CIN105
Week 6 – Editing (May 22, 2025)

Housekeeping
Assignment 1 – Prompt has been posted. We will walk through the prompt in detail during tutorial.

Lecture
Today we move onto our third component of film style – editing.

At the outset of any discussion of film editing, it's important to consider the idea that of all the formal components that comprise cinema – mise en scene, cinematography, editing, sound – **editing is the most unique** to film as an art form.

SLIDE

Editing governs the **relation of one shot to the next** – and it can be considered as both an **additive** and a **subtractive** process.

It's additive in the sense that it strings diverse shots together, creating a chain of images. And it is subtractive because it allows each new shot in a film to replace the one that precedes it, such that new meaning formation is constantly happening on the basis of the images changing.

And because editing belongs to the work of post-production, it's a creative process that does not affect the actual construction of the image, at least most of the time – today post-production work does often involve altering the look and feel of an image, which complicates this division.

That said, generally, unlike mise-en-scène, it has no influence on the material chosen to appear on the screen, and unlike cinematographic properties, it does not control the way such material is rendered.

Instead, what editing does **influence is the structure of the material presented.**

Editing forges **links between individual images**, which determines the larger context -- be it a narrative context, rhetorical context, or aesthetic context – in which those individual images are embedded and from which they thus derive meaning.

How is meaning constructed through editing? Well…

One good place to start our discussion is with the **Kuleshov effect**. Here is a fairly famous clip of a fairly famous director, Alfred Hitchcock, discussing this idea.

CLIP

SLIDE

This theory of image juxtaposition originated with Lev Kuleshov, a Soviet filmmaker and intellectual, who, as Hitchcock explains in the clip, experimented with the **expressive qualities** of film editing – he was among a group of Soviet filmmakers including Sergei Eisenstein who stressed the artistic and meaning-making qualities of cutting – to legitimize film as an art form.

The "Kuleshov effect" suggests that editing can create, in the mind of viewer, certain inferences and implications that may not be present at all in the original shot.

So how this works is that you take a shot of a person's face which, on first glance, appears neutral. You then intercut the shots of the individual's face

with various other subjects, and observe how the neutral expression appears to transform, depending on what the audience assumes they are looking at.

In Kuleshov's experiment, audiences read the neutral expression as one of hunger when paired with a shot of a bowl of soup. A rather morbid image of a deceased child in the second row transformed the expression to one of mournfulness for the audience. Finally, a woman lounging on a couch made the expression seem like one of desire.

Now, the Kuleshov effect can and has been complicated and contested, but the key idea here is that these inferences are entirely based on editing done in post-production, they have very little to do with the choices made by the filmmakers during production in terms of mise-en-scene or cinematography. This idea is meant to illustrate the degree to which the meaning of every individual shot in a film is entirely dependent on every other.

Images can have intrinsic meaning, but they also have meaning that is associational, and this means that the intrinsic meaning can and often is dynamic, it can change based on context

PAUSE

So with that idea established and in the back of our mind, we're now going to begin to explore the various types of transitions that are regularly used by filmmakers. Then, we'll talk generally about the kinds of relationships that can be forged between shots when employing those transitions. And then we'll look at the system of continuity editing, which is the normative editing system established by Hollywood during the studio period, and we will also consider its alternatives.

Again, lots of new terms to memorize, but maybe not quite as many as last class.

SLIDE – The Birds

The most common transition between one shot to another is – obviously – a **straight cut** (otherwise referred to as a cut).

SLIDE – Play clip The Birds

Now, other types of transition are possible, which move from one shot to another more gradually.

SLIDE – Dead Man

For one, there is the **fade-in and fade-out.**

In the typical fade-out, an image darkens at the end of a particular shot until it is black

And in the typical fade-in the reverse occurs: a shot begins in darkness and then lightens. A fade-out need not be followed by a fade-in, but it often is…

SLIDE – Dissolve - CLIP Picnic at Hanging Rock

Another types of transition is a dissolve:

Dissolves are a variation on a fade out-fade in combination, one where the screen never darkens completely but instead the two successive shots seem to fade into each other

In the case of dissolves, the end of the first shot lingers as the next shot begins to appear such that there is a **brief moment of superimposition**.

SLIDE – Star Wars

Yet another type of transition is a **wipe**, which is a somewhat more self-conscious form of transition

In it, the second shot replaces the first one by way of a boundary line that moves across the screen in some way.

SLIDE – Dracula

The final and least common type of transition worth noting today is the **iris-in** and **iris-out**.

In the iris-in, the image steadily increases from a pin point to a visible masked image. In the iris-out, the process is reversed.

SLIDE: Dimensions of Film Editing

Now that we've listed the types of edits that a filmmaker can employ, let's think about the kind of relationship that a filmmaker can create between two linked shots in and through those edits.

SLIDE

Editing creates relationships between successive shots in four ways: **graphically, rhythmically, spatially, and temporally.**

SLIDE: Graphic Relations
In a nutshell, the graphic relationship between two shots depends on how they work together or against each other visually.

The graphic properties of a shot are a function of the shot's pictorial qualities and composition and thus include its lighting and darkness, colors and tones, lines and shapes, volumes and depth, movement and stasis.

Editing can deliberately **emphasize similarities in graphic relations** from one shot to the next in order to create a smooth transition OR it can **emphasize differences so as to produce a jarring one**.

Often, however, films play with a combination of similarity and difference OR repetition and variation.

CLIP of *Strangers on a Train*

What do we see at play in this clip?

SLIDE

- We see A Play on repetition with difference: graphic contrast so as to posit difference but graphic similarity that suggests the inevitability of a meeting)

Every shot has a graphic relation of some sort to the shot that succeeds it and that relation can be described by way of the vocabulary that we have amassed so far -- a vocabulary that employs terms like saturated and desaturated colors, low-key and high-key lighting, static and moving camera.

SLIDE

But there is one new term that you all need to learn this week that speaks to a very specific kind of graphic relation between two shots: that is **graphic match**.

What a graphic match does is deliberately **emphasize the graphic relation constructed through editing.**

And the way it does so is by taking some prominent aspect of shot #1, typically a character's or object's position or direction of movement, and

then replicating it in in some way in shot #2.

CLIP: from Seven Samurai (match based on composition, camera position, movement)

CLIP: and Dracula (match based on composition)

As is evident from these examples, especially the second of them, graphic matching, if taken to extremes, can result in an almost abstract stylization.

For this reason, the most common place it is found is in musical numbers, certain avant-garde films, or music videos.

SLIDE

Rhythmic Relations

Whereas graphic relations involve the relationships between the characteristics of the material photographed, rhythmic relations are more directly **affected by the duration of shots.**

In other words, the rhythmic relations between shots determine a **film's tempo and pace**. A series of relatively brief shots will create a quick pace…while a string of long takes will more likely produce a languorous effect.

One variety of editing that depends upon a very particular rhythmic relationship between shots is accelerated editing, wherein increasingly diminished shot duration creates a sense of heightened tension and mounting excitement.

PLAY CLIP – The Birds

SLIDE: Spatial Relations

We will be talking more about the spatial relations between shots when we tackle the continuity editing system later on, but for right now what I want to emphasize is the fact that editing allows for the **creation of entirely fictional spaces** that have no correlation with reality, that do not exist in reality.

Kuleshov called this "**creative geography**," that is the assembling of shots through montage that create the impression of single place at a single time, though the various shots may have been shot at wildly different times and places

Through cinematic editing practices, it's possible to construct an impossible, imaginary space that exists only in the viewer's mind.

One very common way in which filmmakers exploit "creative geography" is by editing together interior and exterior spaces so as to make them appear contiguous when, in fact, they are not.

In other words, very often films will feature, say, exterior shots of an actual apartment building, where its protagonist supposedly resides.

But then it will film all the interior shots of that protagonist at home on a studio stage.

You never see a single shot that leads you from the street outside into the actual apartment interior. Instead you are led to assume that the two spaces (exterior and interior) are continuous through editing.

CLIP from North by Northwest

SLIDE: Note the discrepancy between the interior and exterior shot

SLIDE: The final type of editing relation we want to consider is
Temporal Relations

Just as editing can help to construct the viewer's sense of a film's space, so does it play an essential role in determining **how time is presented.**

While most films present events in a linear, progressive sequence, it is not unusual for moments from the past or even the future to be inserted into a sequence of events from the present.

The interruptions of the normal temporal order are known as flashbacks or flashforwards, depending on which movement in time they represent.

While **flashbacks and flashforwards** demonstrate how the order of temporal progression can be altered through editing, editing can **also distort the duration of temporal progression.**

As was discussed in our week on narrative, rarely do films present their entire narrative in the actual time it would take for that narrative to occur.

Instead films almost always rely on a compression of the narrative's timeframe.

Elliptical editing is a technique that typically **eliminates certain visual information** so as to streamline its story.

A I mentioned back when we were discussing narrative and narration, material considered unimportant is often eliminated from a film -- so as to keep the viewer engaged

SLIDE

One technique that quite frequently connotes a passage of time and thus a temporal ellipsis is the fade out/fade in, as saw in the Dead Man clip.

Another technique that produces an ellipsis and thus constitutes a type of elliptical editing is a jump cut.

What a jump cut does is join two shots that are extremely similar in their subject and composition, so much so in fact that it seems as if a fragment of footage has been removed from a single continuous shot in order to produce two or more shots.

Jump cuts are jarring, they feel like someone has clipped a piece of film out from the middle of an action – which is often what happened. They are called jump cuts because, in the ellipses of the action, it can look like the characters jump from one position to the next abruptly.

Jump cuts are actually quite common today and you are probably familiar with them, because they are used frequently by online content creators, especially vloggers and video essayists, as a way to compress time or to eliminate dead air.

PLAY CLIP

PLAY CLIP

SLIDE

Less common is the flip side of this procedure, where a film deliberately extends the duration of an event so that it takes longer than it normally would.
One method to achieve this is by shooting the action in slow motion, which we discussed last week.

Another way, however, is called **overlapping editing**, which involves cutting together a series of similar shots which stretch out the action.

In a rare variation on overlapping editing, an event actually may be repeated in more than one identical shots.

SHOW clip from Ivan the Terrible

SLIDE

One other way that editing profoundly shapes temporal relations is through a technique called **cross-cutting (or parallel editing).**

This entails cutting between two or more lines of action happening in different spaces, and, in doing so, suggests through temporal implication that these lines of action are happening **simultaneously.**

CLIP from Written on the Wind

SLIDE

Another temporal technique is the Montage Sequence, which Bordwell and Thompson define as a segment of a film that summarizes a topic or compresses a passage of time into brief symbolic or typical images.

Frequently, dissolves, fades, superimpositions, and wipes are used to link the images in a montage sequence.

There's a great example in Orson Welles' Citizen Kane, in which the slow dissolution of a marriage is depicted rapidly through a series of short discussions around the breakfast table linked by brief dissolves to a swirling abstract image. When the sequence finally ends, the camera tracks back to reveal that the distance between the two characters has been made material.

PLAY CLIP

PAUSE

Now that we've covered the types of relations between shots that editors frequently work with or exploit to create meaning, we're going to move on to the next part of this week's material and learn about what is called the continuity editing system, as well as some alternatives to this system.

This system involves a set of conventions that have been developed since the 1910s – and which are still firmly in place today.

This system or set of conventions is associated most closely with Hollywood cinema, especially classical Hollywood cinema of the studio era.

And for this reason, almost all of our examples of it will come from that period BUT it is evident in world cinema at large as well – the influence of Hollywood during the extremely formative period from 1910 to 1930 or so meant that many of these conventions became norms in commercial filmmaking the world over.

So, let's talk about the continuity part of this system.

SLIDE

We can see why this system is associated with continuity by understanding its goal: to minimize the disruptive potential of cutting.

But what exactly is the "disruptive potential of cutting"?

Remember that at the beginning of lecture I mentioned that editing is not only additive insofar as it strings diverse shots together, but also subtractive since it always involves **taking away an image we are in the midst of**

watching.

SLIDE

This process of taking away can be quite disruptive. It can make us aware of what is missing – and it can pull us out of the narrative experience. It's easy to see why filmmakers would want to avoid disruptions.

In order to think through the alternative to disruption, let's refine our description of the goal of continuity editing by expanding on it a bit.

SLIDE

Continuity editing strives to emphasize coherence over fragmentation and continuity over interruption.

SLIDE

In general, the way that continuity editing achieves this goal is by doing the following:

First, by modeling itself after our **way of experiencing the world;**

Second, by ensuring that spectators are given all the information they need to **orient themselves comfortably in the diegesis** (or the world of the film);

And, finally, by **privileging a film's chain of cause and effect events** over any of its other aspects

Another, more all-encompassing way of saying this is the following: continuity editing achieves its goal by **emphasizing the smooth flow of action from one shot** to the next.

But how exactly does one do that?

Let's think about this in relation to the four ways that we now know shots relate to each other**: graphically, rhythmically, spatially, and temporally**

SLIDE

In terms of **graphic relations**, the best way to ensure continuity across multiple shots is by keeping the general **look of those shots consistent** -- their range of tones, their lighting, their composition.

SLIDE

In terms of **rhythmic relations**, the best way to minimize the disruptive potential of editing is to ensure that **each shot is on screen long enough** for spectators to absorb all relevant information on display.

If a filmmaker follows this rule, a kind of regularized rhythm will prevail over the course of a film…where shot scale correlates with shot duration.

What I mean by this is that long shots, for example, will last longer than close-ups since long shots tend to be more detailed, more packed with information.

SLIDE

In terms of **spatial relations**, the best way to ensure continuity is by creating **spaces that are coherent and consistent.**

SLIDE

Finally, in terms of **temporal relations**, it is to manipulate the order in

which events occur and the duration of those events to cause as little confusion as possible.

When manipulation of temporality does occur, by way of, say, a flashback or elliptical editing, continuity editing typically signals such manipulation clearly so that it doesn't take the audience by surprise.

One way of signaling is by relying on conventional meanings for various types of transitions: for instance, the dissolve is often used to imply a fairly small gap of time left out, while a fade-out suggests a larger one.

Similarly, while temporal reordering is allowed, it will usually not occur with great frequency, and when, say, a flashback is introduced, there will be strong cues to indicate as much.

SLIDE: Spatial Relations

To illustrate continuity principles perhaps most clearly, lets focus for a second on the way the system creates space in a manner that is coherent.

The central rule controlling the continuity editing system's spatial relationships is called the 180 degree rule, and it dictates that a filmmaker retain and respect what is called the 180 degree line or the axis of action at all times.

SLIDE

This involves drawing an imaginary line through the realm of filmed action and then ensuring that the camera always stays on one side of that line.

It can take up any number of positions on that side of the line.

What it can't do, however, is cross that line. Why?

Well, as long as the camera stays on one side of 180 degree line, certain indicators of spatial continuity will remain intact. **Direction of movement** remains consistent, **position of figures** are consistent, **spatial markers** are consistent.

If the camera crosses over the line, however, all of those things I just mentioned will be thrown into flux, leading to possible disorientation.

(Explain dialogue example and why it would be disorienting)

SLIDE

Once the axis of action is established, then the camera sets out to analyze space as systematically as possible so to ensure that the viewer has his/her bearings at all times.

What this means is that scenes typically start with an extreme long shot or a long shot that clearly establishes the space at hand and the configuration of the characters inhabiting that space --predictably enough, that type of shot is called an establishing shot.

Then, on the heels of the establishing shot space is broken down into smaller, more narratively significant regions as the action progresses

PLAY FIRST CLIP FROM White Heat

Very often, at the end of a scene this shot pattern is reversed.

SLIDE: SECOND CLIP FROM White Heat

Now, in between the establishing and re-establishing shots of a space that bookends a scene are a series of shots that fragment that space, but <u>always</u> in

a way that makes sense to the viewer.

SLIDE

One way that the relative position of figures is established and then maintained is through the control of **eyelines** (or lines of sight)

Characters look in a particular direction consistently, thereby confirming their spatial relation to other figures, even when those figures are offscreen.

SHOW EXAMPLE FROM T-Men

Toward the end of that clip you saw the employment of two other devices are central to the continuity editing system.

SLIDE

The first of these is a procedure called **shot/reverse shot editing**, which is very frequently used in scenes involving dialogue or some other variety of exchange between two parties

For example, as characters converse they come to constitute the ends of the axis of action as the camera cuts back and forth between them (sometime over the other person's shoulder).

SLIDE: SHOW THIRD CLIP FROM White Heat for another example (notice the symmetry of the shots)

SLIDE

The other thing evident in these two shot-reverse shot sequences is the use of what's called **eyeline matches**.

The characters not only face each other at either end of the axis, but they also look at each other, such that their eyelines meet.

In the case of shot-reverse shot sequences the eyeline matches are often mutual, but sometimes eyeline matches involve a single human and an object that s/he is looking at.

SHOW EXAMPLE from Bonnie and Clyde (also know as a glance-object cut)

SLIDE

The other thing worth noting about eyeline matches is that they also help create expectations on the part of the spectator, expectations that editing can then fulfill.

In other words, when we see a character looking, especially when that character reacts visibly to what she sees, we want to know what she is looking at.

So when the film cuts to the object or subject of her gaze, we get some kind of satisfaction from it. And we barely notice the edit since the film has given us exactly what we have been led to want.

In an instance like this, from the first clip we watched today (which we also used as an example of a straight cut), the implication of the cut is that what we see is from this character's point of view – so we can call the second shot a point of view shot. She looks, and we cut to what she looks at.

SLIDE

Another way in which films organized by continuity editing mask their cuts,

rendering them as invisible or unnoticeable, is by involving us in action that continues across a cut

This strategy is known as a match on action, and involve cutting in the middle of some obvious action taken on the part of the actor. In the second shot, the actor seamlessly continues the action. Because our eye follows the character's action rather than the transition from one shot to the next, the match on action helps to disguise the existence of the cut altogether.

SHOW CLIP FROM His Girl Friday

This is facilitated by the retention of the direction of the action from the first shot to the second.

SLIDE: Alternatives to Continuity Editing

All this said, obviously, even though continuity editing principles dominate the ways in which editing functions in most films, there is no reason such principles must be used.

Some forms of cinema have deliberately avoided continuity editing, either deliberately and consistently (as in many avant-garde films and those made by Soviet filmmakers in the 1920's) or on isolated occasion and for special effect (as in films by French New Wave directors in the 1950's and 60's)

Given what we know already, a filmmaker could provide an alternative to continuity editing by any one of the following approaches, either in isolation or combination:

-First, perhps by emphasizing discontinuity from shot to shot on the level of graphic qualities

SHOW CLIP FROM The Passion of Joan of Arc

SLIDE

Or, perhaps, a film may intentionally play with rhythmic relations to a degree we find disorienting.

CLIP from October

SLIDE

Or, maybe, the filmmaker will intentionally disrupt spatial relations, confusing our sense of space on purpose for some reason, perhaps by intentionally breaking the 180 degree rule

-SHOW EXAMPLE FROM Tokyo Story

SLIDE

Finally, a filmmaker may intentionally disrupt temporal relations, perhaps by scrambling the order of events purposefully so as to produce deliberate discontinuity

SHOW CLIP

In all of these cases the filmmakers have broken the "rules" of continuity editing, but they have done so on purpose. Discerning that purpose may take some work of analysis on our part, but these are all talented filmmakers who we can assume are aware of these rules, and proceed to disrupt them anyway.

The point is these are choices made by editors and filmmakers for particular effects. Why break these rules?

The answer could be as simple as: to create some kind of disjunctive effect. If the continuity system is designed to hide the artifice of a film as much as possible, such that you are immersed and not thinking about the ways the film is a highly constructed object, then perhaps the idea behind breaking these rules is to intentionally draw your attention to the ways in which a film IS constructed.

SLIDE

This is going to be the case in today's film, which at many different moments intentionally draws attention to its own artifice. Let's take a ten minute break, and then I will say more about why that may be, and what I want you to watch out for more specifically.