

Editing Workshop

Key Terms & Concepts¹

- What is editing?
Editing is the coordination of one shot with the next shot.

- Editing considerations:
 - **graphic** relations between shots
In a “graphic match,” an editor links two shots that look visually similar, though they show different things. The movie Aliens (James Cameron, 1986) matched the curve of a character’s face with the curve of the Earth’s surface, for instance.

 - **rhythmic** relations between shots
Music videos are often “cut to the beat,” meaning the rhythm of the music determines the timing of the edits.

 - **spatial** relations between shots
Editing permits filmmakers to juxtapose any two points in space and thus imply some kind of relationship between them.

 - **temporal** relations between shots
In narrative filmmaking, editing allows the filmmaker to control the flow and duration of the film’s story as it moves forward (or, in flashbacks, backwards) in time.

- Types of edits:
 - **fades** (*fade-out gradually darkens the end of a shot to black; fade-in lightens a shot from black*)
 - **dissolves** (*briefly superimposes the end of shot A and the beginning of shot B*)
 - **wipes** (*shot B replaces shot A by means of a boundary line moving quickly across the screen*)
 - **cuts*** (**the most common edit; splices together two shots so that the change appears instantaneous*)

- Continuity editing: techniques and terms:
 - **180° line** (or “axis of action”)
The axis along which the scene’s main action takes place (see handout diagramming 180° system). In continuity editing, the camera typically does not cross the 180° line during a scene.

 - **establishing shot**
Shot that delineates the overall setting/space of a scene

¹ Adapted from David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 8th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008), ch. 6.

- **shot/reverse shot**
A pattern in which the first shot shows one end of the 180° line, followed by a second shot showing the other end of the line; commonly used for conversations between two characters
- **match-on action**
Carries a movement across the break between two shots. For instance, shot A shows a character (face to the camera) entering a room and walking towards another character sitting at a desk. Shot B shows the first character (back to the camera) in front of the second character's desk, having finished walking.
- **reestablishing shot**
Shot reestablishing the overall space of a scene; often used as part of an establishing shot/closer-up action/reestablishing shot pattern
- Alternatives to continuity editing:
 - **montage editing** (**Kuleshov effect)
Editing style in which discontinuities between shots are emphasized; pioneered by the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s

***Note that formal techniques can however cross political and ideological borders: Some editing elements first theorized in 1920s Russia, such as the Kuleshov effect, had been used in early American cinema, and remain common in continuity editing.*

(The Kuleshov effect is when any series of shots prompts the spectator to infer a spatial whole on the basis of seeing only portions of that space. Say, for instance, shot A shows a man's face and shot B shows a painting. Viewers will tend to infer that the man is looking at the painting, even in the absence of an establishing shot showing both the man and the painting.)
 - **jump cut**
Combines two shots of the same subject that are similar enough to create a "jump" effect on the screen (almost as if there were fast-forwarding between the shots). Tends to draw attention to the edit itself. Famously used in Breathless (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)
 - **tracking shot**
A continuous shot that follows the same subject without edits. The film Russian Ark (Alexander Sokurov, 2013) is composed of a single 96-minute tracking shot.
 - **"cutting on both sides"** (breaking the 180° rule)
When the camera crosses the 180° line. Fairly uncommon; happens in some films by Jacques Tati and Yasujiro Ozu
 - **rapid-fire cutting**
When the speed of the editing overtakes our sense of narrative continuity. Common in contemporary action films and some music videos