EDITING

ESSENTIAL CONCEPTS

OUTLINE OF KEY AREAS

1. DEFINITION

2. DIMENSIONS

3. CONTINUITY EDITING

4. ALTERNATIVES TO CONTINUITY EDITING

1. DEFINITION

- The coordination of one shot with the next
- Shot:
  - One or more exposed frames in a series on a continuous length of film stock.
  - An uninterrupted run of the camera
- These joins of shots can be of different sorts

  fade-out

  fade-in

  dissolve

  wipes

Types of joins

- Fade-out: gradually darkens the end of a shot to black

- Fade-in: lightens a shot from black

- Dissolve: briefly superimposes the end of shot A and the beginning of shot B

- Wipe: shot B replaces shot A by means of a boundary line moving across the screen.

  Both images are briefly on the screen at the same time, but they do not blend, as in a dissolve

Types of cuts - cont

- In the production process
  fades, dissolves, wipes
  are **optical effects**

- They are typically executed in the laboratory

- The most common means of joining two shots is
  the cut

2. DIMENSIONS OF EDITING

- GRAPHIC

- RHYTHMIC

- SPATIAL

- TEMPORAL

2. DIMENSIONS OF EDITING - cont

- Editing offers the filmmaker four basic areas of choice and control:

1. Graphic relations between shot A and shot B
2. Rhythmic relations between shot A and shot B
3. Spatial relations between shot A and shot B
4. Temporal relations between shot A and shot B

Graphic relations between shot A & shot B

- Graphic may be edited to achieve smooth continuity or abrupt contrast
- The filmmaker may link shots by graphic similarities, making a graphic match
- Editing need not be graphically continuous
- Graphically discontinuous editng can be more noticeable – clash from shot to shot, e.g. *Citizen Kane* (1941, Orson Welles), *Night and Fog* (1956, Alain Resnais)

Rythmic relations between shot A & shot B

- When the filmmaker adjusts the length of shots in relation to one another, he or she is controlling the rhythmic potential of editing

- Rhythm in cinema includes many factors – principally accent, beat and tempo

Spatial relations between shot A & shot B

- Editing usually serves not only to control graphics & rhythm, but to construct film space as well

- Editing permits the filmmaker to relate any two points in space through similarity, difference, or development

The Kuleshov effect

- The possibility of spatial manipulation was examined by the Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov

- During the 190s, Kuleshov shot and cut "experiments" in constructing spatial relations by eliminating the establishing shots

- The most famous of these involved the cutting of neutral shots of an actor's face with other shots
  These were reported as shots of soup, nature scenes, ad dead woman, a baby

The Kuleshov effect - cont

- The result was that the audience immediately assumed not only that the actor's expression changed, but also that the actor was reacting to things present in the same space as himself

- Similarly, Kuleshov cut together shots of actors, "looking at each other" but on Moscow streets miles apart, then meeting and s trolling together – and looking at the White House in Washington

The Kuleshov effect - cont

The Kuleshov effect is, then, any series of shots that in the absence of an establishing shot prompts the spectator to infer a spatial whole on the basis of seeing only portions of the space

Spatial relations between shot A & shot B - cont

- Editing can also emphasize action taking place in separate places, e.g. *Intolerance* (D.W. Griffith, 1916)

- Such parallel editing, or crosscutting, is a common way films construct a variety of space

- More radically, the editing can present spatial relations as being ambiguous & uncertain, e.g. *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl T. Dreyer, 1928)

Temporal relations between shot A & shot B

- Editing can control the time of the action denoted in the film
- In a narrative film especially, editing usually contributes to the plot's manipulation of story time
- Flashbacks & flashforwards alter the chronological order of events
- Editing also offers ways for the filmmaker to alter the duration of story events

Temporal relations between shot A & shot B - cont

- Elliptical editing presents an action in such a way that it consumes less time on the screen than it does in the story
- The filmmaker can create an ellipsis in three principal ways:
  1. A dissolve
  2. A wipe or a fade
  3. A cutaway
  4. A black frame

CONTINUITY EDITING

- The goal is to arrange the shots so as to tell a story coherently & clearly

- Editing, supported by specific strategies of cinematography & mise-en-scène, is used to ensure narrative continuity

- The basic purpose of the continuity system is to create a smooth flow from shot to shot

CONTINUITY EDITING - cont

- First, graphic qualities are usuallykep roughly continuous from to to shot

- Second, the rhythm of the cutting is usually made dependent on the camera distance of the shot.

  Long shots are left on the screen longer than medium shots, & medium shots longer than close-ups

- The assumption is that the spectator needs more time to take in the shots containing more details

SPACE CONTINUITY: THE 180 DEGREE SYSTEM

- The space of a scene is constructed along what is called the "axis of action", the "center line", or the "180 line"

- The scene's action is assumed to take place along a discernible, predictable line

- This axis of action determines a half-circle, or 180 degree area, where the camera can be placed to present the action

The 180 degree line − cont

- Consequently, the filmmaker will plan, film & edit the shots so as to respect this center line

- The camera work and mise-en-scène in each shot will be manipulated to establish & reiterate the 180 space

- The 180 system ensures that relative positions in the frame remain consistent

The 180 degree line - cont

- The 180 degree line ensures consistent eyelines and screen directions

- The viewer should always know where the characters are in relation to one another & to the setting

- The viewer always knows where he or she is with respect to the story action

- The space of the scene, clearly & unambiguously unfolded, does not jar or disorient

Eyeline match

- A cut obeying the axis of action principle, in which the first short shows a person looking off in one direction & the second shows a nearby space containing what he or she sees

- If the person looks left, the following shot should imply that the looker is offscreen right

- Within the 180 degree system, the eyeline match, like the constant screen direction, can stabilize space

Match on action

- A continuity cut which splices two different views of the same action together at the same moment in the movement making it seems to continue uninterrupted

Crosscutting

- Editing that alternates shots of two or more lines of action occurring in different places, usually simultaneously

- D.W. Griffith perfects this technique in his chase and rescue scenes, e.g. *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch* (1913), *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Intolerance* (1916)

TEMPORAL CONTINUITY

- In the classical continuity system, time, like space, is organized according to the development of the narrative
- Story duration is seldom expanded, that is, screen time is seldom made greater than story time
- Elliptical editing: shot transitions that omit parts of an event, causing an ellipsis in plot and story duration
- A form of elliptical editing is to make a "montage sequence"

TEMPORAL CONTINUITY - cont

- The continuity style uses the temporal dimension of editing primarily for narrative purposes

- Like graphics, rhythm & space, time is organized to permit the unfolding of cause & effect, the arousal of curiosity, suspense & surprise

ALTERNATIVES TO CONTINUITY EDITING
- Graphic & rhythmic possibilities

- Use of graphic & rhythmic possibilities to join the shots

- Experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage uses purely graphic means of joining shot to shot: continuities & discontinuities of light, texture & shape motivate the editing

- In the choreographies of Busby Berkeley, the narrative periodically grinds to a halt, & the intricate dances are arranged, shot & edited according to the configuration of dancers & backgrounds, e.g. *42nd Street* (1933)

Spacial & Temporal Discontinuity

- Instead of an axis of action where the camera is placed within an imaginary semicircle, the filmmakers work as if the action were not a line but a point at the center of a circle, & as if the camera could be placed at any point on the circumference

- The films of Jacques Tati & Yasujiro Ozu offer examples of this discontinuity

Jump cuts & non-diegetic inserts

- Two notable devices of discontinuity
- Jump cut: an elliptical cut that appears to be an interruption of a single shot
- Either the figures seem to change instantly against a constant background, or the background changes instantly while the figures remain constant, e.g. *Breathless* (1960, Jean-Luc Godard)
- Non-diegetic insert: the filmmaker cuts from the scene to a metaphorical or symbolic shot that is not part of the space & time of the narrative, e.g. the slaughtered cow in *Strike* (1924, Sergei Eisenstein)

Discontinuity editing: The Odessa Steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)

- Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein deliberately opposed himself to continuity editing

- He staged, shot & cut his films for the maximum collision from to shot, sequence to sequence

- He believed that only through being forced to synthesize such conflicts could the viewer participate in actively understanding the film

- In the Odessa Steps sequence he constructs an intrincate pattern of images calculated to stimulate the viewer's senses, emotions & thinking

Films suggested as examples

- Graphic match − *The Wrong Man* (1957, Hitchcock)
  The Princess Diaries (2001, Marshall)
- Rhythmic editing − *Love Me Tonight* (1932, Mamoulian)
  Singin' in the Rain ((1952, Donen)
- Eye line − *Dead Men Don't War Plaid* (1987, Reiner)
- Continuity editing − *The Maltese Falcon* (1941, Huston)
- Montage (alternative editing) − *Strike* (1924) &
  Battleship Potemkin (1925) by Eisenstein

Source:

This outline follows the concepts on editing developed by David Bordwell & Kristin Thompson in their *Film Art, An Introduction* (2001)

The list of film examples has been prepared by

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