Chapter One

Perspective for Emotion and Focus

PERSPECTIVE FOR EMOTION AND FOCUS

INTRODUCTION

This is *not* a chapter on how-to-draw objects in perspective. This chapter assumes that the reader has a working knowledge of perspective terminology as well as a general familiarity with the construction of perspective objects. Information regarding perspective (linear and curvilinear) is to be found in the Appendices to this text. Much of the relevant terminology will be explained as it is introduced throughout this chapter, but for a more thorough familiarity with the nomenclature of perspective, consult the Introduction to this book and its brief history of perspective or the appropriate Appendices.

This chapter is devoted to the psychological and emotional effects that perspective can have on an audience as a compositional tool. Perspective in the sense that it will be used throughout this text is synonymous with the *Point of View (POV)* of an audience and *camera angle,* but POV will be the dominant reference term. Below is a short overview of topics and what the reader can be expected to be familiar with by the end of this chapter.

1. What is POV?
2. How perspective creates the perceptual effects of *Compression*, *Expansion*, and *Speed*.
3. How POVs help create the mood of an image or series of images by altering:
    a. POV *Tilt*;
    b. The *Parallel* or *Oblique* orientation of POV.
4. How the *subject* and *environment* of a picture work together to create mood through the creation of:
    a. *Artificial* or *Natural* environmental moods;
    b. *Cooperation* or *Conflict* between subject and environment.
5. How perspective creates *focus* and *movement* in an image by:
    a. Developing *directional paths* toward a single point or multiple points.
6. How to create *visual progression* in sequential media through POV variation.

This text will use scenes from film, television, and video games, both contemporary and classical paintings and drawings, as well as graphic novels, advertisements, and student work to illustrate important points. Each illustration will be referenced to make cross-referencing the text with supporting imagery as easy as possible. Key terms and diagrams will also be referenced in the same manner in dialogue boxes (*Ill.1)* next to the section in which they are introduced. As mentioned, more information regarding these key terms may be found in the *Introduction* or *Appendix* to this text. The precise location of terms and drawing construction diagrams in the *Introduction* and *Appendix* will also be marked in the dedicated dialogue box. All important *technical terms* will be *italicized*. It is recommended that if you do not understand terms and drawings as they arise that you reference the dialogue boxes at a minimum, and even better, the referenced sections before proceeding.

Image Box

Images from across media that illustrate the concepts in the text

Ill. 1: Dialogue Box - Full of useful information.

As with all aspects of this text, perspective is discussed in its capacity to create visual effects which in turn elicit an emotional response from an audience. In other words: perspective is a tool, and this text is an explanation of what effect is created when that tool is put to use. The examples in the text demonstrate instances of perspective functioning in the manner that has been described. *How* to draw perspective objects is covered in the *Appendix*; what follows is a description of *what* perspective *does*.

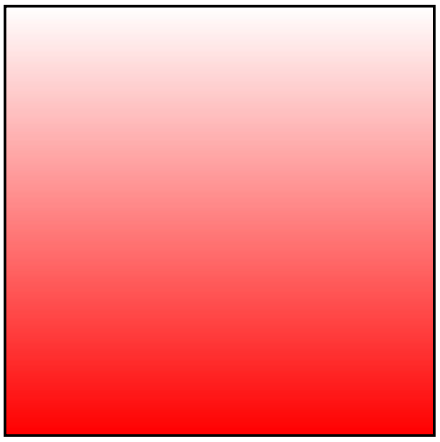
What is Perspective

What perspective *is* cannot be separated from what it *does*. The main use of perspective, as it is commonly understood, is a form of graphical projection. Perfected in 15th century Italy during the Renaissance, perspective was used as a manner of creating convincing illusionistic space in the paintings and drawings of the day. These pictures were illusionistic because they created a sense of 3-dimensional depth on a 2-dimensional surface. Perspective made pictures more realistic because it created a sense of *depth*. The depth in these pictures reflected the depth that we experience in our day-to-day experience so effectively that it came to be called realistic. The difference that perspective made in the pictures of the day becomes obvious when a painting from the 14th century (*Ill.2*) is compared to one from the 15th century (*Ill.3*). While both images are intelligible, only *Ill.3* conveys a convincing picture of realistic space. Objects in *Ill.3 look and feel* near for far, whereas even the most accomplished artists of the 14th century were only capable of creating the comparatively flat, 2-dimensional image of *Ill.2*. Any depth is created by objects overlapping.

Ill. 2: 14th century painting, Christ Carrying the Cross, Simone Martini, c.1336-42. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Ill. 3: 15th century painting, Pietro Perugino, The Keys to the Kingdom, 1481-82. Sistine Chapel, Rome.

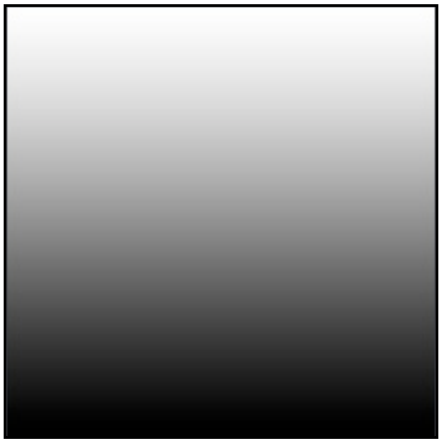
Perspective creates depth because it is a gradient. A gradient is the perceived increase or decrease of any perceptual category. Some examples of perceptual categories are: detail, texture, colour, value, and shape. As the intensity or amount of detail that is perceived in any of these categories decreases, that percept will appear to be further and further away. For instance, as colour and value become less intense they appear more distant (*Ills.4&5*), just as surfaces will appear to become increasingly less textured, or detailed. In the case of perspective, as receding lines (*visual rays*) move closer and closer to each other (i.e., the distance between the lines *decreases*) the perception of depth is created.



Ill.4: Colour Gradient.

"Back" of Gradient
Further from Viewer

"Front" of Gradient
Closer to Viewer

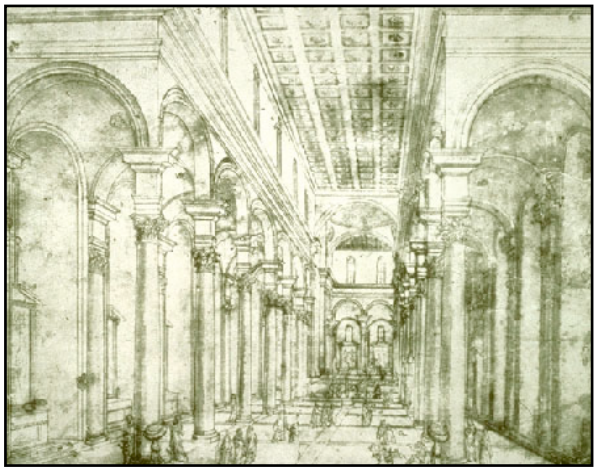


Ill.5: Value Gradient.

For example, the fully saturated red of the colour gradient in *Ill.4* would appear to be closer to the 'front' of the picture than the desaturated pinks; just as the black of the

value gradient would appear to be closer than the shades of gray and white in *Ill.5*. The examples of the mountain scene (*Ill.6*) and renaissance drawing (*Ill.7*) illustrate how an increasing lack of detail and a perspective field respectively create depth. Each example is a gradient of a different type, but all create the perception of 3-dimensional space. However, the manner in which perspective creates depth is of a different sort than that of the examples of colour, value, or detail. Each of the examples in *Ills.4-6* convey a sense of depth in reality due to *atmospheric perspective*. That is, the more atmosphere in between the object and viewer, the less detail or saturated tone or colour you will be able to perceive. Atmosphere has density. It gets in the way of our ability to perceive details, textures etc., the more atmosphere there is between us and the object of our attention. Perspective, on the other hand, causes the *space* between objects to decrease as they recede. It is this *space* that *diminishes* in perspective and creates its gradient.

Ill.6: Detail Gradient. Atmospheric Perspective creates the perception of depth.



Ill.7: Renaissance Perspective Drawing. Elevation of Santo Spirito, Filipino Brunelleschi, 1434-83.

Perspective also creates a sense of depth in a quite different way. Perspective is an optical deformation of the actual shape of an object which creates the optical illusion of depth. However, it does so in a way that is consistent with how we actually see the world. Deformation always involves a comparison of what *is* with what *ought* to be, and what we *see* as a perspectively distorted object we *know* to be undistorted. We *know* that if we were to encounter the hallway in *Ill.7,* it would not actually narrow as it recedes, but it *appears* to do so. The drawing in *Ill.7* simply mirrors what our experience of that hallway in reality.

Our minds seek out simple explanations and categories wherever available: we will interpret objects as we *know* them to be rather than as they actually appear. A hallway whose walls we know to run parallel to each other will be interpreted as such even though it appears to be otherwise. Even though a building (or the picture of a building) may appear as though its walls are slanted because of perspective distortion, we generally interpret that building as being comprised of right angles and straight lines if that is the simplest explanation for its appearance. We *know* the building in *Ill.8* to be perspectively undistorted even though our senses tell us otherwise. Our minds interpret the building as though it looked like *Ill.9*. The optical illusion of perspective is consistent with our perception of reality, but how we interpret reality is something altogether different.

Ill.8: St. Peter's Basillica as we See it.

Ill.9: St. Peter's Basillica as we Know it.

Ill.10: The Illusion of 3-Dimensions on a 2-Dimensional Surface.

Optical illusions are typically defined as perceptual stimuli that deceive a viewer and cause them to perceive something that does not exist or is other than it truly is. The deceptive quality of perspective is its ability to create 3-dimensional space on a 2-dimensional surface. For instance, we know that the railroad tracks of *Ill.10* lay parallel to each other and never actually converge at a single, far-distant point, but they appear to do so. It therefore appears that the flat surface (screen or paper) which you are now looking at actually has 3-dimensional depth.

This illusion is reflective of the reality we experience and is just as true of actual railroad tracks as it is of a picture of railroad tracks. This *illusion* is interpreted by our minds as *realistic*. When perspective is referred to as creating a *realistic illusion,* it is this effect that is being referenced. However, perspective does more than create a realistic sense of depth in pictures, and what perspective *is* cannot be separated from what it *does*. This chapter is devoted to an explanation of the perceptual effects perspective may be used to create beyond that of depth.

Organizational and Emotional Structure of Pictures

Perspective aids in the development of an interdependence of *subject* and *content* in its ability to help *separate* subject *from* content. The *subject* of an image is the subject matter: the *what* of a picture. The *content* of an image is how that subject matter *feels* or how the image is *interpreted by the audience*. How the *subject* is depicted in perspective affects the interpretation of its *content*.

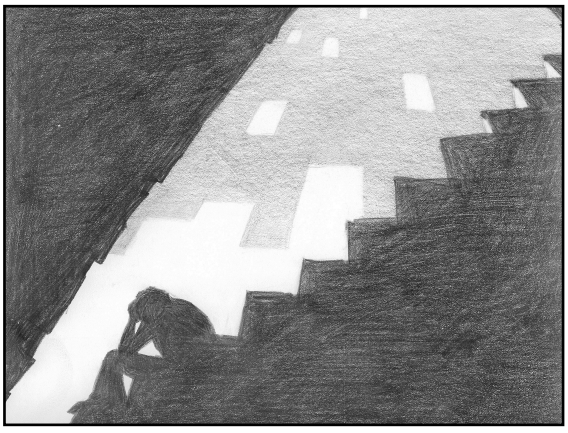
The emotional content of a scene need not rely upon subject matter. *What* is depicted will, of course, contribute to the interpretation of an image, but *how* that subject matter is portrayed plays a significant role as well. You need only reference your own experience while watching a film or television show, or even viewing a static piece of art to realize

the truth of this statement. If you have experienced the 'emotional ups and downs' of a visual story (static or moving) you have reacted in part to *how* that story has been told.

An audience's emotional response to an image is in part created through composition (*how* the individual elements of the picture are arranged) and perspective (the point of view from *where* a picture is seen). While subject matter will definitely influence audience reactions, an image need not be dependent upon the subject matter (and any unpredictable predispositions the audience may be bringing to bear upon it) to elicit the desired audience reaction. The *entire environment*, the *entire image*, can be designed compositionally and perspectively to deliver a message and elicit a guided emotional response from an audience. In this way, identical subject matter in separate pictures can be made to *feel* differently. The *feel* of an image is the end result of the picture's subject matter and its organizational and emotional elements working in coordination. Perspective helps shape both the organizational and emotional structure of a picture regardless of the subject matter.

The *organizational structure* of a picture is how the elements of an image are organized inside the bounded edge of the picture frame. The *organizational* structure of an image will affect the *emotional* structure of a picture. The emotional structure of a picture is how that picture *feels*: does the picture feel happy, sad, angry, confused, tense, etc.? The *organizational structure* and *emotional structure* of a picture work together to create the overall *feel* of a picture. They need not depend on a character's facial expression or body posture, nor are they limited by an audience's predisposition towards subject matter. The more immediately recognizable elements of expression, posture, and subject matter in a picture will affect audience response, but that does not mean that we must create pictures that *depend* on those elements. A picture does not have to depict a person who appears to be sad (*Ill.11*) or what someone might interpret as a sad event in order to *feel* sad (such as the picture in *Ill.12*).

Ill.11: A Person who Looks Sad.

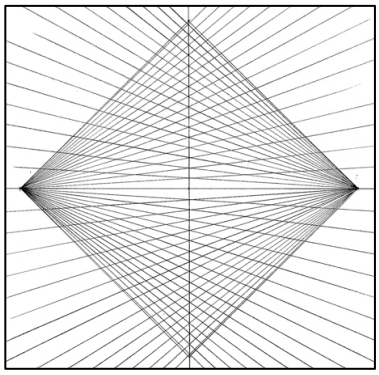


Ill.12: A Picture that Feels Sad. Student Work.

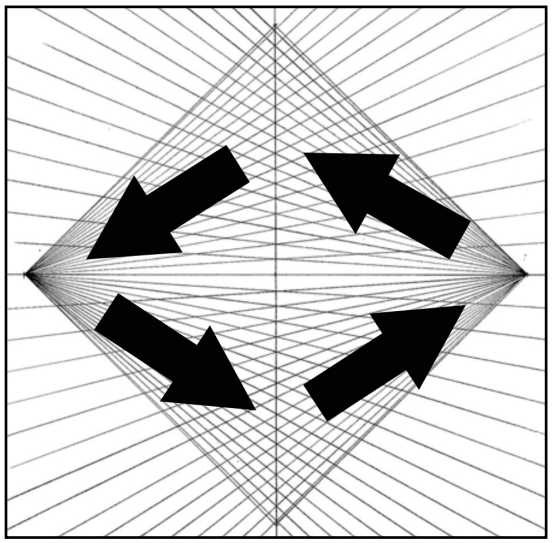
A picture should be able to feel sad to an audience without the familiar cues of someone crying or a sad action occurring. The organizational and emotional structure of a picture is the foundational framework that expression, posture, and subject matter contribute to in the creation of any picture's overall emotional effect. In a well-conceived picture, they all work in concert to elicit a directed audience reaction.

The organizational and emotional structure of a picture are symbiotic. Patterns of organization have emotional results: they will affect how a picture *feels*. Some organizational structures are better suited than others for achieving a desired emotional effect. The subject matter will influence how an image feels, but it is the successful combination of organizational and emotional structures with subject matter that is reflective of a well-conceived picture. When those elements have been thoroughly considered, it is possible to create an image that elicits the response you *want* from an audience. This is the psychology of picture making. Through the control of subject matter and its organization, an audience's emotional and psychological reactions can be manipulated to achieve a predictable response. All successful imagery does this, and perspective is one of the key considerations in its effective realization.

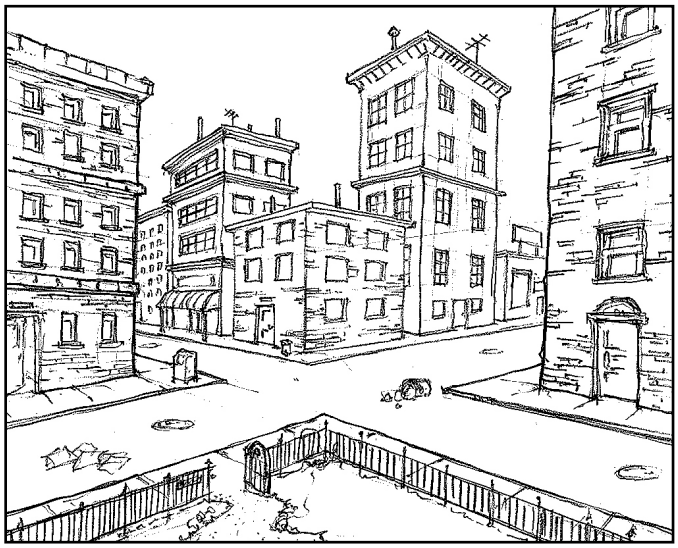
Structurally, perspective guides the eye of the viewer along *visual pathways* towards points of importance. The receding lines of perspective are called *visual rays (Ill.13).* These rays act as visual pathways for an audience to follow. When the elements of an image are aligned along these rays, they create an underlying pattern that an audience can visually follow as they look at a picture. Any pattern created in this way is part of a picture's organizational *structure*. For example, *Ills.14&15* show a circular pattern developed using *2-point* perspective (*see Appendix for 2pt construction*). This underlying structure will be sensed by an audience and creates a pattern for them to follow while they view all the elements of an image.



Ill.13: the Visual Rays of 2-point Perspective. See Appendix.



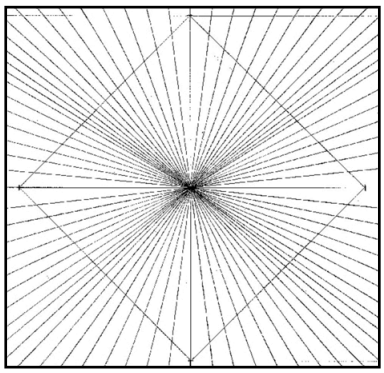
Ill.14: Structural Pattern of 2-point Perspective creates circular visual movement



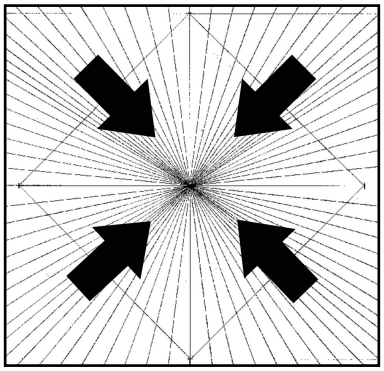
Ill.15: Underlying Structural Pattern allows for multiple points of interest to be viewed along its circular pattern

Two-point perspective is excellent for developing structures that create visual movement between multiple objects (as seen in *Ills.14&15*). Another kind of structural pattern occurs with the adoption of 1-point perspective (*see Appendix for 1pt construction*). In a *1pt* perspective field, all of the *visual rays* converge at a single *vanishing point (vp)* as shown in *Ill.16*. These *visual rays* still act as a *visual pathway* for an audience but in this

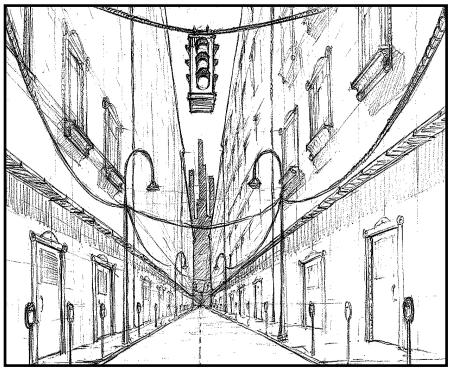
case they lead the viewer toward a *specific point.* Because of the convergence of *visual rays*, the area surrounding the *1pt vp* becomes one of increased importance. An audience will perceive the area that corresponds with the vp as one of increased importance (*Ills.17&18*).



Ill.16: the Visual Rays of 1-point Perspective. See Appendix.



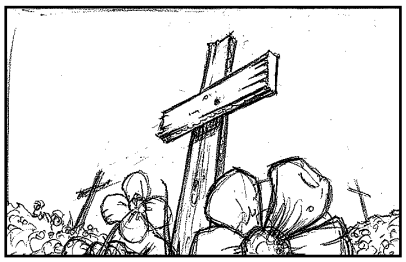
Ill.17: Structural Pattern of 1-point Perspective creates a focal area.



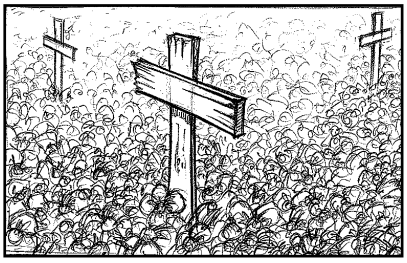
Ill.18: Underlying Structural Pattern directs visual traffic towards a specific point.

A *1pt structural pattern* creates *visual pathways* as well, but it directs it towards a specific object. These are the two main structural uses of perspective: both essentially help direct visual traffic. *One-point* is useful for directing the audience towards a specific point, while *two-point* is well-suited to creating a directional pattern for an audience to follow while viewing multiple objects.

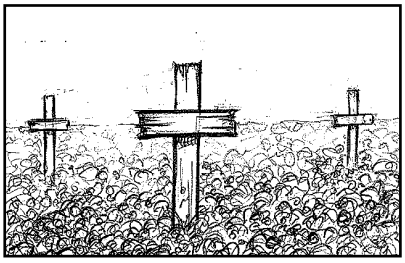
In addition to creating patterns which help determine how an audience looks at a picture, perspective may also be used to achieve *directed emotional reactions* from an audience. Perspective forces the viewer to look at images in a a particular way. This is called *POV shaping*. *POV* is one of the main contributors to the prevailing emotional atmosphere of an image. *POV* helps create a picture's *emotional structure*, a picture's *mood*. *POV* refers to *where* an ideal audience is viewing an image *from* and can be altered in two significant ways. The first is varying the degree of vertical *tilt*, and the second is whether an image is oriented in a *parallel* or *oblique* manner to an audience.



Ill. 19. POV Looking Up: Dominant



Ill. 20. POV Looking Down: Diminutive



Ill. 21. POV Eye Level: Stable

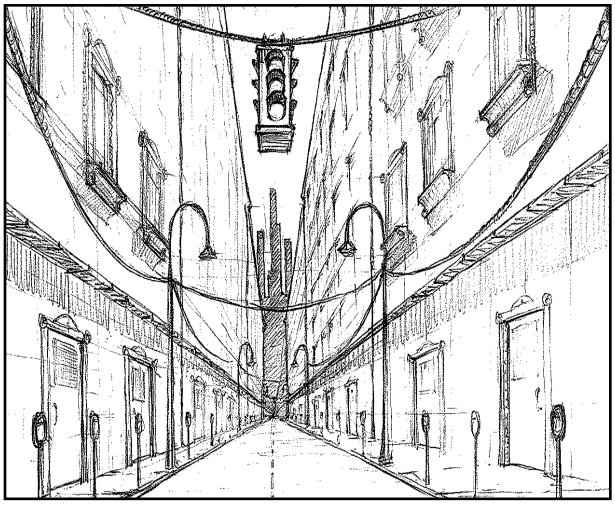
The degree of *POV tilt* helps establish a feeling of *Dominance, Diminutiveness*, or *Stability* in an image. If there is an upward *tilt* (called an *Up-Shot* or *Low-Angle Shot*) to a *POV*, the image will tend to feel more *Dominant* (i.e., the image will feel more important to an audience, as in *Ill.19*). A downward *tilt* (called a *Down-Shot* or *High-Angle Shot*) will accentuate a *Diminutive* feeling (i.e., the image will feel more vulnerable to an audience, as in *Ill.20*). No *tilt* at all (*POV* at *eye-level*, called an *Eye-Level Shot*) will tend to elicit a

more *Stable* audience reaction (i.e., the *POV* provides a neutral emotional environment for the audience, as in *Ill.21*).

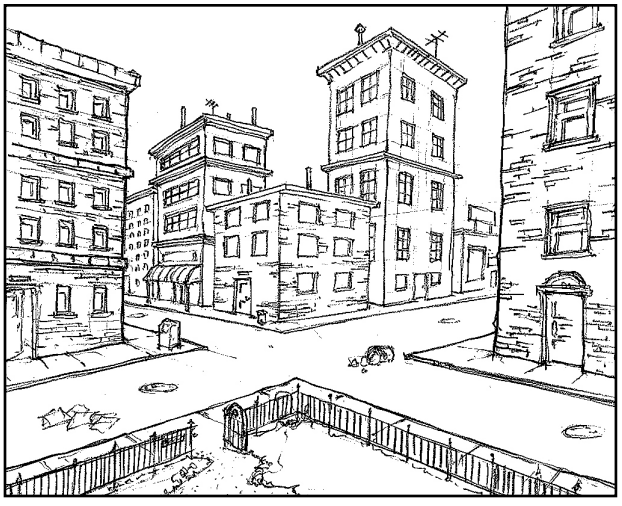
The subject matter in all three of the above images is identical: three crosses in a field of flowers; but each one *feels* different in large part because of the chosen *POV*. Through the use of perspective, a field of flowers and crosses can feel more important by forcing the viewer to look up at them (*Ill.19*), more vulnerable by viewing them from above (*Ill.20*), or present a more balanced and *stable* viewpoint allowing for a similar emotional reaction (*Ill.21*). With each change of *POV*, the story *itself* changes. The cross in *Ill.19* might evoke a sense of awe or reverence from an audience because of the chosen *POV*, while that of *Ill.20* might arouse feelings of nostalgia, and those of *Ill.21* a mood that is more contemplative. Whatever the desired audience reaction, the degree of *POV tilt* is a large determining factor in its creation.

Regardless of the degree of *POV tilt*, a picture will always be *parallel* or *oblique* to the viewer. *Parallel perspective* is when the majority of subject matter is parallel to the facial/camera plane; and *oblique perspective* situates the viewer at an angle to the image. *Parallel* perspective is *1pt* perspective, and *oblique* perspective is *2pt* perspective. Whereas the degree of *POV tilt* helps to establish the kind of emotional reaction an audience will have and its intensity, *parallel* or *oblique* perspective will help determine how *involved* an audience feels with an image. This kind of *POV shaping* will make an audience feel like they are a *part* of an image, or, are being kept *outside* of its space. This is called developing *viewer intimacy*.

Parallel perspective tends to lend a greater sense of involvement in an image to the audience. This means that a viewer will feel more *intimately* involved with the image; they will feel like they are involved in the space of the image. This is because the position of the central vanishing point implies the position of the audience in relation to the scene (see *Appendix* for more information). The position of the *central vp* at the end of the street in *Ill.22,* for instance, implies the position of the viewer at the other end of the street. We, the audience, are viewing that scene from a specifiable position. The viewer has become part of the image, part of that world. This is called *privileging the viewer* and



Ill.22: Parallel Perspective indicates the position of the viewer opposite the central vp. This makes the viewer a participant *in the image.*



Ill.23: Oblique Perspective removes the viewer from the image by concealing the central vp. This makes the viewer an observer *of the image rather than a* participant.

