

Film Editing

This is a rough draft for review. Please direct your comments to David Tamés personally or via email dtames@DigitalImagingArts.com This is a mix of original material and materials from Wikipedia that I'm revising and will submit back to Wikipedia when done. Your comments and suggestions and contributions would be appreciated.

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Film editing is a style of assembling audio and visual materials and reflects one of two dominant theories of conveying information in the cinema that was discussed by the early theoreticians.

Sergei Eisenstein attempted to create a scientific basis for editing which he referred to as “montage.” He suggested that conveying information in film is done by the juxtaposition of one image with another to produce a third idea. The early Russian filmmakers were influenced by the work of D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* and took up Eisenstein’s approach to film communication. It seemed to agree with their revolutionary ideas and seemed also to be the artistic expression of the Hegelian dialectic. Eisenstein’s approach is alive and well today in music videos and commercials.

In contrast to Eisenstein’s dialectical montage, some of his contemporaries including Lev Kuleshov and Vsevolod Pudovkin argued that montage should not be dialectical but, instead, should be harmonic. They suggested that shots must function not as colliding fragments but as building blocks which, when joined together, form a coherent, organic whole. We see this approach as dominant in most narrative films, though most films embody a mix of the two approaches.

The editing process is the one phase of production that is truly unique to motion pictures.¹ Every other aspect of filmmaking originated in a different medium than film (photography, art

direction, writing, sound recording), but editing is the one process that is unique to film and the editing process has often had an transformative effect on a film.²

Various techniques of film editing include the 180 Degree Rule, A Roll, B Roll, Cross cutting, Cutaway, Dissolve, Establishing shot, Insert, Key, L cut, Master shot, Point of view shot, Sequence shot, Shot reverse shot, and Wipe. Each of these is described in this document along with related concepts, people, and films.

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¹ This is attributed to Stanley Kubrick, see Alexander Walker’s *Stanley Kubrick Directs*.

² Ralph Rosenblum, *When the Shooting Stops, the Cutting Begins*.

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Origins

Film editing evolved from the process of physically cutting and taping together pieces of film, using a viewer such as an upright device (called a Moviola) or a flatbed device to look at the results. Steenbeck and KEM are two companies that made flatbed editing tables.

When the work print is cut to a satisfactory state, it is then used to make a negative cutting list, which is used by a negative cutter to cut either a single strand negative or multiple rolls). The use of different rolls allows for dissolves to be created on the actual printing machine. Effects such as superimpositions, wipes, and non-standard dissolves require additional steps of re-photography using an optical printer. Then prints can be made from the negative.

Since the film is physically cut and pasted, a 'nonlinear' style of editing evolved. At the workprint stage, strips of film can be placed in any order. This approach is generally considered superior to the strictly linear approach that was necessary in video editing through the 1970s. A video 'cut' is really the copying of scenes from various camera tapes onto a master tape. Before the development of powerful computer systems that could store large amounts of video data for transfer, it was necessary to make the transfer in strictly linear order. Trying to insert a shot between two shots already on the master tape would require re-assembly of the tape from that point to the end of the master tape, a time-consuming process.

Non-Linear Video Editing

The development of digital non-linear editing systems (of which the Avid was the first commercial success) allowed the creation of a virtual workprint represented as digital video. This is much easier to work with than manipulating a physical workprint for picture and magnetic film for sound. Once editing is complete, the non-linear editing system can generate a negative cut list (for film) or edit decision list (for video) in order to perform the final conform of the project.

In recent years, film editing has come to mean what a film editor does, even though the work involved is now generally performed on a computer-based non-linear editing system, such as the Avid or Final Cut Pro.

If the end product is to be a movie made in the traditional manner, the final negative cutting list is produced from the software, and the negative cutting process occurs as before. In other cases, an edit decision list may be generated for a final conform on a high end video editing system. If the video format being used for editing is the same as the final product, then the final conform can be performed on the same editing system. With the emergence of digital cinema, there is now a movement towards all-digital assembly of the final product, with the film being scanned into digital files, the final conform being done with the high resolution digital files, and then masters made in a variety of formats including recording the material back out to film for the manufacture of release prints and archival copies.

180 degree rule

The 180 degree rule is a basic filmmaking technique that suggests that two characters (or other elements) in the same scene should always have the same left/right relationship to each other. In the example of a dialog scene, if A is on the left and B is on the right, then A should be facing right at all times, even when B is off the edge of the frame, and B should always be facing left. Shifting to the other side of the characters on a cut, so that B is now on the left side and A is on the right, will disorient the viewer, and break the flow of the scene.

The rule gets its name from the 180 degree arc that extends from a point on the other side of A

from B, to a point on the other side of B from A, within which A and B will always have the same left/right orientation. The 180 degree rule is also often called “The Line.”

A Roll

A Roll is the primary footage for non-narrative or interview based film, and usually refers to talking heads or footage that directly relates to the moment. See also: B Roll.

B Roll

B roll is the secondary or “safety” footage for a film, typically a documentary. In order to string together two interview clips that were not shot consecutively, an editor will cut away from A Roll to B Roll, while the audio from the A Roll shot plays under. Then when the editor cuts back to the second A Roll shot, it appears as if the concepts were always married together.

This technique of using the cutaway is common to hide zooms in documentary films: the visuals may cut away to B roll footage of what the person is talking about while the A camera zooms in, then cut back after the zoom is complete. The cutaway to B roll footage can also be used to hide verbal or physical tics that the editor and/or director finds distracting: with the audio separate from the video, the filmmakers are freer to excise uhs, sniffs, coughs, and so forth. In fiction film, the technique can be used to indicate simultaneous action or flashbacks, usually increasing tension or revealing information.

“B roll” also refers to footage provided free of charge to broadcast news organizations as a means of gaining free publicity. For example, an auto company might shoot a video of its assembly line, hoping that segments will be used in stories about the new model year.

Battleship Potemkin

Battleship Potemkin is a 1925 silent film directed by Sergei Eisenstein. It is a fictional account meant to glorify a real-life event that occurred in 1905, the Battleship Potemkin uprising, when the crew of a Russian battleship rebelled against their oppressive officers during the Tsarist regime. Potemkin has been called one of the most influential films of all time, and during the 1950s it was named the greatest movie of all time by Britain's *Sight and Sound* magazine

and voted the greatest film of all time at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels, Belgium.

Deliberately written as a revolutionary propaganda film, Eisenstein used this movie to test his theories of “montage.” The revolutionary Russian filmmakers of the Kuleshov school of filmmaking were experimenting with the effect of movies on the audience, and Eisenstein edited the film in a way that would produce the greatest emotional response, so that the viewer would feel sympathy for the rebellious sailors of the battleship Potemkin and hatred for their cruel overlords. In the manner of most propaganda, the story was written in a very simplistic manner, so that the audience could clearly see who they could sympathize with.

Eisenstein's experiment was a success. Potemkin was a hit with Russian audiences, and it was released in limited venues around the world, where audiences responded positively. Even though the movie was made as propaganda, it was still a tremendously entertaining film that made Eisenstein's name as a great filmmaker.

The most famous scene from the movie is the massacre on the Odessa Steps, where ruthless Tsarist soldiers march down an endless flight of stairs in a rhythmic, machine-like fashion, slaughtering a crowd of innocents as they attempt to flee down the stairs before the soldiers reach them. This scene has been endlessly referenced in many motion pictures, with one of the most famous homage sequences occurring in Brian De Palma's *The Untouchables*. It was also spoofed in Woody Allen's *Bananas* and Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*. The Odessa Steps massacre is an entirely fictional creation. Even though it never occurred in real life, the film convinced many viewers that it did indeed happen, and many tourists and travelers to Odessa expressed a desire to see the Odessa Steps.

Independent filmmakers, restricted to limited exhibition outlets in a world of media conglomeration, can take heart from the fact that *Battleship Potemkin*, one of the most renowned films in the history of cinema and containing perhaps the best known sequence in the medium's entire history, was initially seen only by small audiences of film society aficionados and trade unionists. In this sense, it represents one of the most successful instances of niche marketing the

world has ever seen. In its commercial format (on DVD and festival screenings) the film is usually accompanied by pieces of classical music that have been subsequently added. In an attempt to update the film for the modern day, Pet Shop Boys composed a new soundtrack for the film which was performed for the first time in September 2004 at an open-air concert in Trafalgar Square, London with the Dresdner Sinfoniker orchestra.

Continuity Editing

Editing in a manner that shots flows smoothly without jarring compositional or spatial inconsistencies. The approach helps the viewer establish a sense of space within a scene.

Creative geography

Creative geography is a filmmaking technique invented by the early Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov sometime around the 1920s. It is a subset of montage, in which multiple segments shot at various locations and/or times are edited together such that they appear to all occur in a continuous place at a continuous time. Creative geography is used constantly in film and television, for instance when a character walks through the front door of a house shown from the outside, to emerge into a soundstage of the house's interior.

The least-subtle example of creative geography is probably TARDIS on *Doctor Who*, which looks like a police call box on the outside but is a tremendous space ship on the inside. Every viewer knows that the actors are stepping into a police call box on a street corner, and then driving across London to a soundstage that represents the interior (sometimes filming the interior shots much later, or even before the outside shot), but via creative geography, suspension of disbelief, and the occasional character commenting "why, it's bigger on the inside than on the outside!" the transition is made (more or less) seamless.

Cross-cutting

Cross-cutting refers to a technique of film editing in which consecutive shots alternate between two or more actions. It can be found even in early films, such as *The Great Train Robbery*, and is widely employed in present day films.

Generally, cross-cutting is meant to suggest that actions are occurring at the same time. However, it can also be used to gain a deeper significance between two or more events that do not necessarily occur simultaneously. For instance, in D.W. Griffith's *A Corner in Wheat*, the film cross-cuts between the activities of rich businessmen and poor people waiting in line for bread. This is most likely meant to show the contrast between the lifestyles of the rich and poor. In addition, Cross-cutting may be used to overcome special effects limitations. For example, cross-cutting between a man running and a train moving towards the camera, suggests that the man is running from the train. Another dimension of cross-cutting is the rhythm of alternating shots, increasing the rapidity between two different actions may add tension to a scene.

Cutaway

In film, a cutaway is the interruption of a continuously filmed action by inserting a view of something else. It is usually followed by a cut back to the first shot.

Probably its most common uses in dramatic films are to adjust the pace of the main action, to conceal the deletion of some unwanted part of the main shot, or to allow the joining of parts of two versions of that shot. For example, a scene may be improved by cutting a few frames out of an actor's pause; a brief view of some listener can help conceal the break. Or the actor may fumble some of his lines in a group shot; rather than discarding a good version of the shot, the director may just have the actor repeat the lines "in one" and cut to that solitary view when necessary—some actors have fumbled their lines deliberately to get that treatment.

These are journeyman techniques. Cutaways can also be used for reasons of art. One example of a cutaway being used deliberately to break continuity, for comedic effect, appears in François Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player (Tirez sur le pianiste)*: the pianist and his female companion are being followed; she opens her compact and uses it to show him the two gangsters behind them, impossibly large in the reflection.

Cross cutting is a series of cutaways and cutbacks. In news and documentary work, the cutaway is used much as it would be in fiction. On location, there is usually just one camera to

film an interview, and it's usually trained on the interviewee. Often there is only one microphone. After the interview, the interviewer will usually repeat his questions while he himself is being filmed, with pauses as he pretends to listen to the answers. (The comedy *Micki & Maude* shows this process quite accurately). These shots can be used as cutaways. They may be necessary just to ensure that the audience can hear the questions correctly.

Digital cinema

Digital cinema refers to both technological and cultural developments in contemporary cinema. Culturally it refers to new styles, effects and techniques informing the grammar of cinema. Technologically, Digital cinema is the continuation of the art and science of cinema using digital storage and display instead of film. Note that digital cinema is distinct from high definition television and video which has different cultural and industrial origins. In particular, digital films are not dependent on using television or HDTV standards, aspect ratios or frame rates.

Dissolve

In film, a dissolve is a gradual transition from one image to another. Traditionally this effect was created by controlled double exposure from frame to frame using an optical printer to create a new piece of film with the transition from the end of one clip to the beginning of another exposed on it. In analog video the effect is created by interpolating the voltages of the video signal. In digital editing systems the dissolve is performed as a computation of pixel values using one of several algorithms.

Editor

A film editor combines separate takes into a coherent film. It is not a simple matter of tacking the scene inside the house on after the scene of the man walking up to the front door. Editors play a dynamic and creative role in the filmmaking process.

Typically, the editor follows the screenplay as the guide for establishing the structure of the story and then uses their talents to assemble the various shots and takes for greater, clearer artistic effect. There are several editing stages. In the first stage, the editor is supervised by he whom

the industry regards as the real artist of the movie, the director, who spells out his or her vision to the editor. Thus, this first rough cut is often called the "director's cut," though not to be confused with the re-edits some directors have made in past decade or two to their films that were, in their view, improperly edited in the final stages by the studio and its producers. After the first stage, subsequent cuts are supervised by one or more producers, who represent the production company or studio and its investors. Hence, the final cut is the one that most closely represents what the studio wants from the film and not necessarily what the director wants. Because of this, there have been several conflicts in the past between the director and the studio, sometimes leading to the use of the "Alan Smithee" credit signifying disownership or the aforementioned "director's cut" re-issues in subsequent years after the original theatrical releases.

Some directors are also the producers of their films, and, with the approval of the entities funding the film, have a much tighter grip on what makes the final cut than other directors. The most well-known example of a director who lorded over all aspects of his films, with little studio intervention, and worked completely outside of the Hollywood system is Stanley Kubrick.

The use of Alan Smithee and Allen Smithee as pseudonyms was popular between 1968 and 1999 by Hollywood film directors who wanted to be dissociated from a film for which they no longer wanted credit. It was used when the director could prove to the satisfaction of a panel of members of the Directors Guild of America (DGA) and Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers that the film had been wrested from their creative control. The director is also required to keep the reason for the disavowal a secret. The pseudonym cannot be used to hide a director's failures. In 1997, the comedy *An Alan Smithee Film Burn Hollywood Burn* was released, in which a director wants to disown a film but cannot because his real name is Alan Smithee. The publicity around this movie, and especially around the fact that director Arthur Hiller asked and got an Alan Smithee credit for it, made the Directors Guild decide to discontinue using the Alan Smithee credit. The Guild now chooses a pseudonym for each case

separately, rather than re-use a particular pseudonym. This change has not ended the practice of using Smithee entirely. For example, the Canadian film *Fugitives Run* starring David Haselhoff is also credited to Smithee.

Eisenstein, Sergei

Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein (1898–1948) was a Russian director noted for his films *Battleship Potemkin* and *October*, both based loosely on a true story and presented in a realistic fashion, causing an immeasurable influence on early documentary directors owing to his innovative use of montage.

Eisenstein, who was born in Riga, was a pioneer in the use of editing. He believed that film editing was more than merely a method used to link scenes together in a movie; he felt that careful editing could actually be used to manipulate the emotions of the audience. He performed long research into this area, and developed what he called “montage.” His published books *The Film Form* and *The Film Sense* explaining his theories of montage, and they have been highly influential to many directors.

One complaint that the Russian filmmakers had was with the narrative structure of Hollywood filmmaking. They believed that Hollywood cinema is designed to draw you into believing in capitalist ideology. Eisenstein’s solution was to shun narrative structure by eliminating the individual protagonist and tell stories where the action is moved by the group and the story is told through a clash of one image against the next (whether in composition, motion, or idea) so that the audience is never lulled into believing that they are watching something that has not been worked over. Eisenstein himself, however, was accused by the Soviet authorities of “formalist error,” of highlighting form as a thing of beauty instead of portraying the worker nobly. Later filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard would employ radical editing and choice of subject matter, as well as subversive parody, to heighten class consciousness and promote Marxist ideology.

In his initial films, Eisenstein did not use professional actors. His narratives eschewed individual characters and addressed broad social issues, especially class conflict. He used stock characters, and the roles were filled with untrained people from the appropriate class backgrounds.

Eisenstein’s loyalty to the ideals of Communism brought him into conflict with a number of officials in the ruling regime of Josef Stalin. Stalin was very much aware of the power of motion pictures as a propaganda tool, and he considered Eisenstein to be a controversial figure. Eisenstein’s popularity and influence waxed and waned with the success of his films. *Battleship Potemkin* was a popular hit worldwide, and its success was a factor in Eisenstein being selected to direct *October: Ten Days That Shook The World* as part of a grand 10th anniversary celebration of the October Revolution of 1917. However, the film was not nearly as successful as *Potemkin*.

In 1930 Paramount Pictures invited Eisenstein to Hollywood with a \$100,000 contract. He arrived in New York on May 20 and continued to California. Paramount wanted him to make a movie version on Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy* but the disagreements about casting made them part company by October. Josef von Sternberg finished the film.

Eisenstein journeyed to Mexico, where he tried to produce a partly-dramatized documentary entitled *Que Viva Mexico!* Before it was finished, Stalin demanded that Eisenstein return to the Soviet Union. Eisenstein gave the unedited footage into the care of novelist Upton Sinclair who was also the movie’s main financier, on the understanding that it would be sent after Eisenstein to the Soviet Union at the first available opportunity, with the intention that Eisenstein would edit the film in Moscow. It never arrived. The footage was eventually screened in New York in 1933, in a form edited by producer Sol Lesser without Eisenstein’s input, with the title *Thunder over Mexico*. Since then, numerous films have been assembled from Eisenstein’s footage, with varying degrees of fidelity to his intentions.

Eisenstein’s foray into the west made Stalin look upon him with a more suspicious eye, and this suspicion would never be completely erased in the mind of the Stalinist elite. Political red tape forced the cancellation of Eisenstein’s next two film projects, and an official supervisor was appointed to look after Eisenstein during the making of *Alexander Nevsky*.

His film, *Ivan The Terrible, Part I*, presenting Ivan IV of Russia as a national hero, won Stalin's approval (and a Stalin Prize), but the sequel, *Ivan The Terrible, Part II* was not approved of by the government. All footage from the still incomplete *Ivan The Terrible: Part III* was confiscated, and most of it was destroyed (though several filmed scenes still exist today).

Eisenstein suffered a hemorrhage and died at the age of 50. An unconfirmed legend states that Russian scientists preserved his brain and it supposedly was much larger than a normal human brain, which the scientists took as a sign of genius. His films include: *Strike!*, *Battleship Potemkin*, *October: Ten Days That Shook The World*, *The General Line* (a.k.a. *Old And New*), *Que Viva Mexico!* (unfinished), *Bezhin Meadow* (unfinished), *Alexander Nevsky*, *Ivan The Terrible, Part I*, *Ivan The Terrible, Part II*, and *Ivan The Terrible, Part III* (unfinished).

Establishing shot

In film the establishing shot is a short referential section at the beginning of a scene indicating where the remainder of the scene takes place. For example, an exterior shot on location of a large building on a rainy night, followed by an interior shot of a couple talking, implies that the conversation is taking place inside that building. Of course the conversation may in fact have been filmed on a studio set because of budget, permitting, time limitations, etc. Directors will frequently use subtle cues to reinforce the illusion—in this case, the sound of rain plus the occasional sight of it through a window in the background.

Eyeline match

A continuity editing technique of matching the eyelines between two or more characters. For example, in a shot reverse shot situation between two actors, A and B, if actor A looks to the right in shot 1, B will look to the left in shot 2. This establishes a relationship of proximity and spatial continuity between A and B.

Fade

A visual transition between shots or scenes that appears on screen as a dissolve into a solid color (usually black) followed by a brief interval with

no picture. Often fades are used to indicate a change in time and place.

Hegelian dialectic

Hegel's work had a profound influence on early film theory, particularly in terms of Eisenstein's theory of montage. Although Hegel never used such a classification himself, Hegel's dialectic is often described as consisting of three stages: a thesis, an antithesis which contradicts or negates the thesis, and a synthesis embodying what is essential to each. It was claimed that like Socratic dialectic, Hegel's dialectic proceeds by making implicit contradictions explicit: each stage of the process is the product of contradictions inherent or implicit in the preceding stage. For Hegel, the whole of western history is one tremendous dialectic, the largest moments of which chart a progression from self-alienation as slavery to self-unification and realization as the rational, constitutional state of free and equal citizens. The Hegelian dialectic could not be rigorously applied or defended: for any chosen thesis, the selection of any antithesis, other than the logical negation of the thesis was subjective. If the logical negation were used as the antithesis, there was no rigorous way to derive a synthesis. As applied in practice, where an antithesis was selected to suit the users subjective purpose, the resulting "contradictions" were rhetorical, not logical and the resulting synthesis was not rigorously defensible against a multitude of other possible syntheses.

Griffith, D.W.

David Lewelyn Wark Griffith (1875-1948) was an American film director (commonly known as D. W. Griffith) probably best known for his films *The Birth of a Nation*.

Born in Crestwood, Oldham County, Kentucky to Jacob "Roaring Jake" Griffith, a Confederate Army colonel and Civil War hero, D. W.

Griffith has been called the father of film grammar. Scholars no longer dispute that few or any of his "innovations" actually began with him, but still he is given credit for a set of codes that have become the universal back-bone to film language. In the broadest terms, Griffith contributed *Mise-en-Scène* and various film editing techniques to film grammar. That being said, he still used many elements attributed to the "primitive style" of filmmaking that predated classical

Hollywood's continuity system. These techniques include frontal staging, exaggerated gestures, hardly any camera movement, and no point of view shots.

Credit for Griffith's cinematic innovations must be shared with his cameraman of many years, Billy Bitzer. In addition, he worked on many of his best films with the legendary silent star Lillian Gish. Billy Bitzer contributed significantly to the cinematic innovations attributed to Griffith. Prior to his collaboration with Griffith, Bitzer developed early cinematic technologies for the American Mutoscope Company, eventually to become Biograph Studios. Later he was employed by Biograph as a newsreel photographer, where he pioneered the field of matte photography. The apex of Bitzer and Griffith's collaboration came with *The Birth of a Nation*, a film funded in part by Bitzer's life savings. Techniques such as the dissolve, fade, and close-up can trace their creation to Bitzer and the production of *The Birth of a Nation*.

Griffith has been a highly controversial figure. Although popular at the time of its release, his film *The Birth of a Nation* was considered partially responsible for the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States. On December 15, 1999, declaring that Griffith "helped foster intolerable racial stereotypes," The Directors Guild of America's National Board announced it would rename the D.W. Griffith Award, the Guild's highest honor. First given in 1953, its recipients included Stanley Kubrick, David Lean, John Huston, Woody Allen, Akira Kurosawa, John Ford, Ingmar Bergman, Alfred Hitchcock and Griffith's friend Cecil B. DeMille.

Griffith began his career as a hopeful playwright but failed. He then became an actor. Finding his way into the motion picture business, he soon began to direct a huge body of work. Between 1907 and 1913 (the years he directed for the American Biograph Company), Griffith produced an astounding 450 short films. Such output allowed him to experiment with cross-cutting, camera movement, close-ups, and other methods of spatial and temporal manipulation. Convinced that longer films (then called "features") could be financially viable, he became a co-founder of Triangle in 1915, which produced *The Birth of a Nation*, and later, as a reaction to

the criticism *The Birth of a Nation* received, his most ambitious project, *Intolerance*. The film was a flop, and Triangle went bankrupt in 1917, so he went to Artcraft (part of Paramount), then to First National (1919-20). At the same time he founded United Artists, together with Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks.

He was honored on a 10-cent postage stamp by the United States issued May 5, 1975. In addition to *The Birth of a Nation*, which remains the highest-grossing silent film of all time, other important films include *Intolerance*, *Broken Blossoms*, and *America*. His films had a major influence on Russian filmmakers in the 1920s.

Insert

In film, an insert is a shot of part of a scene as filmed from a different angle and/or focal length from the master shot. Inserts cover action already covered in the master shot, but emphasize a different aspect of that action due to the different framing. An insert is different from a cutaway in that the cutaway is of action not covered in the master shot.

There are more exact terms to use when the new, inserted shot is another view of actors: close-up, head shot, two-shot. So the term "insert" is often confined to views of objects—and body parts, other than the head. Thus we would write in a shooting script or shot list: CLOSE-UP of the bank robber, INSERT of his hand quivering above the holster, TWO-SHOT of his friends watching anxiously, INSERT of the clock ticking. Often inserts of this sort are done separately from the main action, by a second-unit using stand-ins.

Inserts and cutaways can both be vexing for directors, as care must be taken to preserve continuity by keeping the objects in the same relative position as in the main take, and having the lighting match.

Jump cut

A cut that creates a lack of temporal continuity by leaving out a part of the action.

Key, Keying

Keying is an informal term for compositing two full frame images together, by discriminating the visual information into values of color and light.

A chroma key is the removal of a color from one image to reveal another “behind” it. A luma key similarly replaces color from an image which falls into a particular range of brightness. This technique is less controllable, but can be used on graphic elements.

A matte key uses three images: the two images that will be composited, and a black-and-white third image that dictates the blending of the two, with white revealing one image, black the other, and grey revealing a blend of the two together.

Generally, the “bottom” image is called the beauty, the image that appears on top is the fill and the discriminating element (chroma, luma or matte) is called the key or matte.

Kuleshov experiment

In the Kuleshov experiment Lev Kuleshov filmed Ivan Mozhukhin, a famous Russian actor, and shots of a bowl of soup, a girl, a teddy bear, and a child’s coffin.³ He then cut the shot of the actor into the other shot; each time it was the same shot of the actor. Viewers felt that the shots of the actor conveyed different emotions suggested by the other stimulus, though each time it was in fact the same shot. Kuleshov used the experiment to indicate the usefulness and effectiveness of film editing. The effect has also been studied by psychologists.⁴

L cut

In cinema, an L cut, also known as a split edit, is a transition from one shot to another, where the picture transition does not occur coincidentally with the audio transition. This is often done to enhance the aesthetics or flow of the film (for example—a conversation between two people can feel like a tennis match without L cuts. L cuts allow the audience to see the reactionary impulse to speak, or the aftermath of speaking rather than simply the act of speaking.) L cuts are also used to hide transitions between scenes.

³This is based on apocryphal accounts, however, the concept is nonetheless powerful and significant.

⁴ Wallbott, H. G. “In and out of context: Influences of facial expression and context information on emotion attributions,” *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 27, 357-369, 1988.

An example of an L cut occurs in the film *The Silence of the Lambs* when Clarice is leaving her first interview with Dr. Lecter. She has just been humiliated and remembers her father arriving home from work one day when she was a child; after he picks her up and spins her around, the camera pans over to a passing truck and tilts up to the sky. Then we hear Clarice’s sobs and cut back to her outside the mental institution, leaning on her car and crying.

Lev Kuleshov

Lev Vladimirovich Kuleshov (1899 - 1970) was an early Russian filmmaker known for his work on film editing and the impact it has on the viewers. He believed that juxtaposing two unrelated images could convey a separate meaning. The Kuleshov Experiment showed the ability of viewers to associate emotions with images. This and other techniques were explored by Kuleshov in his work in film theory. Sergei Eisenstein and many other Soviet filmmakers in the 1920s were influenced by Marxism and felt that the Hegelian dialectic was best displayed in film editing through the Kuleshov Experiment and the development of montage.

Master shot

A master shot is a recording of an entire scene, start to finish, from an angle that keeps all the players in view. It’s ordinarily supplemented with other shots: groupings of two or three of the actors at crucial moments, close-ups of individuals, and so on.

Montage

In motion picture terminology, montage (literally “putting together”) is a form of movie collage consisting of a series of short shots which are edited into a coherent sequence. Viewers infer meaning based on context; Lev Kuleshov, in his Kuleshov Experiment, established that montage is one way of leading the viewer to reach certain conclusions about the action in a film. D. W. Griffith was one of the early proponents of montage, introducing cross-cutting to show parallel action in different locations, and codifying film grammar in other ways as well.

In his early works Sergei Eisenstein regarded montage as a dialectical means of creating notions. By contrasting unrelated shots he tried to

provoke associations in the viewer, which were induced by shocks. In effect the film was aimed at transcending the level of mere presentation of realities and at explaining the conflict character of reality and the reasons underlying this conflict. This form of editing is known as intellectual montage.

Point of view shot

A point of view shot (a.k.a. POV shot) is a short scene in a film that shows what a character is looking at. It is usually established by being positioned between a shot of a character looking at something, and a shot showing the character's reaction (see shot reverse shot). The technique of POV is one of the foundations of film editing

A POV shot need not be the strict point of view of an actual single character in a film. Sometimes the point of view shot is taken over the shoulder of the character, who remains visible on the screen. Sometimes a POV shot is “shared” (“dual” or “triple”), i.e. it represents the joint POV of two (or more) characters. There is also the “nobody POV”, where a shot is taken from the POV of a non-existent character. This often occurs when an actual POV shot is implied, but the character is removed. Sometimes the character is never present at all, despite a clear POV shot, such as the famous “God-POV” of birds descending from the sky in Hitchcock’s *The Birds*.

A POV shot need not be established by strictly visual means. The manipulation of both diegetic and non-diegetic sounds can be used to emphasize a particular character’s POV.

It makes little sense to say that a shot is “inherently” POV; it is the editing of the POV shot within a sequence of shots that determines POV. Nor can the establishment of a POV shot be isolated from other elements of filmmaking—mise-en-scène, acting, camera placement, editing, and special effects can all contribute to the establishment of POV.

Pudovkin, Vsevolod

Vsevolod Illarionovich Pudovkin (1893-1953) was a Russian film director who developed influential theories of montage. Pudovkin’s masterpieces are often contrasted with those of his contemporary Sergei Eisenstein, but whereas

Eisenstein utilized montage to glorify the power of the masses, Pudovkin preferred to concentrate on the courage and resilience of individuals.

Pudovkin published two books on filmmaking, *Film Technique* and *Film Acting*. His films include: *Chess Fever*, *Mechanics of the Brain*, *Mother*, *The End of St. Petersburg*, *Storm Over Asia*, *The Deserter*, *Minin and Pozharsky*, and *Admiral Nakhimov*.

Sequence

A sequence is a series of scenes that comprise a distinct narrative unit, usually connected either by theme, location, or time. The sequence a structural unit in the hierarchy used to describe the structure of films in varying degrees of granularity. From this perspective, a film is comprised of a one or more acts; acts are comprised of a one or more sequences; sequences are comprised of one or more scenes, and scenes may be thought of as being built out of shots.

Sequence shot

A sequence shot is a long take that extends for the duration of an entire scene or sequence. A single shot with no editing. Woody Allen constructs many of his scenes in this manner. Aleksandr Sokurov’s *Russian Ark* provides a dramatic example of a sequence shot: It is a 96 minute film comprised of a single sequence shot, the longest in cinema history as of its release in 2002.

Shot reverse shot

Shot reverse shot is a film technique wherein one character is shown looking (often off-screen) at another character, and then the other character is shown looking “back” at the first character. Since the characters are shown facing in opposite directions, the viewer subconsciously assumes that they’re looking at each other (see the **180 degree rule**). However, shot reverse shot is also often combined with **creative geography** to create the sense that two characters are facing each other, when in fact they’re being filmed in completely different locations or at completely different times.

The Birth of a Nation

The Birth of a Nation is a controversial silent film directed by D.W. Griffith, based on the play

The Clansmen and the book *The Leopard's Spots*, both by Thomas Dixon. It was released in 1915 and has been credited with securing the future of feature length films (any film over an hour in length) as well as solidifying the grammar of film language. The film premiered on February 8, 1915 in Los Angeles, California under the title *The Clansman*, but three months later was retitled with the present title at its world premiere in New York.

The controversy of the film revolves around its premise of a post-Civil War America where the Ku Klux Klan successfully redeems the South from "carpetbaggers" and "mulattos," perceived in the film as evil. Even at the time of the film's release, people vigorously protested the film. However, the success of the film made Griffith a wealthy man. Griffith was surprised by the harsh criticism and his next major project, *Intolerance* tried to address the issues raised. The film has been accused of helping to revive the modern version of the Ku Klux Klan, which, after having been practically non-existent since 1871, was revived on the year of this movie's release.

The Birth of a Nation is the highest grossing silent film in cinema history, taking in more than \$10 million at the box office in 1915. It was the highest grossing film until the Walt Disney Company's 1937 release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. The film was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry. It is ironic that two of the most influential narrative films in history, *Battleship Potemkin* and *The Birth of a Nation*, are pure, deliberate, propaganda whose innovation in terms of film grammar helped convey questionable ideologies so effectively.

The Great Train Robbery

The Great Train Robbery is a 1903 western film. While the film is only twelve minutes long, it is a milestone in film making and is considered one of the earliest films to tell a fictional story. The film used a number of innovative techniques including parallel editing, camera movement and location shooting. Jump-cuts or cross-cuts were a new, sophisticated editing technique. The film also employed some of the first pan shots.

The scenes with the gun pointing at the audience and the train rushing towards the audience had

audiences at the time screaming in fear, then laughing in relief.

The movie was directed and photographed by Edwin S. Porter, a former Thomas Edison cameraperson. The movie starred A.C. Abadie, Bronco Billy Anderson and Justus D. Barnes, although there were no credits. The film has been selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry.

Wipe

A wipe is a gradual spatial transition from one image to another. One image is replaced by another with a distinct edge that forms a shape. A simple edge, an expanding circle, or the turning of a page are examples. It is often acknowledged that using a wipe, rather than a simple cut or dissolve, is a stylistic choice that inherently makes the audience more "aware" of the film as a film, rather than a story. For example, George Lucas is famous for the sweeping use of Wipes in his Star Wars films, which help evoke a kinship to old serialized pulp sci-fi novels and serials.

Wipes also can be used as syntactic tools, but are often frowned on. Some examples include the page peel, the matrix wipe and clock wipe. A page peel simulates the effect of a page being turned. A matrix wipe is a patterned transition between two images. The matrix wipe can be various patterns such as a grid, stars, etc. The clock wipe is a wipe that sweeps a radius around the center point of the frame to reveal the subsequent shot, like the sweeping hands of an analog clock. Because of this similarity, it is often used to indicate that time has passed between the previous shot and the next shot.

Further Reading

Murch, Walter. *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing*, Silman-James Press, 1995. A collection of short essays that emerged from a series of lectures given in Sydney, Australia in 1988 and UCLA in 1990. Walter Murch is one of the most influential and innovative editors working with both pictures and sound.

Oldham, Gabriella. *First Cut: Conversations With Film Editors*, University of California Press, 1995. This book consists of inter-

views with film editors discussing the art and craft of editing both documentaries and narrative films

Ondaatje, Michael. *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film*, Knopf, 2002. The conversations in this book provide insights into the editing process and the progression of Murch's amazing career as a sound and picture editor.

Pepperman, Richard D. & Paul Norlen. *The Eye Is Quicker: Film Editing: Making a Good Film Better*, Michael Wiese Productions, 2004. Covers the basics in a delightful to read form. The book is full of anecdotes and specific examples and written by someone who has a tremendous passion for teaching.

Reisz, Karel & Gavin Millar. *Technique of Film Editing*, Focal Press, 2nd edition, 1995. The definitive and classic text on the subject of film editing remains a favorite of film students year after year since it was first published in 1953. The original text remains unchanged in this new edition from Focal Press.

Rosenblum, Ralph & Robert Karen. *When the Shooting Stops, the Cutting Begins: A Film Editor's Story*, Da Capo Press, 1986. This book consists of several accounts of the editor's role in a number of films including *Annie Hall* and *The Pawnbroker*.

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