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Non-Linear Video Editing I

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<div align="center">Theoretical Approaches to Film Editing: Analysis Paper</div>

The opening scene of *Jaws* (1975), directed by Steven Spielberg, is a masterclass in building suspense and fear, making it one of the most iconic sequences in film history. Running just over four and a half minutes, this scene establishes the lurking threat of the shark without ever showing it, relying instead on expert editing and a haunting score. It's so effective that it has been credited with amplifying a worldwide fear of swimming in the ocean. This scene is a prime example of Rhythmic and Metric Editing, Montage Theory, Discontinuity Editing and Continuity Editing, all of which enhance the narrative's tension and coherence. Together, these editing styles, along with John Williams' chilling score, craft an unforgettable opening that grips the audience from the start.

In the opening sequence of *Jaws*, the film fades from black into an underwater shot of the ocean, with the score gradually increasing in tempo and volume. As the camera pans through the ocean, we see the opening title card and some credits. As a viewer, you are led to believe this is the perspective of a shark underwater. This opening scene consists of one long shot lasting about 30 seconds, with the camera continually moving. After the crescendo of the tense music, the film immediately cuts to a shot of teenagers on the beach under the moonlight, where more credits are shown. There is no tense music in this scene, only the sound of someone playing the harmonica and teenagers laughing at their moonlit bonfire party. The scene also consists of one long shot with no cuts, lasting about 50 seconds. The camera pans over the partygoers, giving the scene a

calming, warm feeling that sharply contrasts with the suspenseful music from the earlier underwater shots. This is an example of the Montage editing technique, which uses contrasting images to create powerful emotional or intellectual effects, allowing the audience to feel an "explosion" of emotions from the visual clash.

After the camera reaches the end of the group of teenagers, it focuses on a boy looking at a girl, who we later learn is named Chrissie Watkins. The film cuts to a close-up of Chrissie as the two lock eyes and stare at each other. The film then cuts to an establishing shot, showing how close the party is to the water. This shot lingers for about 20 seconds as Chrissie looks at the beach, stands up, and heads toward the water. The boy follows. These long shots with little cutting help establish a relaxed and calm feeling for the viewer, again starkly contrasting the opening underwater scene. This is Montage theory at its finest. For the rest of the opening, the cuts gradually become faster, building up the tension in the same way as the initial underwater shot.

The next scene shows Chrissie and the unnamed boy running along the beach. The boy chases after Chrissie as they try to undress while running toward the water, ready to swim. The cuts are much faster here, cutting between medium shots of the two teenagers running, as the tension and pace steadily rise. This is a great example of Continuity Editing, as the action remains easy to follow despite the increasing pace. I counted seven cuts in 30 seconds before Chrissie entered the water, a sevenfold increase compared to the first two opening shots. The use of the 180 degree rule helps maintain spatial coherence, and the similar framing and color correction between the cuts ensure the viewer stays grounded in the scene.

The first couple of shots in the second half of the opening scene are wide, showing how vast the ocean is compared to the lone swimmer. Throughout the second half, the film cuts back and forth

between Chrissie swimming in the water and the boy sitting on the beach. At first, the tone between these shots are consistent. We have a girl swimming in the serene ocean alone and a boy sitting on the beach as the sun sets, two relatively calming and equally toned shots. Only one of these people's tones will stay the same throughout the opening scene. As Chrissie swims farther into the dark ocean, the editing pace subtly shifts. The cuts become even shorter and more frequent, signaling growing unease. The shots also become much more close and intimate, further building the tension of the scene.

This change in rhythm aligns with the introduction of John Williams' now iconic two note score. The music begins softly, its rhythm slow and deliberate, matching the steady underwater shots from the shark's perspective. The film cuts back and forth between Chrissie's perspective above water and the shark's perspective underwater. I see this as an example of Discontinuity Editing, as the camera moves around space, showing two contrasting perspectives in a scene. This could also be considered Montage Editing, as the two perspectives are vastly different and can offer differing emotional responses depending on the viewer's perspective.

As the unseen predator closes in, both the score and the editing accelerate. This is the last "long" cut before the shark attacks, with a 10-second-long shot of the shark rising to the surface of the water toward Chrissie, the last calm before the storm. Then, the film, the music, and the editing all hit a crescendo. When the shark attacks, the editing becomes frantic, with rapid cuts between Chrissie's panicked thrashing, and the churning water. This rhythmic acceleration mirrors Chrissie's rising terror, pulling the audience into the chaos of the moment.

Throughout this horrifying scene, the film keeps cutting back to the boy on the beach, now lying down and enjoying the sunset. This is once again an example of Montage Editing, jarring the

viewer into two very contrasting shots. I think this also exemplifies the horror of the shark attack shots, as the viewer has something calm to keep comparing the horrifying attack shots to. As the shark attacks Chrissie one final time, she lets out one last scream and is pulled into the water, her voice silenced. Along with this, the music also cuts out, but the shot doesn't cut as soon as she is pulled under the water for the final time. The shot lingers just a little longer, giving off a strangely calm feeling. With her being dragged underwater and the music cutting out, it gives me the same feeling that Montage Editing does, without cutting away. We then cut to one last shot of the boy on the beach, still lying there calmly, not knowing the horrors of what just happened. For the final shot of the opening scene, we cut back to the ocean, where Chrissie was horrifically attacked. The ocean, where just seconds ago was the setting of a terrifying attack, is once again calm, as we hear the soothing sounds of the waves and the echoing sound of a bell on a buoy. We fade into the next day and the first shot of the protagonist, starting the movie off with a bang.

The opening of *Jaws* exemplifies the enduring power of Rhythmic and Metric Editing, Montage Theory, and Continuity Editing in shaping cinematic experiences. By carefully controlling the tempo of the cuts and synchronizing them with the score, Spielberg crafts a scene that is both technically brilliant and emotionally gripping. In this sequence, Spielberg's rhythmic precision ensures that the audience experiences the full intensity of the suspense, setting the stage for the terror that follows.

Reflecting on the effectiveness of these editing choices, it's clear how they enhance the overall experience of *Jaws*. The editing builds tension with a careful balance of rhythm and pacing, intensifying the suspense as the viewer is drawn deeper into the narrative. From the slow, almost meditative pacing in the beginning to the frantic cutting during the shark's attack, the editing is essential in guiding the audience's emotions. It doesn't just support the action, it creates

suspense. The contrast between the serene beach scenes and the impending danger amplifies the horror of the shark's unseen approach.

The broader implications of editing theory in contemporary filmmaking are vast. The principles demonstrated in *Jaws*, such as rhythmic pacing, montage theory, and continuity editing are still incredibly relevant today, even as they have evolved with new technology and storytelling techniques. Modern films still rely on the same fundamental editing techniques to build tension, manipulate time, and guide emotional responses. As editing techniques continue to evolve, the foundations laid by films like *Jaws* remain central to understanding how editing can shape the emotional experience of the audience.

In conclusion, the opening scene of *Jaws* is a testament to the effectiveness of specific editing theories and techniques. Through deliberate pacing and rhythm, Spielberg immerses the audience in a harrowing experience that lingers long after the scene ends. This analysis highlights the importance of rhythmic precision in cinematic storytelling, demonstrating its power to evoke profound emotional responses and elevate the overall impact of a film.

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