesn't want to succeed. What we're trying to do is make our subconscious work for us by making that task at which we can succeed very simple and very technical so we don't have to throw ourselves on the mercy of either our good taste or the cinema-going public.

We want to have some test that allows us to know when our job is done without relying on our good taste. That test here is *does it convey the idea of homage?* Feet way off, man stands up, I think it does. Let's go on to the next beat. What's the next beat after homage? What's the first question we want to ask?

STUDENT: What's the superobjective?

MAMET: Good. What's the answer?

STUDENT: *To win the respect of the professor.*

MAMET: So after showing homage, what's the next beat?

STUDENT: *To impress.*

MAMET: It's a tad general. It also rather reiterates the superobjective. *To impress, to win respect.* They are too similar. One part at a time. The boat has to look like a boat; the sail doesn't have to look like a boat. Make each part do its job, and the original purpose of the totality will be achieved—as if by magic. Make the beats serve the scene, and the scene will be done; make the scenes, in the same way, the building blocks of the film, and the film will be done. Don't make the beat do the service of the whole, don't try to reiterate the play in the scene. It's like "would anyone like a cup of coffee because I'm Irish," right? It's how most acting is done today. "I'm so glad to see you today because, as you'll find out later, I'm a mass murderer." Anyone? The next beat?

STUDENT: *To gain acknowledgment?*

MAMET: That's also rather general.

STUDENT: *To please?*

MAMET: You can't get more general than that.

STUDENT: *To show affection?*

MAMET: *To gain respect by showing affection?* Maybe; what else?

STUDENT: *To show self-confidence?*

MAMET: Be dynamic. See, these things you suggest really

could come at more or less any point, and they will betray us into a circularity more appropriate to the epic than to the dramatic form. But what will be the next essential thing to come after *showing homage*?

STUDENT: *To blow your own horn?*

MAMET: Would you do that to gain someone's respect?

STUDENT: No.

MAMET: You can ask yourself the question thusly: what would I like to do in the best of all possible worlds to earn someone's respect? It's a question of what you might do in your wildest imagination, not what you might do because you are bound by the strictures of polite behavior. We don't want our movies to be bound by that. We'd like our movies to be greatly expressive of our fantasy life.

There's another question we probably need to ask at this point. We might ask ourselves when are we going to be done? so we will know when the movie is done. We could go on trying to gain respect indefinitely. So we need a cap. Without a cap, the essential problem of the throughline, which is to gain respect, really can lead into a never-ending spiral, which is capped only by our good taste. So perhaps we need a throughline with a more positive, that is to say a more definite end than to gain respect.

For example, getting a reward. Reward being a simple and physically identifiable sign of respect. On this level of abstraction, the reward could be, for example, what?

STUDENT: It could be that he wants the teacher to do him a favor.

MAMET: Okay; anybody else?

STUDENT: He wants the teacher to give him a job.

MAMET: Yes; anything else?

STUDENT: The teacher gives him a pat on the back.

MAMET: That's not as specific as the first two, is it? I take it that you're speaking rhetorically. In which case the pat on the back is similar to gain his respect in this: it is deficient in that it lacks a cap or an objective, so that one is unsure when one is finished. It's going to make our task a lot easier if we always know both where we're going and when we're finished. If the job is the objective, then when that job is given or when that job is absolutely denied, the scene will be over.

Or perhaps we could say the reward the student requires is this: he wants the teacher to change a grade. Then, when the teacher changes the grade, the scene will be over; or if the teacher categorically refuses to change the grade and no hope is left, then the scene would be over. So we could say that the throughline of the scene in that case is to get a retraction. Then that's what everything in the scene would be about.

What's the first thing that's done to get a retraction? To show up early, right? What's the second thing? To prepare. The third beat is to pay homage. It's going to be a lot easier to find out what the fourth beat

is for *to get a retraction* than *to gain his respect*, because now we have a specific test for *knowing* when the movie will be over; we know where we have to end up, and we can find a beat that will lead us to that end. Does anybody know what a MacGuffin is?

STUDENT: It's Hitchcock's phrase for a little invented device that will carry the action.

MAMET: Yes. In a melodrama—Hitchcock's movies are melodramatic thrillers—a MacGuffin is *that thing which the hero is chasing*. The secret documents . . . the great seal of the republic of blah-blah-blah . . . the delivery of the secret message . . . We, the audience, never really know what it is. You are never told more specifically than "it's the secret documents."

Why should you be? We'll fill in for ourselves, unconsciously, those secret documents which are important to us.

In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim says of fairy tales the same thing Alfred Hitchcock said about thrillers: that the *less* the hero of the play is inflected, identified, and characterized, the more we will endow him with our own internal meaning—the more we will *identify* with him—which is to say the more we will be assured that we are that hero.

"The hero rode up on a white horse." You don't say "a short hero rode up on a white horse," because if the listener isn't short he isn't going to identify with that hero. You don't say "a tall hero rode up

on a white horse," because if the listener isn't tall, he won't identify with the hero. You say "a hero," and the audience subconsciously realize *they are* that hero.

The MacGuffin is *that thing which is important to us*—that most essential thing. The audience will supply it, each member for himself.

Just so in the objective *to get a retraction*. It's perhaps not necessary to know at this point a retraction of what.

The actor doesn't have to know it. A retraction of a grade, a retraction of a statement, a retraction of a reprimand. It's a MacGuffin at this point. The less the objective is inflected, the better off we, the audience, are. The less the hero is described to us, the better off we are.

Step four, anybody? We know where we're going, and we know who's going with us. We know who we love, but the devil knows who we'll marry. *To get a retraction*. Tally-ho, then, me hearties.

STUDENT: You have to *ask for the retraction*.

MAMET: Good. Now, wasn't that a breath of fresh air? The invigorating infusion of fresh air that this direct and blunt bear brings into this discussion is the same breath of fresh air that it will bring into the film. Now we have: *to show up early, to prepare, to pay homage, and to ask for* as the four beats of the story *to get a retraction*.

STUDENT: Don't you think showing up early and preparing are the same as paying homage?

MAMET:

You are saying that these may be subsumed under the larger beat *to pay homage*? I don't know. I have a question about *to prepare*, which we may come back to. Now you see that the process we're going through here is re-forming the large to better understand the small, and re-forming the small to better understand the large (working from the superobjective to the beats, and reworking from the beats to the superobjective, et cetera), until we come up with a design that seems to fulfill all of our requirements. Then we'll put that design into action and we will shoot it.\*

Now, we may find, as I found a little bit in my first movie and to a greater extent in my second, that after we've shot it we have to refine it further—which phenomenon scientists call the Jesus Factor,

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\*The process we are going through in this room is the exploration of the dynamic between the moment and the objective. It is this dynamic that, in this discussion, in film, in the theater, gives both the moment and the entirety strength—in the beautiful drama, each moment serves the purpose of the superobjective, and each moment is beautiful in itself. If the moment only serves the superobjective, we have plodding narrative pseudodrama, good only for object-lesson or "message" plays. If the moment only stands for itself, we have only self-indulgent or "performance" art. The effort that the dramatic artist spends in *analysis* frees both him and the audience to enjoy the play. If this time is not spent, the theater becomes the most dreadful of marriage beds, in which one party whimpers "love me," and the other pouts "convince me."

a technical term meaning "it works correctly on paper but for some reason doesn't work when we get it on its feet."

That happens sometimes. All you can do then is try to learn from it. The answer is always there. Sometimes it requires more wisdom than we possess at that instant—but the answer is always there. Sometimes the answer is: "I'm not smart enough to figure it out yet," and we must remember that the man said, "A poem is never finished—only abandoned."

All right, enough lovelinking. We got our three beats and looked at the throughline and said, "perhaps this throughline is not very good." We re-formed the throughline away from *to gain respect* and decided that it was *to get a retraction*. Now we can look back at the beats, and we may say that perhaps *preparing* is out of order. Perhaps *paying homage* is what that beat is about. I don't know. Let's forge on a little bit and see if the fourth step gives us some more clues.

STUDENT: Do we have to decide what the end result is?

MAMET: You mean does the hero get the retraction? Who's interested to know if he gets the retraction or not? Anyone?

STUDENT: I'd want to know, because then we can do something with the response of the teacher to the homage. Does the teacher know why the guy's there? Is he suspicious of—

MAMET: No, no, no, forget the teacher; let's stick with the protagonist. We stick with the protagonist, and that will tell us the story. Because the story is *his* story. We're here not to create disorder but to create order. What's the inherent disorder? "The other guy has something I want." What does the other guy have? The power to issue a retraction. When is the story over? When the hero gets it. The disorder is inherent in the story. What we're trying to do is create order. When the hero either gets a retraction or finds that he cannot have a retraction, order will be restored. The story will be over, and there will be no further reason to be interested. Up to that point, what we're trying to do is bring about that blessed state of bliss in which there is no story. For as Mr. Trollope told us, "they are most happy who have no story to tell."

Let's go on. Let's be jolly, jolly scientists and take one step at a time. The next step we've suggested is *to ask for*. What are some alternatives?

STUDENT: *To plead his case.*

MAMET: *To plead his case.* Now, as you see, we're suggesting two stories of two different lengths. Why? *To plead his case* is eventually going to have to contain so right? And this is what determines the length of the healthy story—it is determined by the least number of steps absolutely essential to secure the hero's objective. Who likes which bear better—*to ask for*

or *to plead his case*? On what basis can we determine which is better for the story?

STUDENT: On the basis of why he's asking for the retraction?

MAMET: No, we don't care why. It's a MacGuffin he's asking for. Because he needs it.

STUDENT: But we don't know anything about it.

MAMET: I don't think we need to. Anybody think we need to? What you're talking about is what the illiterate call the "back story." You don't need it. Remember that the model of the drama is the dirty joke. This joke begins: "A traveling salesman stops at a farmer's door"—it does *not* begin: "Who would think that the two most disparate occupations of agriculture and salesmanship would one day be indissolubly united in our oral literature? Agriculture, that most solitary of pursuits, engendering the qualities of self-reliance and reflection; and salesmanship, in which . . ." Does the protagonist have to explain why he wants a retraction? To whom is he going to explain it? To the audience? Does that help him get it? No. He must only do those things that help him get a retraction. All he has to do is *get a retraction*. The guy says to the girl, "That's a lovely dress"—he does not say, "I haven't been laid in six weeks." Now, the question is: on what basis can we decide which is better in this bear—to *plead his case* or *to ask*? My feeling is *to plead his case* is better. Why? Because I'm having a good time and I'd like the

STUDENT: How about *to bargain*, or *to bribe*?

MAMET: What about these ideas, in terms of the structure?

STUDENT: Since pleading is more inflected, isn't that an attempt to be more interesting?

MAMET: I don't think so; and I don't think it's either more or less inflected. I think it's just different. I think it's a choice. You could say *to plead his case*; you could say *to present his case*. By the way, we didn't say these beats had to be uninflected. We said that the *shots* had to be uninflected. *Paying homage* may or may not have certain inherent psychological overtones. We talked about *to plead*, *to ask*, *to plead his case*, *to present his case*. Each of these is going to call up associations in the actor. It is these personal, immediate associations, by the way, that both induce the actor to act and keep him in line with the intentions of the author. *This* is what brings the actor to the play—not those gyrations of emotional self-abuse that hack teachers have fobbed off as preparation.

STUDENT: How about *to bargain*, or *to bribe*?

MAMET: What about these ideas, in terms of the structure?

Let's talk about *to bargain*, because that's a little bit simpler.

STUDENT: The problem is that we started with a different throughline. *Bargaining* wouldn't work with *gaining respect*, but it might be a way to get a *retraction*.

MAMET: This is a problem you're going to run into a lot in dramatic structure. Because if you are creating it, either creating a film of your own or taking someone's film and trying to find the inherent dramatic structure in it, no angel is going to come down to you and say, "this is the throughline." What's going to happen is *exactly* this process of wondering and revising—to work every time either to create or to discern a throughline.

We've decided now that *to get a retraction* is the throughline of the scene. We are on to the beat following *to prepare*. Perhaps this next beat is *to present the case*. So this is now our new beat. What a relief to get on to this new beat. What self-respect we must feel for taking upon ourselves the onus of this task so as to save the audience the trouble. *To present the case*.

Our task now is to find a series of uninflected shots that will give us this idea: *to present the case*. The student wants to present the case to the teacher. Now, where are we going to find a clue? We have four beats. We're working on the fourth beat. What is going to be our clue to the answer of the shots?

Some helpful hint we might find to the answer of presenting the case.

STUDENT: How we prepared?

MAMET: Exactly so. The previous beat will provide a clue. It was to prepare. The beat that we thought, in terms of the new throughline, might possibly be dorky may, in effect, offer us quite a hint. So let's go back and look at our shot list for to prepare. It would be nice for the sake of cleanliness if we knew whether there was something we were wasting in there. Some extra step, which weakened to prepare but might strengthen to present the case. Like Indians of yore, we want to use all parts of the buffalo.

STUDENT: The shot where he opens the notebook, has the little strip with the cardboard things, rips them, writes on one, puts it in the tab holder.

MAMET: Good. Now, what are the shots for to present the case?

STUDENT: The presentation of the notebook in some way.

MAMET: What are the actual shots? A guy comes into a room, a guy in the room approaches the desk. Our criticism is that a juxtaposition of shots will give us the idea we require in this instance, to present the case. We have to know what we're taking a picture of.

STUDENT: Start with a shot of a desk with nothing on it and the notebook is pushed in.

MAMET: What's the next shot?

STUDENT: The reaction from the teacher. Either approval or disapproval.

MAMET: No. All this beat has to be about is presenting the case. We don't need the teacher's reaction here.

STUDENT: If the first shot were a presentation of the book and the second shot the teacher looking down, wouldn't the juxtaposition of those two shots present the case to him?

MAMET: Maybe the first shot is the empty desk and a book is placed into it, and the second shot is the teacher at the desk looks down at the book and he also looks up, and we cut to a shot of the student. I think we need the student there because he presents the case.

STUDENT: But couldn't we recognize the notebook from scene two? We know it's the same student we saw preparing, so we don't need a shot of him.

MAMET: The book is identification enough?

STUDENT: Yeah, we know it's the student's book. The book stands for the student.

MAMET: Very good. Of course, you're right. I got caught up in the idea of following the protagonist around. Good. Now, this brings us to the application of the principle of the throughline to the plastic elements of production.

What music is playing? What time of day or night is it? What do the costumes and the sets look like? At one point you mentioned someone reading a magazine. You say a magazine: what magazine? I'm not overstating the case, because somebody makes these decisions, and that person is called the direc-

tor. The prop person is going to say, "what should the notebook look like?" and what are you, the director, going to say? First off, what is the untortored person going to say? "Golly, the scene is about to get a retraction, so what kind of notebook does a person who wants to get a retraction carry?" If this seems dorky, if this seems overstated to you, look at American movies. Because that's the way all American movies are made. "Hi, how are you today because I just got back from Vietnam." In Hollywood, a committee of thugs wants to make sure that each word, moment, shot, prop, sound, et cetera, in a movie will stand for and, in effect, advertise the film. This committee is called "producers," and they are to the arts what the ducking stool was to jurisprudence.\*

What answer do we give to the prop person who says "what's the notebook look like?" What are you going to say?

\*Natural, creative exuberance and self-confidence are wonderful things in an artist. They are inhibited from growing into arrogance not through the content but because of the process of education. Even the minimally serious artist is humbled constantly by the screaming demands of craft.

Those who style themselves "producers" have not had the benefit of any such education, and their arrogance knows no bounds. They are like the white slave owners of old, sitting on their porches with their cooling drinks and going on about the inherent leanness of the Negro race. The "producer," having never had a run-in with the demands of a craft, sees all ideas as basically equal and his own as first among them, for no reason other than that he has thought of it. This notion is easier to fathom if one thinks

STUDENT: Doesn't it depend on what the objective is or isn't?

MAMET: No, because you can't make a "retraction notebook" any more than you can act what room you just came out of—though there are, to their shame, schools of acting that purport to teach such. What should the notebook look like—this "retraction notebook"?

STUDENT: Put a label on the cover?

MAMET: The audience won't read it. It's like a sign. The audience doesn't want to read a sign; they want to watch a motion picture, in which the story is advanced through the cut.

STUDENT: They don't have to read it. It's a black folder, white label, looks like a book report.

MAMET: Why should it look like a book report? I mean, it's not a bad idea that it should look like a book report, but why is it a good idea that it look like a book report? Prop person says, "what does it look like?"

back to the period of early adolescence and to, perhaps, the critique of an English teacher who said of our efforts "I don't understand" or "it is unclear," of which correction one thought: "The old fool . . . I know what I mean."

I have a great deal of pride and, I suppose, a large admixture of arrogant pride. I, in my generally looting context with these self-styled "producers," many times console myself by thinking that after society falls apart, I will be able to eat out at least my meals and shelter by putting on plays that may make people laugh; but that these "producers" would have to wait until I and those like me went to work before they could eat.

Yes, that is how I see "producers." They are "let me take that cow to the fair for you, son."

What's the correct answer? What does it do? What does the report do?

STUDENT:

It *presents the case*.

MAMET:

Right. Now, what's the shot list for presenting the case?

STUDENT:

The open book on the desk.

MAMET:

What's the next shot?

STUDENT:

The face of the teacher.

MAMET:

What is not the next shot? The face of the student, right? So, therefore, how does the book look?

STUDENT:

Prepared.

MAMET:

No, you can't make the book look prepared. You can make it look *near*. That might be nice, but that's not the most important thing for your answer to the prop person. \* Think about the shot list and the objective to *present the case*. To make it prepared, to make it neat, to make it convincing, the audience ain't going to notice. What are they going to notice?

STUDENT:

That it's the same book they've seen already.

MAMET:

So what's your answer to the prop person?

STUDENT:

Make it recognizable.

MAMET:

Exactly so! Good! You've got to be able to recognize it. That is the most important thing about this report. This is how you use the principle of throughline to

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\*The audience will accept anything they have not been given a reason to disbelieve. So the report must look, minimally, neat, for if it did not, the audience might question the sincerity of the hero's desire. The neatness of the report is an *analogue*, rather than a *creative* consideration.

answer questions about the set and to answer questions about the costumes. The book *in general* is not important. What's important is what it does in the scene. The most blatant thing it does in the scene is *present the case*. Since we aren't going to see a shot of the student, it's got to *present the case* for him. That shot of the uninflected book has to present the case. Since we know that it has to be uninflected, the answer cannot be "it's a prepared book." The answer cannot be "it's a contrite book." The answer must be "it's got to be the same book we saw in shot two." In choosing the book, you are telling the audience *that thing without which they cannot understand the movie*. In this case, it's the essential element of the shot. *That without which the beat will not survive* is that it's the same notebook as in the previous beat. It is essential to the telling of the story.

Every time you make a choice as a director, it must be based on whether the thing in question is essential to telling the story. If we don't need the shot of the student, then we'd better be jolly, jolly sure that they understand that it's the same book.

The audience is only going to look at the most overriding thing in the frame. You must take charge of and direct their attention. It's also the principle of magic: What is the single important thing? Make it easy for them to see it, and you're doing your job. You don't have to make it a book about *getting your retraxion*. You do have to make it the same

notebook. So our beats are to show up early, to prepare, to pay homage, to present the case. What were the shots for to show up early?

STUDENT: He arrives and tries the doorknob.

MAMET: No. I hope you don't think I'm being picky, but it's very useful to think of the film in exactly the same way the audience is going to perceive the film. What they're going to see in the first shot is a man walking down the hall. What are the shots?

STUDENT: Man walks down hall, shot of a hand on a doorknob, same man sits down on a bench.

MAMET: Perfect. Now, why did all those Olympic skaters fall down? The only answer I know is that they hadn't practiced enough. Practice with these tools until you find them boring, then practice some more. Here is a tool—choose your shots, beats, scenes, objectives, and always refer to them by the names you choose.

What are the shots for to prepare?

STUDENT: Man takes the notebook out, rips out a tab, writes something down on a tab, puts the tab in the plastic thing, closes the tab.

MAMET: Good. To pay homage?

STUDENT: Shot of the man looking and getting up out of the frame. A shot of the man running to a glass door.

He opens the door, a man walks through.

MAMET: Good. Next beat?

STUDENT: To present the case. An empty desk. The notebook

put on the desk, and a shot of the man sitting at the desk, looking down at it.

MAMET: Good. Let's finish it now. How do we reach a conclusion?

STUDENT: The teacher could start considering the book.

MAMET: What is the beat we are trying to dramatize here?

STUDENT: Judgment.

MAMET: Okay, the idea is judgment. Consideration is a different way of saying it. But the teacher considering the book doesn't really have any weight of montage behind it. It's basically expository. A guy picks up evidence and looks at it and makes up his own mind. Not good storytelling, as Aristotle told us. The character shouldn't "just get the idea."

STUDENT: Why is the next beat judgment, if all the way through, the beats are about the student and the teacher? Don't you want to follow the course of the student and not the teacher?

MAMET: What's your idea?

STUDENT: I saw the beat as taking a stand. He's presented the case, and you cut to him standing there, and he's not going to take no for an answer. And you cut back to the teacher looking up at the kid.

MAMET: What are some other ideas for the next beat?

STUDENT: Receipt of the retraction.

MAMET: Yeah, that's an idea.

STUDENT: To be denied.

MAMET: That's not really the beat, that's the result. That's

the end of some other beat. The student/protagonist has to be working toward completion.

STUDENT: At this point in the story, you are going to expect the response of the professor. The next logical beat after *presenting the case* is judgment, *judging the case*. When that beat is over, he has or hasn't gotten the retraction. We don't have to follow the student to complete the throughline, do we?

MAMET: No.

STUDENT: But it's the kid's job to get a retraction.

MAMET: Yes, it is. But it doesn't have to be a picture of the kid. We want to know what happens next in terms of the throughline, not in terms of what the protagonist does. What was our last shot in the last beat?

STUDENT: The professor looking down at the book.

MAMET: The professor's looking down. Cut to a shot of a bunch of kids in the doorway. A new kid comes, and they all look over to one side or another. We cut to their point of view of the empty classroom with the kid sitting there and the professor looking at him. To get to the idea of judgment. Now we're ready for the resolution. We see the professor in a long shot, he opens the book, he looks down to his right, we cut to the desk drawer, we see him open the desk drawer and he takes out a stamp pad. You see him stamp the book. And you cut to a shot of the kid, who is smiling, and he picks up the book, and we cut to a shot of the kid's hand closing the

book, and then from the back of the classroom you see the kid go to his seat and the professor stand and call the rest of the class, and they go in, and they sit down. All right?

STUDENT: What if he didn't get the retraction?

MAMET: I don't know. It's our first movie. Let's make it a happy ending, what the hell. And now we're done, and that was excellent work.