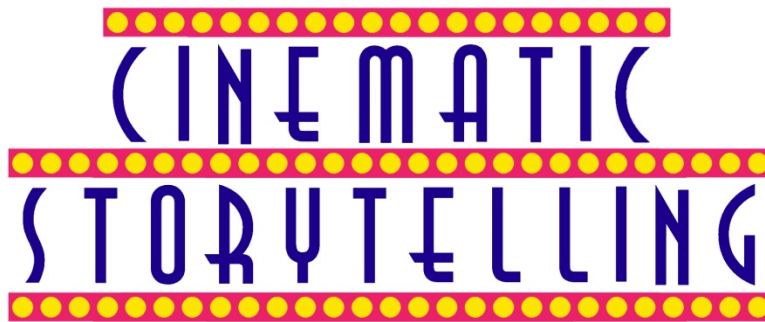




CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

The invention of the motion picture and its moving images created an entirely new way of showing and telling a story.

CINEMATIC STORYTELLING explores some of the mechanics of the creative process, concentrating on those technical aspects of film making that are key to how cinema presents and tells its tale.

The director of a movie chooses not only what you can see, but also how and when you can see it. There are therefore chapters on shots and framing, as well as sections on re-framing and shot transitions. But of course, the unique development in the invention of cinema was editing, for the edit, with its connections, transitions and juxtapositions of images, created new ways in which the audience could take in and understand a story. Far from being a passive medium, as is often thought, cinema, by means of the edit, often makes audiences work things out for themselves. And this principle is there in narrative editing and dialectical montage, both of which are explored in CINEMATIC STORYTELLING.

The Image in the Camera explores the ancient concept of telling a story through images and the invention of the 'moving image' in the movies. This chapter then considers the similarities and differences between the camera and the human eye, before moving on to look at camera positioning and movement. **PAGE 4**

Shots and Framing considers the definitional difference between the 'frame' and the 'shot'. This chapter then examines the types of shot available to the filmmaker, plus the idea of 'shot perceptive', which covers not only POV (point of view) but also camera exegesis. **PAGE 30**

Shot Composition considers the idea of *mise-en-scène* before moving on to look at shot composition, including compositional lines, balance, empty space, the dual image and the inner frame. **PAGE 38**

Re-framing and Shot Transitions reflects on the idea that the director by means of the camera and the frame decides not only what you can see but also where you should look. This chapter then moves on to examine re-framing and the many types of shot transitions available to the filmmaker, including the 'straight cut', the 'dissolve', the 'wipe', the 'fade' and so on. There is also a look at shot duration and cutting averages. **PAGE 55**

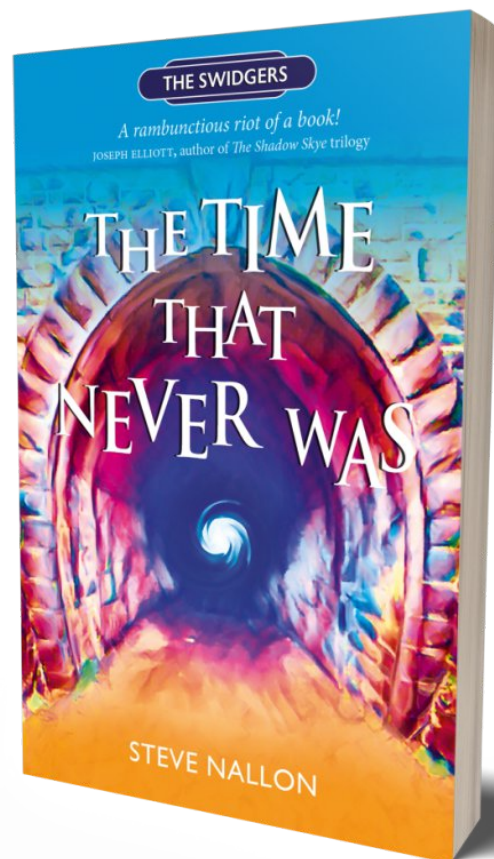
The Editor considers early pioneers of cinema and their influence, before moving on to reflect on the role and function of the editor, both of which are often misunderstood or undervalued. **PAGE 74**

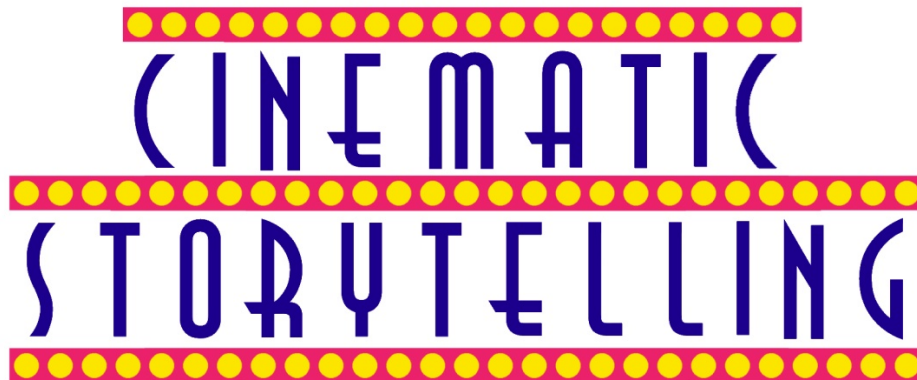
Types of Edit looks at the wide range of technical edits that are available to the filmmaker, from continuity editing, cross-cutting and elliptical editing, to contrast montage, split screens and parallelism. **PAGE 90**

The Editing Process and the Concepts of Montage considers the function of editing and the way it relates to how we experience and understand a film. The chapter then goes on to examine the different concepts of montage, from dialectical and relational montage, to American montage and musical sequences. **PAGE 113**

Sound considers the function sound in cinematic storytelling, distinguishing story world sound and non-story world sound. **PAGE 131**

Music explores the role of music in film making and the importance it plays in the development of character and story. **PAGE 154**





CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

The Image in the Camera

"A director makes a hundred decisions an hour. Students ask me how you know how to make the right decision, and I say to them, 'If you don't know how to make the right decision, you're not a director.'"

George Lucas

Story Images as Storytelling

Telling a tale through drawings or a sequence of images has been around since stone age people first drew pictures in caves of their encounters and battles with beasts. Later came Egyptian hieroglyphs, those medieval paintings of saints, which, in one image told the story of their life, and in the modern era we've had Picasso's iconic *Guernica*. And by the time of Picasso the cinematic medium had come along and with it the telling of story by means of moving pictures, or 'motion pictures', as the cinema used to be called. The arrival of this exciting kinetic medium meant that narrative suddenly

had a whole new world to explore. And, as with all aspects of designing a narrative, *choice* is key. The choice of what image to use, it's shape and composition, then later choosing how those pictures could be juxtaposed or transitioned so that the way they were linked became part of how the story could be put together and told.

What follows then is a brief and basic summary of some of the terms and technical jargon used in filmmaking. These are included here because, first, some people may not be familiar with them, and second, because they give an indication as to the many new ways that cinema has expanded the means by which a story can be presented and told. For the uniqueness of the cinematic experience, unlike, for example, the stage, is that the cinema director is always in control of not only what you are seeing but also where you are looking.

“The hieroglyphic script was the medium most appropriate for the articulation of the ancient Egyptian mentality. Far from being crude, it reflected richly symbolic modes of conceiving and relating to both the physical and the psychic spheres of existence.”

Jeremy Naydler, TEMPLE OF THE COSMOS: THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN EXPERIENCE OF THE SACRED

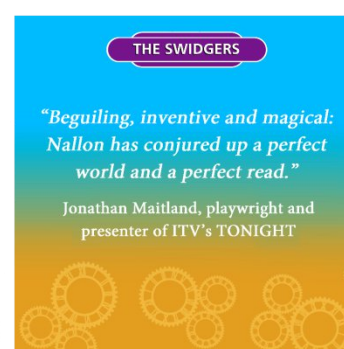
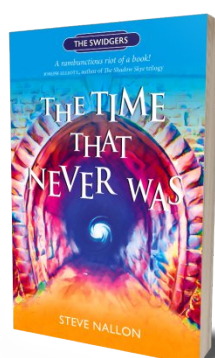
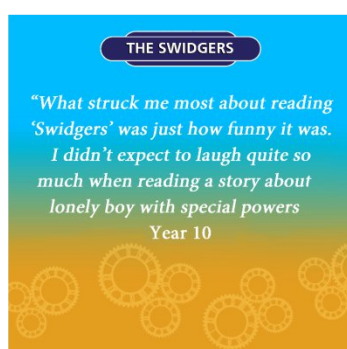


“I know nothing of life except through the cinema.”

Jean-Luc Godard, film director

The Cinematic and Human Experience Compared

The human experience of seeing is three-dimensional but cinema is, in the main, two-dimensional. The point here is that when looking at a two-dimensional image the eye makes more of the compositional elements than it would if it were looking at three-dimensional real life. The human mind does not like randomness and its nature is to find designs and connections, for we are hard-wired mentally with pattern-forming brains. And what that means in practice is that when the eye is looking, for example, at a painting, the brain will attempt to harmonise the various elements of a composition and make them, as it were, one, as a complete picture. Another factor about the human eye is that it rarely wanders without purpose, yet it can be guided around an image by such things as size, placement and colour.



But, of course, the big difference between a painting and a moving picture, apart from the obvious point that a moving picture is in motion, is time. You can spend as long as you like staring at a painting, but the world of the motion picture lives by its own time, and you, as a viewer, are constrained by the seconds or minutes it gives you. And it's not just time, because there is only a certain amount of information that can be put into a shot in a film, and then there's the fact that the human eye and mind have limited capacity to take in the information they are presented with. An early film theorist, Raymond Spottiswood, who worked at the National Film Board of Canada during the 1940s, talked in his 1951 book *FILM AND ITS TECHNIQUES* about the 'content curve', which assesses the assimilation of information on the screen. He argued that you should always cut at the peak of the content curve. Cutting before wouldn't give the audience enough time to take in all the information, and cutting after, when all the available information has been acquired, risks the audience becoming bored. All that said, unlike in a painting, camera movement, focus change, re-framing and so on, plus of course editing, give the director the advantage in guiding you where to look and when.

There are two more key points to think about when considering any cinematic technique in relation to our physical and emotional lives. The first is to what degree cinema is similar to, or different from, the everyday human experience of seeing and looking. Does

cinematic technique try to imitate what the human eye, body and mind can do? Or is what results from editing, shot transition and so on so far removed from human experience that it offers a whole new perspective that the human eye and mind have never had before? And related to these questions is the second point: what emotional and psychological effects are brought about in the viewer by the cinematic experience? Were these the intention of the writer, the director or the editor? Or were they felt because what we saw had a particular relevance and resonance in our own individual lives?

“Talking about dreams is like talking about movies, since the cinema uses the language of dreams; years can pass in a second, and you can hop from one place to another. It's a language made of image. And in the real cinema, every object and every light means something, as in a dream.”

Federico Fellini, filmmaker



“I'm a much better filmmaker than painter. But studying it did make me visually acute and taught me lessons like being economic: Say something once and you don't have to say it again.”

Jane Campion

Aesthetic or Functional?

An important key difference between the moving image of the motion picture and the painting in a gallery is that the motion picture image is not primarily about aesthetics but functionality. And by function we mean, in simple terms, that the image is concerned with and ultimately serves the purpose of plot (including exposition, back story or whatever) and character (including social status, psychology, emotional well-being and so on). Yet opinions divide as to where aestheticism ends and functionality begins. There are those, for example, who see the work of Jane Campion (THE PIANO, THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY, BRIGHT STAR, THE POWER OF THE DOG) as essentially just ‘picture postcards’, while there are others who see the landscapes and images in Campion movies as integral to the build of both plot and character. There are those too who argue that CITIZEN KANE is really just a collection of visual cinematic camera and sound tricks. In fact, in J’ACCUSE: CITIZEN KANE (1993), Robert McKee made a television presentation making that very point. McKee acknowledged the virtuoso camera technique and sound devices, but argued that its artistic extravaganza was the very definition of style over substance. The shot through the roof in the

nightclub, he suggested, had little if any purpose other than showing off.



But, in a way, it all comes down to stylistic preferences and tastes. And both audiences and critics divide into camps for and against whenever considering those filmmakers who have a distinct style. Jean-Luc Godard. Genius or fraud? Brian De Plama. Love him or hate him? Alfred Hitchcock. Brilliant storyteller or competent technician?

"To me style is just the outside of content, and content the inside of style, like the outside and the inside of the human body – both go together, they can't be separated."

Jean-Luc Godard



***“The function of camera movement is to assist the storytelling.
That's all it is. It cannot be there just to demonstrate itself.”***

Mike Figgis, DIGITAL FILMMAKING

Camera Movement and Position

One of the big questions in filmmaking is to what extent the filmmaker imitates our normal visual or mental experience or not as the case may be. Film as a form is the transformation of three-dimensional onto a two-dimensional. 3D has been experimented with for many decades but it has never really taken off. Camera movement however is certainly one way of giving the illusion of depth in what is essentially a two-dimensional world.

Pans and Tilts

If the camera sits on top of a stationary tripod and it is pivoted from side to side on a vertical axis then this is known as a ‘pan’, which comes from the word panorama. There are many terms for what happens if this camera movement is done quickly, including ‘flash pan’, ‘whip pan’, ‘zip pan’ and ‘swish pan’. If the camera is pivoted up and down on the horizontal axis then this is called a ‘tilt’. A ‘fluid head’ on top of the tripod allows the camera to go both up and down, from side to side, and in fact in any direction at all. A ‘lock off’ shot is where the camera is fixed into position, with the result that the shot remains constant.

Camera Movement in Motion

First, dolly shots and tracking shots. A tracking shot is when the camera sits on a platform on rail tracks and is then pushed or pulled along those tracks. It's a 'tracking shot' in that it is on tracks, but it's also a 'tracking shot' in that it follows – that is it tracks – the subject. A 'dolly shot' refers to when the camera is mounted on a dolly, which is a wheeled cart, usually one that also runs on tracks but sometimes can be independent. Dollies have been used in film making since the early 1900s and the term 'dolly' possibly came from a variation of 'trolley', where 'dolly' is simply a smaller version. The point is that because the camera is ultimately on wheels or mounted on a rail track the movement is smooth, controlled and variable. The camera can visually explore its subject. To 'dolly in', the camera dolly moves toward the subject, producing a close-up image, to 'dolly out', the camera operator moves the dolly away from the subject. In both cases the operator may need to manually keep the subject in focus.



The 'dolly zoom' is when the camera zooms out as the dolly pushes in (or the other way round), creating a composition where the subject remains the same size but the background changes. This technique is also sometimes called the 'trombone shot' and was developed by Irmin Roberts for Alfred Hitchcock's *VERTIGO* as a POV shot (point of view) to suggest the sensation that comes from a fear of heights. It's used in *JAWS* to suggest a sense of trepidation when there's a shark attack on the beach, in *MANHUNTER* to reflect what's going on in the mind of a killer, and in *GOODFELLAS* at the critical meeting in the café. In *E.T. THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL* it is used as the government agents approach to the city.



Dolly shots are essentially versions of tracking shots but the main difference between the two is that in a dolly shot the camera can move towards, away from, or alongside the subject, whereas in a tracking shot the camera usually follows alongside a subject, keeping them in the frame. Incidentally, the first motorised dolly shot is

thought to be in Allan Dwan's DAVID HARUM, where the actor is followed on his walk in the park.

Television, particularly studio television, uses different jargon to film when it comes to camera movement. The traditional television camera was designed and built to move smoothly without a cart or tracks, and the term that was used for movement was 'crab', where the television director in the gallery would instruct the camera operator on the studio floor to 'crab left' or 'crab right'.

A crane shot is when the camera is put high up in the air on, for example, a cherry picker, which is a hydraulic crane with a platform. Crane shots are also called 'bird's-eye-view' or 'God-view shots'. These types of shots were popular with Busby Berkeley who used them when shooting dance routines in musicals such as THE GOLD DIGGERS OF 1933, THE GOLD DIGGERS OF 1934 and 42nd STREET. Alfred Hitchcock often used the high up crane shot to suggest the powerlessness of the protagonist. In years gone by, a moving aerial shot would have needed a plane or helicopter, but nowadays there are drone cameras which do that for just a fraction of the price. APOCALYPSE NOW uses aerial shots to show the POV of the bombers as they attack the villages with napalm. In THE SOUND OF MUSIC aerial shots show the majesty of the Austrian terrain but as the helicopter comes in to find Maria singing on her mountain, you can see the grass blowing on the ground as a result of the propellers. There is also Skycam, a brand name computer-controlled, stabilised,

cable-suspended camera system. The camera is manoeuvred through three dimensions in the open space by a computer-controlled cable-drive system. Skycam is particularly popular in sports stadia and arenas, though it is also used in everyday filmmaking.



In a way, hand-held camera is a bit of a misnomer because the camera is usually positioned on the operator's shoulder as they are moving. However, the camera can also be held by just the hands and arms, for example when the camera is shooting up at an object or person from low down. Hand-held camera is often associated with *cinéma vérité*, documentary film making and observational cinema.

Steadicam is the brand name for a particular type of camera stabiliser which is attached to the body of the operator. It was invented by Garrett Brown in 1975 and designed to isolate the camera from the camera operator's movement, thus keeping the camera motion separate and controllable by the operator. The way the device works is by compensating for the body's movements by means of counterbalance. The point of a Steadicam camera is that

the operator can follow a subject without the jolts you would get with a camera on the shoulder and this has allowed modern filmmakers to shoot long uninterrupted takes that remain relatively smooth but can also go pretty much anywhere. ‘Fluid camera’, is another term for it. A recent example of this type of filmmaking can be found in the movie 1917 (2019). Other long takes in movies can be found in THE PLAYER, CHILDREN OF MEN, GOODFELLAS, BOOGIE NIGHTS, GRAVITY and SNAKE EYES. Incidentally, the term French critics use for an uninterrupted sequence is plan-séquence and there’s a famous one in Jean Renoir’s RULES OF THE GAME (1939) which takes you through doors and along corridors, plus there’s the famous traffic jam scene in Jean-Luc Godard’s WEEKEND (1967).

“I have developed my eye as a cinematographer through the craft of operating. When I am not operating, I am often anxious, uncertain, restless, sometimes irritable. When I am in the position of working with Steadicam or remote cameras, I fly with a broken wing.”

Robert Richardson, cinematographer known for SALVADOR, PLATOON, WALL STREET, BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY, A FEW GOOD MEN, NATURAL BORN KILLERS, THE AVIATOR, SHUTTER ISLAND, DJANGO UNCHAINED and EMANCIPATION



"I don't need interesting camera angles, I am interesting."
Charlie Chaplin

Camera Angles

In the early days of cinema, the camera was simply placed directly in front of a set and the movie was shot as though the camera was an audience member watching a play. But the pioneers of cinema soon realised that straight-on was the least interesting angle to shoot an actor or scene. They discovered that an angle from the side would create more contrast in facial features and an angle looking up at a face would give that character a sense of control and power over what was below and conversely an angle from above looking down would suggest weakness and helplessness. Looking up, incidentally, makes an actor look heavier in terms of weight and looking down helps them, as it were, lose a pound or two.

The pioneers also began putting the camera in places that would have been unnatural for the human eye in everyday life. For example, a high-angle shot is when the camera is looking down from a very acute angle high in the air (sometimes called the 'bird's-eye-view' or the 'overhead shot') and an acute low-angled shot is looking up from way below (the 'worm's-eye-view'). The murder on the staircase in PSYCHO uses the overhead. Plot wise this is useful because it keeps the identity of the murderer a secret. An example of

the worm's-eye-view (or rather shark's eye view) can be seen in JAWS where we see the shark's POV as it swims under the boat.



A camera can be tilted on the horizontal and the vertical, or the y-axis or x-axis on the Cartesian coordinate system. When the camera is tilted it creates an oblique angle and this is called 'canted'. Another term for this is the 'Dutch angle' or 'Dutch tilt'. It's a camera technique that was developed by the German Expressionist filmmakers in the 1920s and so it used to be called the 'Deutsch Angle' (Deutsch meaning German) but somewhere along the line 'Deutsch' became 'Dutch'.

Anyway, the 'Dutch angle' is now the classic cinematic technique used to suggest unease in the situation or mental upset inside the mind of the subject. For example, when Laura in BRIEF ENCOUNTER is on the platform contemplating suicide, there is a tilt on the x-axis to suggest that her mind is in turmoil. Canted angles are also used in dream sequences and to suggest intoxication. For

example, in DEAD OF NIGHT, the murder's dream is mainly made up of Dutch angle shots, and in HOBSON'S CHOICE, canted angles are used on Hobson's drunken walk home. It's rare to use canted angles all the way through a movie, but pretty much every shot in THE THIRD MAN, a story about people surviving on a knife edge in Vienna immediately after the Second World War, is on some degree of canted angle. Again the point here is that the canted angles serve a purpose in exploring both plot and character.

Some more thoughts on camera movement, camera positions and camera angles...

"A style is not a matter of camera angles or fancy footwork, it's an expression, an accurate expression of your particular opinion."

Karel Reisz

"Tracking action without cutting is the least jarring method of placing the audience into a real-time experience where they are the ones making the subtle choices of where and when to look."

Steven Spielberg

"Your eye scans the page from left to right, and you scan until gradually the words disappear and become thoughts, images and real dialogue. If a book was indicating a pattern of dialogue that kept repeating itself in a boring way – you'd put the book down. And Antonioni and Kubrick to a great extent, are the only other filmmakers that never repeated angles. They would find the right angle for a shot and a scene, and then move on."

William Freidkin

"The director, Roger Christian, has learned from better films that directors sometimes tilt their cameras, but he has not learned why."

Roger Ebert's review of BATTLEFIELD EARTH

"I came out of the womb looking for the camera angle."

Liza Minnelli

"You don't rehearse jazz to death to get the camera angles."

Stan Getz

"If you can show something as complicated as two people falling in love with just music and camera angles, well, just think about what you can do with football."

Steve Sabol



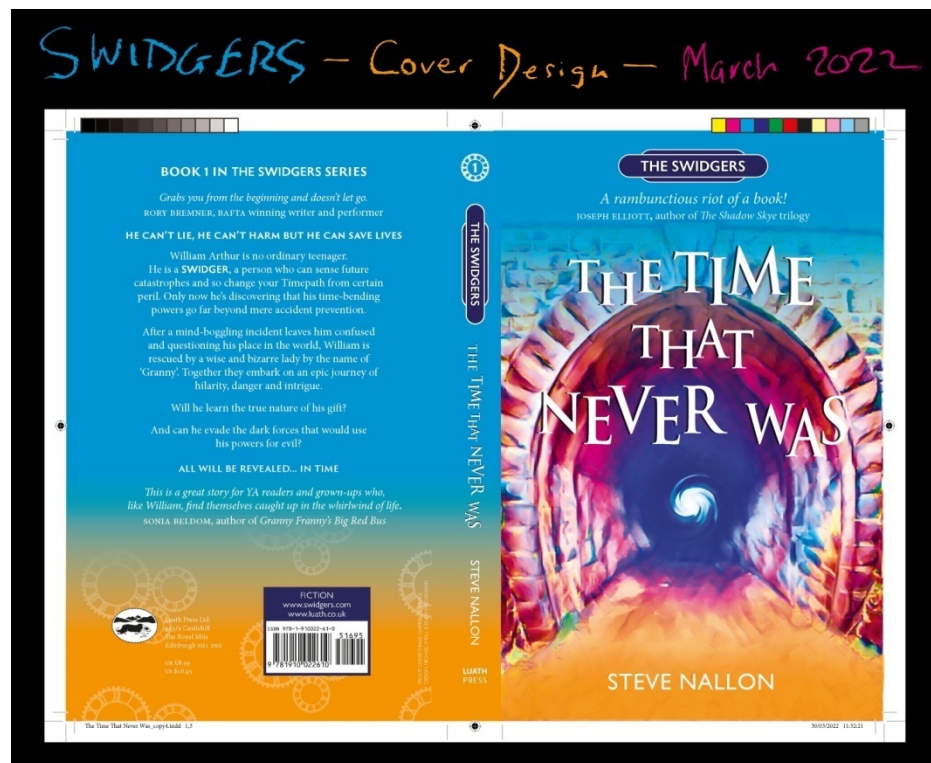
"By the time you've finished shooting and you've really been into everything, you've touched up everything in the editing room. You've gone in there and taken little bits from everything."

Ridley Scott

Putting it Together

In putting a film together there's a whole host of techniques and technical devices. There's production design, make-up, choice of typeface for the credits. Then there's the art director's contribution, plus the costume designer and the production designer. Oh, and we

haven't even mentioned the actors yet. All enhance a movie in their own way.



Then there's the role of the cinematographer who, as it were, writes the story with light, and gives the camera movement and the image it produces the illusion of depth in what is essentially a two-dimensional medium. With this job comes the choice of film stock, camera filters and, importantly, lenses. There are lenses for long focus, giving a flat perspective; short-focus, deepening perspective and exaggerating size; fish-eye, an extreme wide-angle modifier sometimes put in doors at hotels to see who in on the other side. Related to these choices is depth of field, meaning the range of distances within which objects can be photographed in sharp focus

primarily controlled by the lens aperture – ‘deep focus’ is where there is great depth of field and so objects close up and in the background are all in focus.

However, the over-riding arc and purpose of STORY CRAFT is to look at Story and storytelling from the writer’s perspective. So how does all this technical stuff fit in or help? Edward Dmytryk, the screenwriter and director, said in the opening pages of his book ON SCREEN WRITING, “Varied and optimum camera positioning, effective change of audience point of view through competent film editing, and the ability to highlight dramatic transition by zeroing in on the reaction, thus affording the viewer a greater opportunity to understand, identify with, and interpret the attitudes and emotions of the people on the screen rather than just those of the author. ‘Well yes,’ most screenwriters will say, ‘but those are the prerogatives and responsibilities of the film director.’ And so they are – but not necessarily so. I have never known a director who knew it all. The more the writer can concern himself with the cinematic demands of the film, the sooner he will learn to understand, and use to advantage, the tremendous potential of the medium. How then can the quality of films fail to improve?” He’s right, but where do you draw the line?

Take the choice of film stock. Ektachrome Colour Reversal Film, Kodak VISION3 500T Colour Negative Film 5219/7219, Kodak VISION3 250D Colour Negative Film 5207/7207, Kodak VISION3 200T

Colour Negative Film 5213/7213, Kodak VISION3 50D Colour Negative Film 5203/7203, TRI-X Black and White Reversal Film 7266 and Eastman Double-X Black and White Negative Film 5222/7222 each has their own specific light sensitivity and colour saturation but how many screenwriters could tell you what they are?

All that said, the movie PLEASANTVILLE (1998), written and directed by Gary Ross, depends in its plotting on a move from a black and white world to one of colour. And those turning points would have been written into the script. Likewise the transition from sepia to Technicolor in THE WIZARD OF OZ. And it may be that scenes in flashback have a note in the screenplay suggesting they be shot in black and white. Movie makers call this Monochrome Past and you'll find the convention in the *Harry Potter* series of films. As Bugs Bunny says in CARTOON ALL-STARS TO THE RESCUE, "This is the past, and the past is in black and white. Get it?"



The British movie *IF...* (1968) offers a curious insight into the use of black and white or colour film stock. There was a story that some scenes of the film were shot in black and white simply because the production company ran out of money and black and white stock was cheaper. However, it seems it wasn't quite like that. Apparently the high-speed colour stock that was tested was very grainy and the colour values, due to the light coming through a stained glass window, kept changing and so it was decided to shoot those scenes in monochrome. The director, Lindsay Anderson, liked the idea that monochrome images could break up the surface of the film. You might compare this to 'breaking the forth wall' in theatre when something happens on stage that reminds the audience they are in a theatre watching a play. As Anderson's *IF...* is a satire on the British school system, it suits the genre that the viewer is disorientated and so the decision was taken to insert other monochrome scenes, sometimes at random, to illustrate the movie was in constant flux between reality and fantasy.

These chapters on cinematic storytelling concentrate on the shot, re-framing, shots transitions and editing because these are integral to how a story is told and presented in the cinematic medium. And they overlap, to a degree, at least, with the thinking of the writer. But perhaps detailed discussion of lenses and film stock is a step too far. Those choices do belong to the director and cinematographer.

BURT: You wanna know how it works? There's a big machine called a projector, inside there's a big bright light and it projects photographs of, of clowns and acrobats... These photographs move past the light really fast – 24 photos in every second! – Now in your brain each photograph stays for about a fifteenth of a second. That's called persistence of vision. The photographs move past faster than your brain can let go of them. And that's how the movie projector tricks us into believing that motionless pictures are moving - a motion picture!

From THE FABALMANS

"Create your own visual style. Let it be unique for yourself and yet identifiable for others."

Orson Welles

"What's important is the way we say it. Art is all about craftsmanship. Others can interpret craftsmanship as style if they wish. Style is what unites memory or recollection, ideology, sentiment, nostalgia, presentiment, to the way we express all that. It's not what we say but how we say it that matters."

Federico Fellini

"People always say to me, 'You have such a clearly defined sense of style,' and when I hear it, I get crazed, because what I hear – and I know they mean it as a compliment – is that I have such a narrow vision that I can't get out of it."

Stanley Donen

"A good movie is three good scenes and no bad scenes."

Howard Hawks

"Of all the contributors to that collective 'art' called 'film making', the screenwriter is the one 'creator' whose contribution is most frequently edited, controlled, revised or discarded, and whose

creative efforts are most often debated, denied, subjected to arbitration."

Edward Dmytryk, ON SCREEN WRITING

"I like the idea of the documentary as a portrait. There's not a chronological beginning, middle, and end structure. You build something in the editing room that's shaped by getting to know the person and digging deeper, unpeeling the layers of them as you get to know them."

Spike Jonze

MITZI: Movies are dreams, dolly, that you never forget. You just wait and see, when it's over, you're gonna have the biggest sloppiest smile on your face.

From THE FABALMANS

"I don't shoot movies quickly because I get a lot of coverage and a lot of angles, so we have all the pieces in the editing. I do a lot of takes, but it's because I'm looking for something."

Nancy Meyers

"I believe what Walt Disney said 'For every laugh there should be a tear.' I love movies that make me cry, because they're tapping into a real emotion in me, and I always think afterwards

'How did they do that?'"

John Lasseter

"A movie is a little like a question, and when you make it, that's when you get the answer."

Francis Ford Coppola

"Everything's always about page-turning, right? What's next? So, if you create questions for audiences, then they'll want to know the answer. Or they begin to formulate possible outcomes. That's the

game we play when we're hearing a story unfold. That's part of what sucks us into a movie."

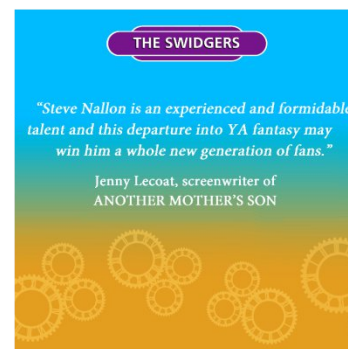
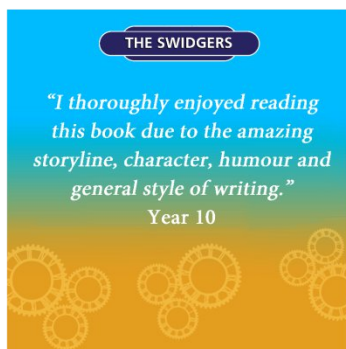
Ron Howard

"A good opening and a good ending make for a good film provide they come close together."

Federico Fellini

"I like happy endings in movies. I think life has a happy ending. When it's all said and done, it's all something worthwhile, and I want my movies to reflect that. There are enough things to be sad about. When you pop in a movie, let the message be one that's one of hope."

Jon Favreau



"Pictures are for entertainment, messages should be delivered by Western Union."

Samuel Goldwyn

"You know when Hollywood does a great big blockbuster that really wraps you up in a world, and lets you believe in extraordinary things that move you in some way, in an almost operatic sensibility? That to me is the most fun I have at the movies."

Christopher Nolan

"I'd rather entertain and hope that people learn, than teach and hope that people are entertained."

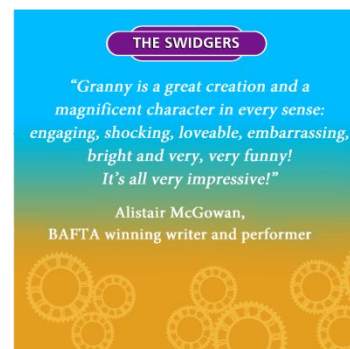
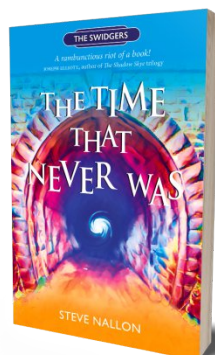
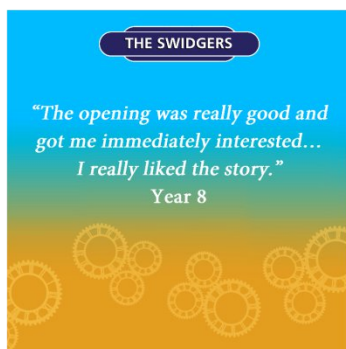
Walt Disney

"Pictures that will live on for years, like THE BIRTH OF A NATION and GONE WITH THE WIND, had great historical events in the background."

William Wyler

"One of the things you do as a writer and as a filmmaker is grasp for resonant symbols and imagery without necessarily fully understanding it yourself."

Christopher Nolan



"Don't give me any money, don't give me any people, but give freedom, and I'll give you a movie that looks gigantic."

Robert Rodriguez

"The cinema is not a craft. It is an art. It does not mean teamwork. One is always alone on the set as before the blank page. And to be alone... means to ask questions. And to make films means to answer them."

Irmin Roberts

“Cinema is the most beautiful fraud in the world.”

Jean-Luc Godard

“As children, we have vivid imaginations. We stay up late waiting for Santa Claus, dream of becoming president, and have ideas that defy physics. Then something happens. As we grow older, we start editing our imagination.”

Brian Chesky

“Think of the imagination as a giant stone from which we carve out new ideas. As we chip away, our new ideas become more polished and refined. But if you start by editing your imagination, you start with a tiny stone.”

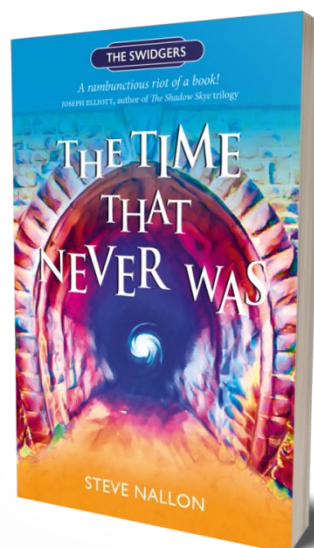
Brian Chesky

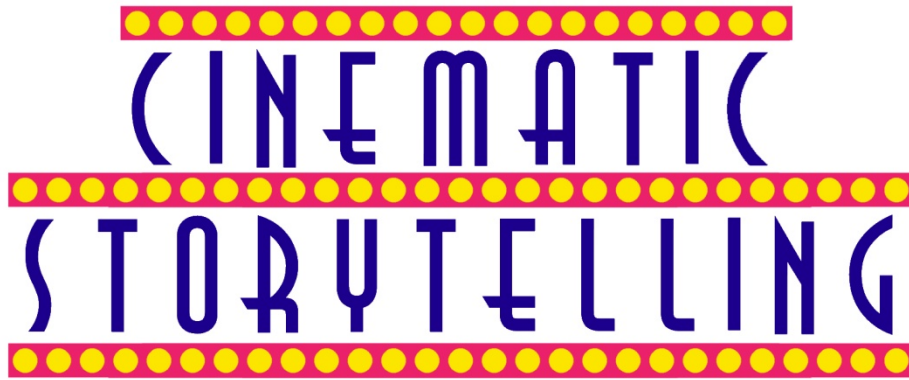
“I don't do any research. It's all about gut. Editing - it's always about gut.”

Graydon Carter

“Editing is the same as quarrelling with writers - same thing exactly.”

Harold Ross





CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

Framing and Shots

“Cinema is a matter of what's in the frame and what's out.”
Martin Scorsese, film director

Framing and Shots

Framing is the use of the edges of the film frame to select and compose what will be visible on screen. Technically the ‘frame’ is also the single image on a strip of film. The shot itself is the image within that frame, whether that frame be static or moving. The shot is also that which is filmed, meaning the object, the person of the action, from when the camera starts rolling to when it stops. A simple way of understanding the difference between the two is to think of the frame as the outline that gives you the singular shape of what you film which then becomes the shot.

It’s important to remember that as well as what is seen, framing also involves what is not seen but is then later revealed. As a result, re-framing, whether by means of a zoom in, camera

movement or whatever, is an important aspect of storytelling (or story *showing*) for the filmmaker.

“When I start a film, I can sort of shut my eyes, sit somewhere quiet and imagine the movie finished. I can imagine the camera angles, I can even imagine the type of music. Without knowing the tune, I can imagine the type of music it needs to be.”

Peter Jackson, filmmaker



“Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot.”

Attributed to Charlie Chaplin by Richard Roud, director of the New York Film Festival

The Shots

‘Shot types’ can range from close-up to landscape, but when people talk about ‘shot composition’ they are usually referring to what in cinema is known as *mise-en-scène*, meaning how the framing/shot has been composed in terms of placement, balance and so on.

So, what are the basic types of shots? Extreme long shot, ELS, is primarily for landscapes. The long shot, LS, tends to include most of what is there which is relevant to the narrative. For example, if the plot involves a large crowd, the long shot would attempt to cover as

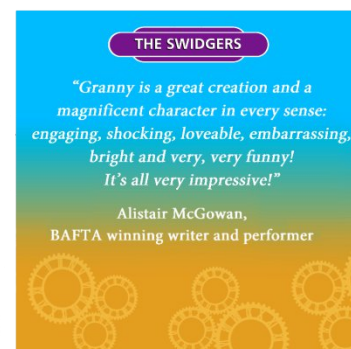
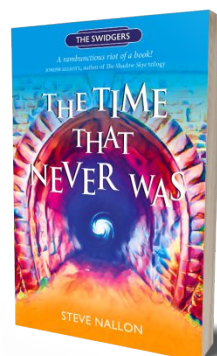
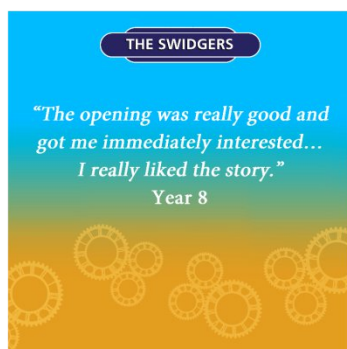
much of that crowd as possible. The medium long shot, MLS, or medium wide shot, MWS, is essentially a shot from the knees up and usually included in the shot is the geographical location in the background. This shot is also known as the 'America shot' because of its popular use in Hollywood movies, particularly the Western genre as the MLS would have the hanging holster, plus the dusty main street or whatever. The classic shot of John Wayne, for example, is usually a medium long shot. A more recent and now iconic example of the medium wide shot is the line-up image in the movie THE USUAL SUSPECTS.



The medium shot, MS, (or mid-shot) is the actor shot from the waist up, the medium close-up, MCU, is head and shoulders and close-up, CU, is just the head or face. Extreme close-up, ECU, or 'tight shot' concentrates on a single element and isolates it. Perhaps the mouth or the eyes. You'll find this type of shot, for example, in Sergio Leone movies such as ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE UGLY and A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS.

Another way of thinking about shots is in terms of ‘two shots’, with two people in the frame; ‘three shots’, where there are three people in the frame and POV shots (point of view shots) which show what a character is seeing and ‘over the shoulder’ shots which indicate a character’s physical proximity to another character.

A further way of describing shots is more functional and practical than visual. The ‘master shot’ (or ‘master take’) is usually a wide shot that covers all the action across the whole scene. The master shot/take dictates continuity, meaning that if an actor picks up a glass of wine at a particular moment in the master, then it’s going to be necessary to do it again at that same moment in any close-up. There is also what is known as the ‘establishing shot’, showing you where you are, and the position of the people in the scene to each other. Since the establishing shot is primarily about geography, it isn’t always necessary to shoot the whole scene. An ‘integral shot’ on the other hand is a single shot that makes up an entire scene for which no editing will be required.



Next there are 'reaction shots', which, not surprisingly, are those shots showing a character's response to what has just happened or has been said. 'Noddies' are specifically shots of someone listening while another person talks, but this term is mainly used in television news interviews and documentary filmmaking rather than in drama. A 'cutaway' or 'cut in' is a shot of an object that is key in a scene or has just been referred to by one of the characters in the scene. A 'clean shot' is a shot of a character where there is little else in the frame other than that character, whereas a 'dirty shot' may have, for example, another character's hair or shoulder at the edge of frame. The point here is that jargon phrases such as 'establishing shot', 'reaction shot' and 'cut ins' are, in their very language, already anticipating and taking into consideration the edit which will come later.

"To receive footage that has been shot with editing in mind, it is a blessing."

Thelma Schoonmaker, American film editor, known for her over five decades of work with director Martin Scorsese, including RAGING BULL (1980), THE AVIATOR (2004) and THE DEPARTED (2006)



“To be an artist means never to avert one’s eyes.”

Akira Kurosawa

Shot Perspective

Perspective in the context of a particular shot can mean a literal perspective, that which is seen, or a more poetic perspective, meaning capturing a particular attitude or a way of thinking or feeling about someone. It can also be a way of indicating a point of view in terms of the opinion or perspective of the filmmaker.

Objective and Subjective Camera

John Ford's philosophy of camera was essentially that the camera is a window and the audience are looking in through that window at the action. Record the action, and let's see it. Subjective camera was a camera philosophy that belonged more to Alfred Hitchcock. Sometimes subjective camera is the literal point of view of the character and at other times it is subjective in the sense that it is reflective of what is happening mentally or emotionally within the subject. In *NORTH BY NORTHWEST*, as Kaplan/Thornhill hides in the house, subjective camera POVs keep changing between the observant housekeeper and Kaplan/Thornhill moving around upstairs. *SPELLBOUND* has one of Hitchcock's most remarkable subjective camera shots and it's from the POV of the guilty. In the penultimate scene of the movie, the murderer, now unmasked, points his gun towards his accuser as she leaves the room. But he

knows the game is up and so the gun is turned on 'himself', meaning that the gun is pointed directly at the POV camera, and fired. The screen then, not surprisingly, goes black. Subjective POV is rare throughout an entire movie but his was experimented with in THE LADY IN THE LAKE. The fact that the technique was not repeated tells you much about whether it worked or not.

Indirect-Subjective Shot Perspective

Indirect-subjective in shot perspective gives you the feeling of participation without actually showing the action through the participant's eyes. The interview between Clarice Starling and Hannibal Lecter in THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS is an example of indirect-subjective perspective as both are very nearly looking into camera but not quite.

Camera Exegesis

Exegesis in this context simply means that the camera/director/shot perspective is offering an explanation or interpretation of what is happening at that moment. In exegesis we are consciously aware that the director wants us to see the action in a particular way, though exactly where subjective camera ends and exegesis camera begins is a moot point. You could argue that pretty much the whole of THE THIRD MAN, famously shot using canted

angles, is due to the director wanting to emphasise the peculiar world we are now entering.

More thoughts on shots and framing...

“You often know what the next shot is, because the editor and the director have established a cutting pattern that becomes boring and predictable! And I perceived a long time ago, that a director whose work I really admired, the Italian Neo-Realist, Michelangelo Antonioni – his films used to never use the same shot twice. He would never do that over-shoulder close-up jive. He would cover a scene one way, and it was simple – there’d be no repetition of angles within the scene, and then he’d cut to the next scene. It was sort of like the way you read a good book.”

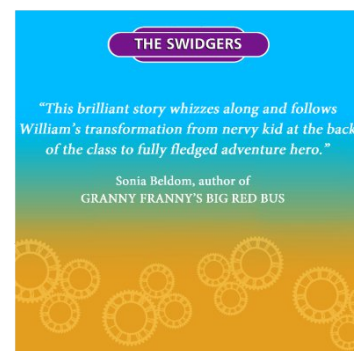
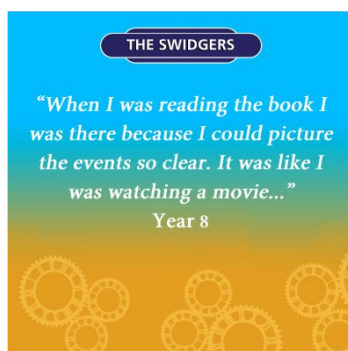
William Friedkin

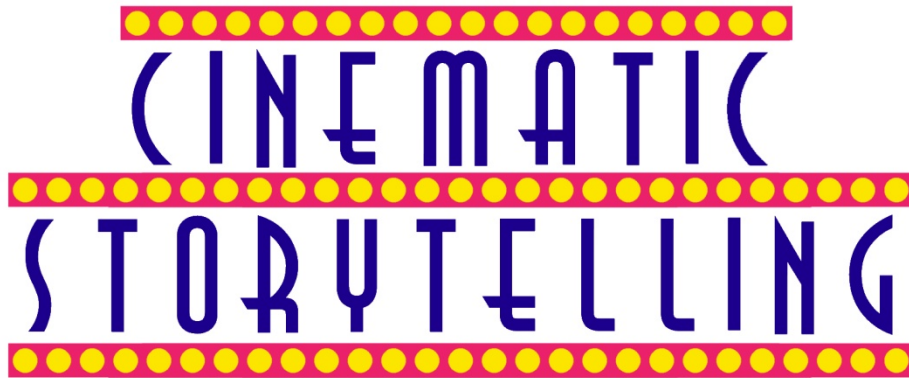
“The film is not shot, but built up from separate strips of celluloid that are its raw materials.”

Vsevolod Pudovkin

“Jean-Luc Godard said that cinema is the truth 24 frames a second. I think cinema is lies 24 frames a second.”

Stanley Donen





CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

Shot Composition

“Photography is truth. The cinema is truth 24 times per second.”
Jean-Luc Godard

Shot Composition

When looking at shot composition what we are considering are the choices that are made. And shot composition essentially covers what is placed within the frame, and how and why it is arranged in the way it is. The term movie theorists use for this *mise-en-scène*, which literally means ‘the putting onto the stage’ or ‘what is put into the scene’. Again the key points to consider are the dramatic context of the shot – what is happening in the scene and in the story – and the psychological context of the shot – what is going on internally with the characters.

The Dominant and the Subsidiary

Let’s start with what is known as the ‘dominant’. The dominant in shot composition is that area of the image that immediately

attracts our attention. It stands out perhaps because it is isolated in some way, or because of its colour or the fact that it is moving. And because the shot makes it distinct or defined, we can assume that it is of intrinsic interest to the drama. Think here of the coffee cup containing poison in *NOTORIOUS* or the box containing the secret music composition in *THE BISHOP'S WIFE* where both are dominant in foreground or the use of the colour red in *SCHINDLER'S LIST* in a movie that is essentially in black and white. Hitchcock, incidentally, was particularly fond of foregrounding key objects, for example, the razor in *SPELLBOUND*, the table being cleared in *ROPE*. In contrast to the dominant is what is known not surprisingly as the 'subsidiary', which is the second thing we look at and often operates as a kind of counter-balance to the dominant.



Compositional Positioning

The centre of the frame is usually reserved for the most important visual element. Filmmakers often talk about the 'Rule of

Thirds' where the frame shape is dissected vertically by three lines and horizontally by three lines so that the shot is divided equally into nine segments. The Rule of Thirds is that you should try and get the most important element of the image in along the lines where the verticals and horizontals intersect. Those filmmakers working within the style of what is sometimes called formalism (as opposed to naturalism) prefer central dominance because it is the least obtrusive kind of framing. If the dominant subject wasn't central, and was instead placed left or right of centre, then the viewer might begin to ask why. As for the bottom of frame, well, that is traditionally associated with that which is powerless, vulnerable or subservient, whereas the top of frame is reserved for those in power who control, as it were, all that is in the frame below them.

It should be said here that the analysis of shot composition is not unique to the cinematic art. In fact much of it comes from the world of art, notably the Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin known for *DIE KLASSISCHE KUNST* or *CLASSIC ART* (1898) and *KUNSTGESCHICHTLICHE GRUNDBEGRIFFE* or *PRINCIPLES OF ART HISTORY* (1915). A basic point that Wölfflin made was that we scan pictures from left to right, which means that although we may begin left we then look towards the right and, most importantly, that's where the eye tends to stay. Watch any Hollywood movie and you'll notice that the star is nearly always positioned right of frame.

Compositional Lines

Art historians talk a lot about 'the line' and the concept of the line or lines applies to moving pictures as well. In *THE FABELMANS* when Sammy (based on the young Steven Spielberg) meets his idol the director John Ford, the old man makes Sammy look at the art on his office walls and after Sammy nervously talks about the characters in the pictures Ford says, "No! No! No!" and then adds, "When the horizon is at the top, it's interesting. When it's on the bottom, it's interesting. When it's in the middle, it's boring as sh*t! Got it?" The movie then ends with a reframing so 'the line' moves from middle to bottom.

Art experts say that the greatest interest in a frame is located along the diagonal line that runs from bottom of screen left to the top of screen right. For repeated uses of that visual line, watch, for example, Eisenstein's *OCTOBER* (1928) or the opening credits of *NORTH BY NORTHWEST*. A recent use of the bottom-left to top-right line can be found in *TOP GUN: MAVERICK* where Tom Cruise (Maverick) stands in front of the American flag and the stripes of the stars and stripes are positioned on that dynamic diagonal. In fact if you study any movie, even a documentary, and only look out for the lines on the screen, you'll see that the diagonal bottom left to top right is often very prevalent.

The diagonal line then is seen as dynamic but there are other compositional lines and each has its associations and purposes. The

vertical is perceived as strong, the curved line as sensual, the horizontal as stark or unnatural and the criss-cross as an entrapping. Of course none of these associations is exclusive, yet you'll usually find that the horizontal is the dominant line in the *film noir* (look out for all those Venetian blinds) and the criss-cross line can often be found in movies which use a prison image system, think here of CASABLANCA.



The Triangle

Another aspect of shot composition is the use of the triangle or V, pointing both down and up. In IMAGE 1 the focus of attention is on B even though B may be smaller in size than A or C – and there's an example of shot composition in THE GODFATHER PART II where Michael is positioned between his sister and her husband. In IMAGE 2 B separates A and C and there are examples of that in PUBLIC ENEMY. THE BISHOP'S WIFE is about an angel called Dudley who comes to Earth from Heaven to supposedly help a bishop, only

then falls in love with the Bishop's wife. And there are several triangular shot compositions where Dudley is positioned between the two.

A word here about the triangle in terms of 'up-staging'. Up-staging is what performers refer to when an actor who is more towards the back of the stage, or up-stage, moves or does some sort of activity which takes away attention from what should be the main focus or action which is happening down-stage. This idea is also applicable to the triangular composition and a comic example of it can be found in a scene in the movie PERSONAL SERVICES. The story concerns a madame who runs a friendly brothel from home where she offers sexual services in exchange for luncheon vouchers. In fact it's based on the real life story of Cynthia Payne who was known as Madame Cyn. Anyway, one of the sexual services she offered involved being locked in a box. Madame Cyn instructs the man to press the button inside when he needs to come out and when he does a flashing red light will appear on the exterior of the box and she'll open it up for him. There's a scene with a long conversation between the Madame and another character (in position A and position C of IMAGE 1) where the red light is constantly flashing in position B, except the characters are so absorbed in what they are saying that neither sees the red light. Of course, the audience, because of the light's key position in the frame, cannot but notice it.

The Inner Frame and the Divided Frame

Mirrors, corridors, boxes, serving hatches, gates, doorways, traditional theatre stages and even shrubbery and trees can all offer the filmmaker the opportunity of an 'inner frame'. In *CITIZEN KANE*, for example, the frame within the frame is the window in which we can see the boy Kane playing on his sledge outside his modest home as those inside decide his future. Probably the most famous inner frame in movie history is John Wayne in John Ford's *THE SEARCHERS* standing outside and framed by the doorway of the homestead in shadow. The inner frame isolates him but more importantly, this is a door to domesticity which will always make him a literal outsider. Door frames are particularly useful as inner frames. In *DIE HARD* there's the inner frame of a bathroom door that is used to isolate John McClane as he argues with his wife in the next room and in a mid-shot the side of that door frame becomes a vertical line separating the two. *DIE HARD* being an action thriller has several divided frames where the baddies are seen hiding one side of the frame as the goodies walk towards them on the other side of the frame.

In the three *GODFATHER* movies, the doorway inner frame is used in several different ways. In the first in the series, when Michael is made Godfather, Kay is in the foreground and the inner frame is the door leading to the inner sanctum. This door is then closed by one of Michael's lieutenants, suggesting that Kay will never be part

of Michael's new life. In the second movie in the series, Michael and Kay have a disagreement and this time it's Michael himself who closes the door on Kay who is in the inner frame of the doorway. In GODFATHER PART III, Michael is again drawn back into the mafia life, and, reflecting this, there's an image of Michael standing in an inner frame at the doorway.



THE FABELMANS, Spielberg's drama about his childhood years, has numerous frames within the frame. Not surprising in a way since because this a movie about a young filmmaker who, by nature of what he is doing, constantly sees the world through a frame. For a start there's Sam's home editing equipment, that obviously has a frame. The various projectors he uses create a frame, but just on a screen but also on hands and in closets. The windows of the family car and home become a frame. The light cast through a window in the bedroom becomes a frame on the wall opposite on which Sam creates silhouettes. Mirrors become frames and during a family disagreement there's a shot of Sam looking into the frame of a

mirror, seeing himself in his mind recording the distressing events happening in front of him.

There are times when any shape, especially those in shadow, can be used to create an inner frame. Think here of Mrs Robinson's legs in THE GRADUATE. Silhouettes too can be effective. Paul Thomas Anderson made use of shadows and silhouettes very effectively in PUNCH DRUNK LOVE.

Composition and Space

When considering shot composition in terms of the space what we're talking about is the space around the subject or object. Filmmakers talk a lot about a shot being 'tight' or 'loose', a tight meaning one with little space around the subject, and a loose shot one with more space around the subject. You'd use a tight composition, for example, to give the idea that a character is concentrating hard, and perhaps a loose one to suggest they are lost or perhaps even overwhelmed by their environment. Shots can also be 'open' or 'closed'. Open would mean simple and unselfconscious, where the frame is only partly in control of what is seen and recorded. This is very much the style of many Woody Allen comedies, where the frame is, as it were, left open for characters to wander in and out, without any readjustment of the frame itself to accommodate. You can see this type of shot composition in HANNAH AND HER SISTERS in the New York apartment. In fact, this open shot

composition is so associated with Woody Allen that when he voiced the character of a neurotic ant in *ANTZ*, the director adopted the open frame style and had Woody Allen's ant constantly pacing up and down, going in and out of the shot. A 'closed' shot composition is one that is more artificial and formalistic. In a way it's like the traditional proscenium arch in the theatre where all the action is directed in such a way that it keeps within the frame.

Empty Space

Empty space in terms of shot composition is sometimes called 'dead screen' or 'negative space'. The point here is that if space is empty/negative then the viewer probably expects that at some stage it will be filled with something. Often something sudden and unexpected. An example of the use of empty space can be found in *INDEPENDENCE DAY*. There's a scene where the US President meets a scientist who is behind a secure glass screen. The scientist's mind is somehow taken over by the alien and smoky mist fills the area behind the glass. The President stands left with empty screen space left. This is suddenly filled by the scientist who is now possessed by the alien – and it's one of the biggest 'jumps' in the movie.

The master of the empty space in a frame in thrillers and horror is undoubtedly the director John Carpenter, known for *THE FOG*, *THE THING*, *ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13* and *HALLOWEEN*. Carpenter loves empty space precisely because you, the viewer, are always

anticipating that it will be filled with something, though you don't know what or when. And when it suddenly is there, you jump! Sometimes what enters the empty space is harmless enough, for example, the hand of the police officer in HALLOWEEN, but on other occasions what was empty space suddenly has Michael in the shot.



A brief digression here on widescreen movies on television. HALLOWEEN (1978) was shot in a 2.39:1 aspect ratio, which is the widest aspect ratio in common cinema presentation. However, up until relatively recently televisions were made with 4:3 aspect ratio, not exactly square, but almost. So what happened when a 2.39:1 movie was broadcast on a 4:3 screen? Well, it wasn't usual in the 1980s to have black lines top and bottom to accommodate the 2.39:1 aspect ratio. Besides, if you did, it would have meant that what you saw was too narrow to watch. Instead, television broadcasters had to go through a process called 'pan and scan'. Basically what this meant was that a technician moved a 4:3 framing device back and forth within in the 2.39:1 deciding what should and

should not be seen. In effect, the technician was re-directing, at least in terms of framing, the entire movie. And in a movie such as HALLOWEEN, the technician would naturally enough pan and scan away from any empty space. But the movie HALLOWEEN depends on that empty space to work as a horror movie. It's easy to see why many filmmakers used to despair when they saw their movies essentially butchered by television.

But it should be said that empty space isn't just used for horror jumps. For example, in Woody Allen's MANHATTAN, Mary, the Diane Keaton character, is on the phone. In the plot, Mary is having an affair with Isaac, played by Woody Allen, and in one scene there's a phone call from her ex-lover where Mary lies to Isaac about who is ringing. Shot wise Mary is screen right and there's empty space screen left. Story wise Mary can't decide who she wants to be with and the empty screen left is a way of suggesting that she hasn't yet decided who, as it were, in her love life, is going to balance the screen with her.

Another use of empty space is to suggest powerlessness. One of the weakest positions in a frame is when the subject, centre, is surrounded by empty space. An example is this can be seen in Spielberg's THE FABELMANS in the scene in which the father receives snapshots of his former wife and her new life. The father is centre frame but he is enclosed by empty grey walls. Another example is when Rick in CASABLANCA is told by Ilsa that she is married to Victor.

After she leaves, Rick, though still central, is surrounded by empty space, and worse, he has the back of his head to camera, which is also a traditional positioning to suggest vulnerability or weakness.

Distance and Proximity

The anthropologist Edward T. Hall, known for *THE HIDDEN DIMENSION* and *THE SILENT LANGUAGE*, talks about proximity in terms of the intimate, the personal, the social and the public. And each is given a distance range. Intimate is skin to eighteen inches, personal is eighteen inches to four feet, social is four feet to twelve feet and public is twelve feet to twenty-five feet. A key point when thinking about distance and the relative relationships between objects is the technical issue known as 'Depth of Field' or DoF. Depth of field refers to the range of focus, meaning that which is in sharp focus and not all blurry, in front of the camera lens. In a shallow depth of field, only a slice of the image is in focus and the rest is more hazy and indistinct, whereas in deep depth of field, multiple objects across a wide distance are all in focus. Where there is a shallow depth of field, our attention is directed to the specific area within the frame that is in focus, but with deep depth of field, because the image is, as it were, flattened, everything in sight is essentially in the same plane. Shallow depth of field is what the human eye is used to and so deep depth of field is strange. But

there's no right or wrong in the use of shallow or deep depth of field. As ever, choices depend on dramatic and psychological contexts.

Compositional Balance

Balance in this sense means when two things (or more) are deliberately put or positioned in relation to each other (or others). Balance can involve symmetry, size and shape, but it can also include movement, depth (in terms of spatial layers), volume (in respect of three-dimensional objects) and line. Stanley Kubrick in 2001 had symmetrical balance in many of his compositional shots, whereas Woody Allen in MANHATTAN uses size and shape as a way of balancing the frame. For example, there's a comic shot composition that features a skeleton frame left that balances with Isaac frame right. And it's funny because the skeleton strangely enough looks a bit like Isaac.

The Actor and Shot Composition

If the actor is facing camera with eyes towards camera then the shot is intimate and involving. Back to the camera obviously offers no intimacy, but this shot can be mysterious. Profile shots tend to be neutral and detached, and less involving than full front or a quarter turn. Sometimes a director will request more 'frontality', meaning asking the actor to adjust the angle of their head more out front and less to the side. This is often referred to as a 'cheat angle' because it

doesn't quite fit the actual eye line in the scene. In the later *Carry On* movies Charles Hawtrey famously took frontality to extreme and often looked directly into camera, knowing that he would then catch the eye of the audience.



Shot Composition and the Creation of Ambiguity

In *THE MALTESE FALCON* there's a very unusual shot composition featuring the Peter Lorre character, Joel Cairo, and the Humphrey Bogart character, Sam Spade. Joel Cairo is established early on as a gay character by the scent of his handkerchief. He enters nervously clutching an umbrella, which he then fiddles with through the conversation with Spade. The umbrella has a protruding cylindrical bar top which at first is in a down position between the seated men. But then Cairo twists the handle into what can only be described as an erect position. In the shot which follows, where Peter Lorre is talking frame left and Humphrey Bogart is listening frame right, the cane handle becomes angled in such a way that it

takes on, shall we say, a more phallic appearance as it is now positioned between Humphrey Bogart's waist area and Peter Lorre's mouth. It is so carefully constructed as a shot that it's difficult to see that it was anything other than intentional. This was 1941 when the Hays Code essentially censored any homosexual characters and overt sexual images. Perhaps then the director John Huston decided to have a bit of fun and, by means of a double-meaning shot composition, got a highly suggestive image past the movie censor.

Less subtle shot composition double-meanings can be found all through the *Austin Powers* series, including a visual joke involving two rabbis and a meatloaf where the end is cut off. And there is, of course, the constant visual playfulness in the movies of Jacques Tati.

Shot Composition and Masking

Masking is rarely used today in shot composite but it was once a popular feature of movie making. Masking means simply that part of the frame is in black. If there's black top and bottom, the composition becomes more horizontal, if there's black at the side, more vertical. Masking was also popular as an iris in or out, going from black to a full screen via a hole from the centre, or from a full screen to black by an ever decreasing circle. Rare today, except when people are looking through binoculars or the like, but early filmmakers such as D.W. Griffith often used a masked frame to

highlight images. Charles Laughton, much influenced by Griffith, used black masking in his classic movie NIGHT OF THE HUNTER.

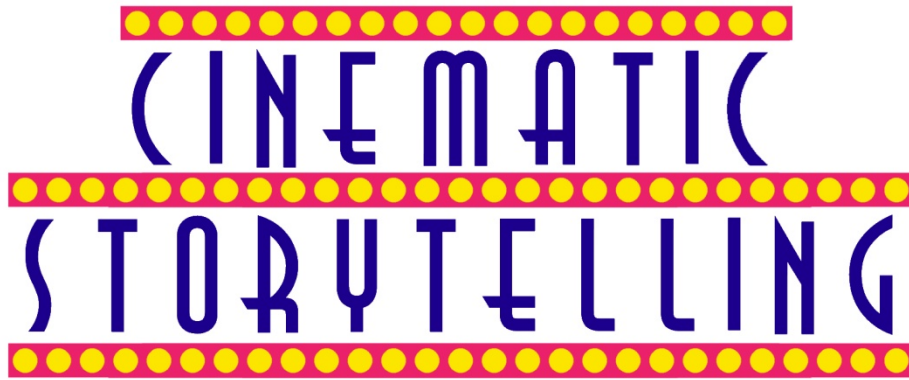
Reflections and the Dual Image

Reflections in a mirror, a pond or simply a shop window can be thought of as a frame within a frame, but in certain circumstances reflections can operate as what you might call or consider a dual image. In RAIN MAN, for example, there's a scene where Tom Cruise is outside on the phone in a phone box and in the reflection in the glass we can see Raymond wandering off. Another example is in NORTH BY NORTHWEST where the housekeeper spots Kaplan/Thornhill in the reflection on the television set as he moves cautiously around upstairs believing himself to be unobserved. Essentially what we are witnessing in both cases are two separate actions happening at once but within the same shot composition.

"CinemaScope? Oh, it wasn't meant for human beings. Just for snakes – and funerals."

Fritz Lang, filmmaker





CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

Re-framing and Shot Transitions

“At the cinema, we do not think – we are thought.”

Jean-Luc Godard

What Should I Look at and When?

The director by means of the camera and the frame decides not only that which we can see, but also where we should look. And this is done by re-framing. Later, in the edit, the director and the editor then choose what we should see next. And that they do by means of shot transitions. Again, our focus is always on the story purpose behind the cinematic technique. Why re-frame at that moment and why go for that sort of transition?

“The essence of cinema is editing. It's the combination of what can be extraordinary images of people during emotional moments, or images in a general sense, put together in a kind of alchemy.”

Francis Ford Coppola, filmmaker



“I love more than anything looking at a movie scene by scene and seeing the intention behind it. It allows you to really appreciate the hand of the filmmaker.”

Jodie Foster, actress and movie director

Re-framing

At a very simple level re-framing may be necessary when a previously unseen character enters the frame and so the composition of the frame needs to be rebalanced to accommodate. Another basic example of re-framing is to show something present but not yet seen – think here, for example, of the famous shot of the hundreds of soldiers revealed in *GONE WITH THE WIND*, which is echoed in *THE SWIMMERS* (2022) where the camera reveals the hundreds upon hundreds of lifejackets abandoned by refugees on Lesbos.

Re-framing can involve following people, as in *LADY IN THE LAKE*, which is almost entirely shot as POV (point of view), and, to comic effect, there’s re-framing when the camera pursues characters in *WAYNE’S WORLD*. Re-framing can also involve drawing the viewer’s attention to an object or action that is already present in the frame. For example, in *VERTIGO*, John "Scottie" Ferguson (James

Stewart) is watching Judy Barton/Madeleine Elster (Kim Novac) looking at the picture of Carlotta and he begins to notice certain similarities between the two. As he compares the two, the camera re-frames to show you what it is he's spotted, namely an identical bunch of flowers and a similar type of curl in the hair. Sometimes, re-framing can take our attention away from what is there or happening, as in the torture scene in *RESERVOIR DOGS*, though here the sound tells you what is going on even if you can no longer see it.



Re-framing can be used in a movie to reflect re-framing elsewhere in the same movie. For example, in *SPELLBOUND*, when the escaping lovers go to give their tickets to the ticket collector, the shot re-frames on the ticket collector's face looking suspicious. In the final scene of the movie, when the lovers are later married and on their honeymoon, they give their tickets to the same ticket collector and again the shot re-frames on him and his reaction. In James Whale's *THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* there's a re-framing on Doctor

Pretentious that is very similar to a re-framing on Henry Frankenstein, thus creating a linkage between the two.

Re-framing can also reflect the environment, tilts up and down are often used, for example, to suggest being on a boat in rough waters. Re-framing offers as well a sense of distance, both actual and metaphorical. For example, in THE SIXTH SENSE, the camera re-frames towards or away from the child psychologist Doctor Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) depending on whether he's right or wrong when he and the boy who can see dead people play the doctor's mind-reading game.



From a storytelling perspective, perhaps the most interesting examples of re-framing are where the frame changes at key story moments. For example, in RETURN OF THE JEDI, as Darth Vader decides to kill the Emperor and save his son there is a re-framing on the mask of Darth Vader where the camera goes in for a slightly bigger close-up. Re-framing suggests re-thinking. Then there's a plot moment in NORTH BY NORTHWEST when the villain discovers that his lover is a double-agent and then says that the issue is best dealt with "from a great height", meaning they'll drop her from the plane when it's over the ocean. And as he says that line the camera goes up above the villain's head and re-frames him in a more high-angled shot.



It should be said here that techniques are always in development. TAXI DRIVER, for example, set a new benchmark not just in terms of subject matter but camera work too. Traditionally in a movie if a character exits frame right, he or she usually enters the next shot from frame left. This happens in TAXI DRIVER, only there isn't an edit. What happens is that Travis exits screen right, the camera pans left and stops, then Travis re-enters screen left. That's fine if there is an edit but here it's one continuous shot and so a little disconcerting. But it's quite simple really because Travis, or the actor playing him (Robert de Niro) has, in effect, walked behind the camera.

"With bad movies, I have this image in my head of the director and the editor in the editing room watching a scene that is not happening, looking at each other and saying, 'Put some music in there.'"

Gustavo Santaolalla



“The film is made in the editing room. The shooting of the film is about shopping, almost. It's like going to get all the ingredients together, and you've got to make sure before you leave the store that you got all the ingredients. And then you take those ingredients and you can make a good cake – or not.”

Philip Seymour Hoffman

Shot Transitions

A shot transition is the most basic form of edit and means simply that one shot or image becomes or transitions in some way into a different image. Over the years, filmmakers have developed many types of shot transition and technology has played its part too, particularly with the invention of the optical printer in the late 1920s. An optical printer was a device consisting of one or more film projectors mechanically linked to a movie camera which allowed filmmakers to re-photograph one or more strips of film thus giving them the options of fades, dissolves, freeze frame, slow motion and so on, though of course digital computer software does that job today.



With shot transitions, styles vary and tastes may alter. Traditionally, for example, the degree of change with a straight cut shot transition within a scene was not that great. Long shot to mid-shot was fine but never long shot to close-up. But then came along Sergio Leone whose editing style revolutionised what people thought was acceptable. As ever, though, the question to ask when considering shot transition is what connects the cinematic technique to the plot and its theme, or the character and their psychology. In other words, what purpose does the shot transition serve?

The Straight Cut

A straight cut is the splicing together of two shots by means of tape if it's temporary or glue (or 'cement' as it is known) if it's permanent. A 'straight cut' or 'hard cut' is the quickest and most direct type of shot transition. A straight cut in story terms could be a 'jump cut', a 'continuity cut', a 'match cut' or whatever, for a straight cut is just the technical term given to the hardest type of shot transition.

A key point to consider with the straight cut is the degree to which an action in one shot takes you to the action in the next shot. For example, the noise of a door opening and the turn of the head of the person who hears it would naturally lead to a shot transition of cut shot showing who is coming through the door. Many directors even use the phrase 'motivate the cut' when they tell actors to do

certain actions in a scene, knowing that it is more than likely that it will be on or just after that action that action they will make the transitional edit.

The Dissolve

A dissolve is where a new image superimposes itself on the previous image. One image, as it were dissolves and disappears and at the same time the next image slowly takes shape to replace it. Dissolves are popular when introducing flashback memories and dreams.

Often with a dissolve there is some sort of association between the two images. There are connecting dissolves, for example, between father and son in *THE GODFATHER, PART TWO*, which tell their stories in parallel. In the Western *SHANE*, as the friends dig out a tree trunk, there's a dissolve to the wider landscape, thus making a correlation of sorts between the men and nature. You can also have match dissolves where there is some sort of visual match between the two images. An example of this can be found at the end of *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* where the face of the young soldier dissolves into the face of the veteran at the grave. But beware the unreliable dissolve. In *THE USUAL SUSPECTS* there is a shot of a large pile of rope. Could someone be hiding fearfully behind it? The camera goes in and then there is a dissolve to Verbal (Kevin Spacey) being interviewed. A camera going in and then dissolving would in terms of

camera grammar certainly suggest that it was Verbal who was hiding behind that rope. And of course that's what you're meant to think. Only it's a mislead, but that red herring is made possible by our familiarity with how cinematic storytelling usually works.



The Fade

Another sort of shot transition is the fade. The difference between a fade and a dissolve is that the fade comes from or goes to blank screen, usually black. Fade-outs are seen nowadays more than fade-ins. A famous recent fade-out which created a lot of media buzz is the fade-out at the end of the last episode of television series *THE SOPRANOS*. In days gone by, the fade-out to black was a major feature of the *film noir* genre, notably in *BUILD MY GALLOWS HIGH* and *OUT OF THE PAST*.

Fades have often been used as some sort of marker to indicate the end of a sequence or act. Shakespeare usually ended his acts with a rhyming couplet, and the fade for filmmakers serves similar

purpose. THE GODFATHER, PART TWO, for example, uses several fades in this way.



The Iris-in and Iris-out

The camera works in a similar way to the human eye in that there is a device called the iris which opens or closes depending on lighting conditions, only of course with the camera iris it's the shutters and springs that do the actual adjustments. The point here is that the iris when opening or closing can act as a shot transition. The iris can open from the centre of the screen to reveal a scene in full or indeed close to black in an ever decreasing circle, though the shape may be more hexagonal to match the mechanics of the camera. Such shot transitions are essentially mimicking what the camera does and so naturally enough remind the audience that what they are in fact watching is a movie made by a camera. Iris-in and iris-out transitions were popular in the early days of cinema and you'll find them, for example, in BIRTH OF A NATION, THE CABINET

OF DR CALIGARI and NOSFERATU. You'll certainly see their influence in Charles Laughton's THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER and also in STAR WARS, which anyway is a homage to weekly Saturday matinee movies that were popular in the 1930s which often used the iris-in/iris-out technique. Other examples of this type of shot transition are there in the opening of BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID and the closing of THE STING.

Of course the iris-in or iris-out is no longer done inside the camera as nowadays it's achieved as an optical effect through digital versions of the optical printer. Although this sort of shot transition is rarer today you do sometimes see it in films and documentaries about the early days of cinema.



The Wipe

The wipe is when Shot A is replaced by Shot B by means of a boundary line moving across the screen. This boundary line could be horizontal, vertical or even zigzag. In a wipe, both images are briefly

on the screen at the same time and usually there is no blend between the two. Wipes were, like the iris-in/iris-out, a regular feature of Saturday matinee movies such as the *Flash Gordon* series and they were also used as shot transitions in the 1930s Busby Berkeley musicals. Wipes were made possible by the optical printer which was developed for use in 1927. It's not surprising then to see wipes and fades and the like in the movies of 1930s as in those days such things were still new and something of a novelty.

The Flip

The frame turning over like a page in a book is known a 'flip'. The flip shot transition was only made possible relatively recently and features more in television than in the movies. In the 1980s computer technology entered the editing rooms and this allowed for a whole variety of flip shapes and shot transitions. In comedy sketch shows of the period it was not unusual to see the final frame of one sketch freezing and then turning in the shape of a letter and floating through the air before disappearing into a letterbox in the next sketch. However, this sort of technique was so overused it became a bit of a cliché and like those wipes and dissolves of the 1930s is seen less nowadays than it used to be.



Graphic Match Cut

A graphic match cut (also sometimes called a ‘form cut’) is where a physical element of one scene is used in, and as a transition to, the next image, and usually this is achieved through some sort of visual similarity. Often such a cut can indicate a leap in time, most famously the bone to spaceship in 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY. But here there’s a thematic link in that the bone is used as a tool and though the spaceship is a remarkable feat of engineering, it’s still ultimately just a more advanced tool. Another match cut that makes a leap in time is the hat going down on the young Indiana Jones at the end of one shot and then raised on the head of the older Indiana in the next shot in INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE. And Spielberg repeats that basic trick in THE FABELMANS where the hand of young Sam going up in front of the family cuts to the older Sam’s hand going up when he’s with his teenage friends searching for scorpions. Spielberg loves those sort of movie games and there’s a fun graphic match cut in INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM where the

Paramount logo mountain becomes the actual mountain of the location. What all these self-aware references are doing in story terms is simply saying to the audience, *‘Look, this is a movie. It’s going to be playful and we’re gonna have some fun.’*

“The key to making good movies is to pay attention to the transition between scenes.”

Steven Soderbergh



“If it’s a good movie, the sound could go off and the audience would still have a pretty clear idea of what was going on.”

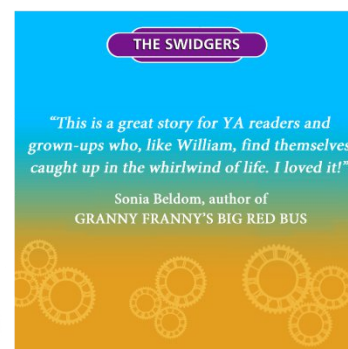
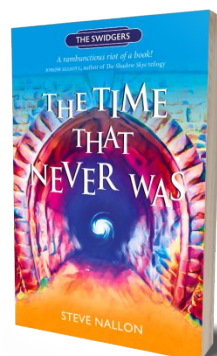
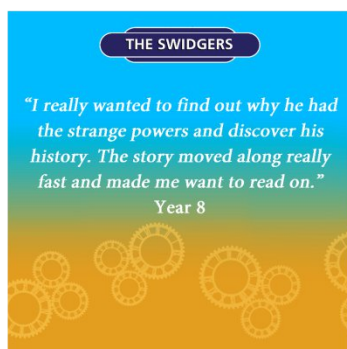
Alfred Hitchcock

Shot Duration and Editing Styles

André Bazin was a renowned and influential French film critic and film theorist. He argued that realism was key to cinema and he called for objective reality and as little editing (or montage) as possible. His belief was that the interpretation of a film or scene should be left to the spectator and that editing was an intrusion on the “natural continuity of duration.” Not quite do away with the editor, but certainly a fight back against the film theory of the 1920s

and 1930s, which emphasised how the cinema could manipulate reality. In his world then shot duration should always be kept as long as the dramatic unity required.

Another point on shot duration is the actual capacity of the human eye and brain to assimilate visual information. Put simply, we can only take in so much at any given time. Raymond Spottiswood's book *FILM AND ITS TECHNIQUES* (1951) talked about the 'content curve' which assesses the assimilation of information on the screen. He argued that cutting before the optimum point on the content curve would confuse the audience, as they wouldn't have been able to take in all that was there, and cutting after, when all the information has been taken in, would potentially cause the audience to get restless or bored. The problem then for the editor is deciding in terms of length of shot duration where the peak of that content curve lies. And that's a difficult judgement, especially when by the time it gets to the final edit the material on the screen is so familiar to the editor.



Arguably our capacity to take in visual information has changed over the years. The speed at which an audience can absorb that which is on a screen is nowadays much quicker than it was in the 1940s or 1950s. The more we are accustomed to quicker edits, the more used we get to taking that information in. As a result, even movies like *DIE HARD* (1988) now seem 'slow', certainly at least in comparison to action movies made today.

Another point of shot duration is that different genres require specific types and lengths of edit. Shot duration in a comedy is usually much longer than that for an action movie. In the *Pink Panther* series, for example, the attitude of the director Blake Edwards was simply to leave the camera rolling – usually in a wide shot – and let Peter Sellers be funny. Over cutting in fact often kills comedy. Steven Spielberg learnt that lesson in 1941 and so when he came to direct *INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE*, and saw the comic chemistry between his two male leads Harrison Ford and Sean Connery, Spielberg threw away his planned storyboard with lots of edits and went instead for longer takes, which were often left as is in the final edit.

Different storytellers/directors/editors have different editing styles. Edits can be rhythmical, rapid or slow, and transitions can be instant or slow or faded or whatever. The feel of a Woody Allen movie is unlike that of an Oliver Stone film. And shot duration is one of the key reasons as to why.

For those interested in statistics, modern action films have an average shot length of 4 seconds, followed by adventure at 5.1 seconds and sci-fi at 6.2 seconds. In comparison, the average shot length of a Hollywood movie in the 1940s was 9 seconds and for an Italian movie it was 15 seconds. But of course there were exceptions. *THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES* directed by William Wyler was a 172 minute movie with only 190 cuts, meaning a cutting average of 54 seconds. The director today with the shortest average is Paul W.S. Anderson, director of the *Resident Evil* series, who has a cutting average of just 2.4 seconds. Compare that with Michael Haneke's average, which is 26.4 seconds.

Some more thoughts on cutting and shot transitions...

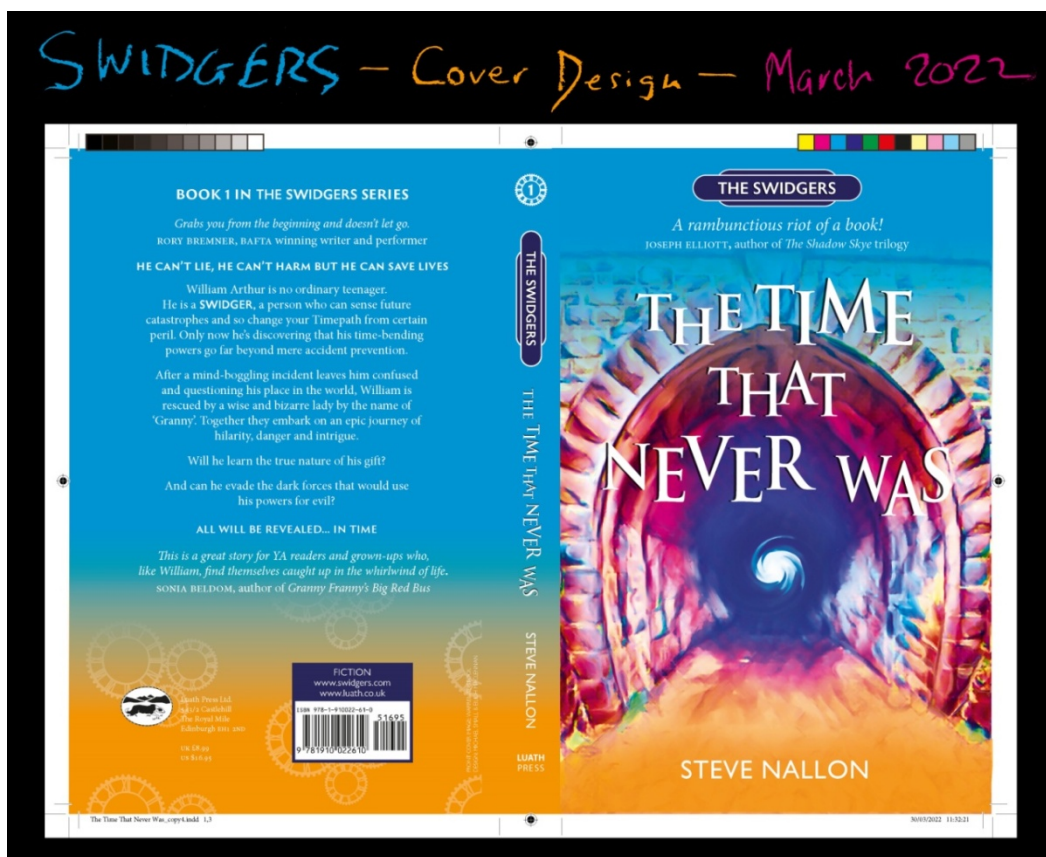
"I consciously did away with fade-ins and replaced them with the cut. Henceforth, I never used such editing techniques again. In fact, neither dissolve, fade-in nor fade-out can be regarded as 'the grammar of film,' they are no more than characteristics of the camera."

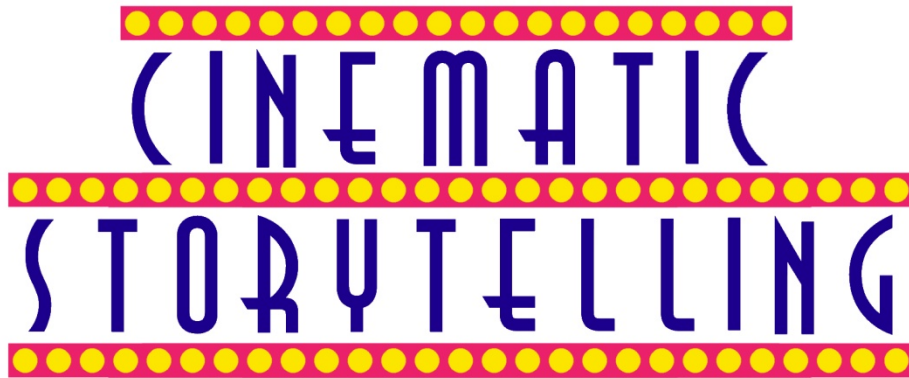
Yasujiro Ozu

"You see so many movies... where the younger people who are coming from MTV or who are coming from commercials and there's no sense of film grammar. There's no real sense of how to tell a story visually. It's just cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, you know, which is pretty easy."

Peter Bogdanovich

“The less the camera is able to capture what you're seeing in a scene, the more editing it needs.”
Tom Anderson





CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

The Editor

“The cinema began with a passionate, physical relationship between celluloid and the artists and craftsmen and technicians who handled it, manipulated it, and came to know it the way a lover comes to know every inch of the body of the beloved. No matter where the cinema goes, we cannot afford to lose sight of its beginnings.”

Martin Scorsese

The Pioneers

First a word about D.W. Griffith and his work. David Wark Griffith’s *BIRTH OF A NATION* (1915) is a racist movie and Griffith himself was as unpleasant as many of his films. Yet his contribution to early cinema at a technical level should not be denied. Griffith worked primarily in his head and very rarely wrote things down. In doing so, he created a unique visual grammar and language for cinema. Griffith didn’t wait for the actor to come through the door as if filming a stage play, but instead began the scene when the action started. In *FOR LOVE OF GOLD*, Griffith was one of the first to use

close-ups and mid-shots, and one of the first as well to change the position of the camera mid-scene and then edit the two different angles together later. Studio officials didn't like these mid-shots and told Griffith that the public would never accept only "half an actor", but of course they did. Griffith thought in terms of story and always did his own editing. He was one of the first to use cross-cuts or parallel cutting, where the edit switches back and forth between scenes giving the impression that the action, though happening in different locations, is unfolding at the same moment in time, for example in *THE LOVELY VILLA*, and he was the first to make use of the flashback in *THE ADVENTURES OF DOLLIE*. In his movie *HOME, SWEET HOME* Griffith put the camera on the back of a cart so that the horses were riding right in front to you. He used lighting to suggest mood and the Californian 'golden hour' just before sunset became known as the "the light that D.W. Griffith waited for." In the movie *BABYLON* (2022), a homage to the crazy days of early cinema, there is a film being shot that is dependent on that same golden hour of light. *BABYLON* certainly gets a lot right in its depiction of Hollywood's extremities. The early pioneers of cinema were often vile and selfish people with unpleasant moral attitudes and political views. And there can be no excuse for that. Their technical achievements live on today in way that they do not. So with D.W. Griffith, acknowledge the practical developments of the cinematic craft to which he undoubtedly contributed, but always be aware as

well that the films he made were often as loathsome as the man himself.



But Griffith wasn't the only influential pioneering director. In Russia there was Sergei Eisenstein who developed the 'Soviet Montage' theory of editing, a technique that created meaning through the juxtaposition of images. In Sergei Eisenstein's movies there are visual jumps from one scene to another, cutting together unrelated events and images in order to express or illustrate an idea. His purpose was both dialectical and political, for his ultimate aim was to glorify the collective of the masses. And you can see his theory of montage in such films such as *BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN* and *OCTOBER: TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD*.

A contemporary of Sergei Eisenstein was Vsevolod Illarionovich Pudovkin. Pudovkin shared Eisenstein's general political philosophy, but whereas Eisenstein used montage to present the power of the collective, Pudovkin's aim was more to show the struggles and

toughness of the individual. And, like Eisenstein, Pudovkin's method was editing (or montage).



Editing, argued Pudovkin in his book *FILM TECHNIQUE* (1933), was an aspect of filmmaking that was unique to film and so had a power that distinguished it from any of the other art forms. For Pudovkin, editing was not merely a technical way of creating a junction between separate scenes, pieces or image, but a method of 'psychological guidance' for the spectator. And this he called 'relational editing'. His point was that you as the editor can, with skilful montage, convey an idea or emotion without explicating saying it.

Pudovkin's five principles of editing were contrast (how seemingly different images can relate to each other), parallelism (the connection of two images visually by matching certain elements in both), symbolism (the use of visual metaphors), simultaneity (cross-cutting between two actions occurring at the same time but in

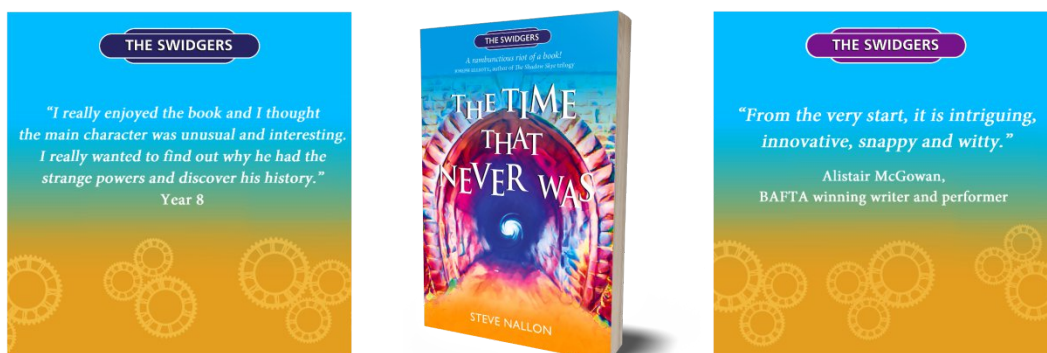
different locations), and leitmotif (a reoccurring shot or scene that has some sort of a resonance or meaning in the story).

Pudovkin, it should be said, was the student of Lev Kuleshov, who was the first to show that editing could evoke emotions entirely based on their order and juxtaposition. There is in filmmaking what is known as the 'Kuleshov Effect', which is the phenomenon whereby viewers derive more meaning from the interconnection and interaction of two sequential shots than they do from single shots in isolation. To illustrate this Kuleshov did an experiment where he took a strip of film of the matinee idol Ivan Mosjoukine (possibly from an old screen text) and edited the same shot of Mosjoukine's motionless face with various other shots, including a bowl of soup, a girl in a coffin and lady on a couch. Although it was the identical shot of Mosjoukine's face each time, when the film was shown to an audience, they believed that Mosjoukine's inner emotions were changing each time he appeared. To them Mosjoukine's facial expressions clearly showed hunger when looking at the bowl of soup, sadness when seeing the coffin and desire when observing the woman on the couch. The implication of all this is that viewers not only bring their own emotional world to sequences of images, but also attribute to the actor thoughts and feelings that are simply not there. The edit in effect creates them.

A word here as well about the German Expressionist film directors of the 1920s such as Fritz Lang who directed METROPOLIS

(1927) and M (1931), F. W. Murnau who made NOSFERATU (1922) and Robert Wiene who created THE CABINET OF CALIGARI (1920).

German Expressionism was highly symbolic and stylized. The early Expressionist films, often used non-realistic sets, geometrically absurd camera angles, and created mood by means of distorted shadows. The plots and stories often dealt with madness, alienation and sexual desire. Their purpose was as much to show the inner emotional life as what was on the surface. And their chief method in all this was the composition of the shot and what they chose to put in it. In other words, the *mise-en-scène*.



In summary then Hollywood's big impact on cinematic storytelling was in the narrative drive of the story, the Russian influence was in the relational ideas and the emotions that montage could convey, and the German Expressionist way of working inspired imaginative visual compositions that revealed an inner life. And you could argue that these techniques and methods of cinematic

storytelling have in their different ways given us the many styles of cinema that we know today.

“The most instructive book on film aesthetics I came across was Pudovkin’s FILM TECHNIQUE... Pudovkin gives many clear examples of how good film editing enhances a scene, and I would recommend his book to anyone seriously interested in film technique.”

Stanley Kubrick, movie director



“I realised – and I am probably the last person in the world to realise this – that we live our lives with no editing.”

Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu

Editing and the Human Experience

The human eye sees life in, as it were, one long take. Occasionally we are told to close our eyes and turn round – when a birthday present is being given, for example – and this creates a visual edit of sorts, yet on the whole we witness our life go by as one unbroken shot. Except, of course, for blinks, naps and sleeping. But in a way that’s where that unbroken shot does change because our dreams are edits, jump cuts and strange shot transitions. And so too our memories. However, the basic point to remember is that in our waking life at least, there are no edits. And therefore seeing an

edited cinematic story is, to a degree, an unnatural way of looking at the world.

“If you've noticed that I don't use long takes, it's not because I don't like them, but because no one gives me the necessary means to treat myself to them. It's more economical to make one image, then this image and then that image, and try to control them later, in the editing studio.”

Orson Welles



“Well, you always discover a lot in the editing room. Particularly the action, because you have to over-shoot a lot and shoot an enormous amount of material because many of the sequences have to be discovered in the editing and manipulation of it.”

Christopher Nolan

Film Editing and the Editor

The very earliest films had very little editing. There was, for example, the uninterrupted short film of the arrival of a train in a station that caused a sensation when shown in theatres, and a short clip of it can be found in the compilation of classic cinema moments at the end of the movie BABYLON (2022). However, someone then came along and physically cut the film and joined another piece onto it and so editing was invented.

Editing in the sense of montage is the only craft associated with film making that is native to film. It is no longer unique to film because television includes editing, but television came later. Interestingly the editor together with the director, are the only creatives who have an involvement across an entire movie. The lead actor is rarely in every shot, not all scenes require musical composition and even the cinematographer may not contribute to every frame if old film stock is used.



Editing, like all narrative design, is essentially the art of making decisions and selections from many variables. The variables in editing include the selection of the shot, the length of shot, how those shots are joined or transitioned, plus why they are then put together in that particular order to create the sequence. Cutting is the technical act of 'splicing' or joining lengths of film together. An example of how this is done can be found in Steven Spielberg's THE FABELMANS, where the young Sam Fabelman (based on Spielberg) takes different

lengths of film and literally joins them together with tape. If you want to get very technical there are 'tape splices' and 'cement slices'. In the first instance, a transparent sprocked tape is used for temporary edits and then later they are 'cemented' together using a permanent glue. In years gone by, the 'cutting room' would have been hung with long lengths of film, giving the editor numerous choices and options. Of course nowadays everything is done digitally, though there are films still made today which use traditional film stock, for example Martin Jenkins' *ENYS MEN* (2022) and for which Jenkins used a hand-cranked camera.



Editing technique is now over a hundred years old, yet it is still developing. Rules that were sacrosanct are now being broken and that which was never tried before is being experimented with. For example, there was a rule once that said there shouldn't be edits between shots where the camera was moving, but in Robert Altman's *GOSFORD PARK* the camera is in constant and continuous

motion. Only slight, but still perceptible. Split screen is a technique that has been around for years but no one had ever used it across a whole movie. Well, not until Gaspar Noé's VORTEX in 2021.

“Editing is where movies are made or broken. Many a film has been saved and many a film has been ruined in the editing room.”

Joe Dante



“To receive footage that has been shot with editing in mind, it is a blessing.”

Thelma Schoonmaker

The Role of the Editor

The American editor Harry Keramidas, known for the BACK TO THE FUTURE series, has said that shooting a film is the director's way of talking to the editor and cutting a film is the editor's way of answering. The relationship is, says Keramidas, “a dialogue among peers.” The British editor Antony Gibbs, known for ROLLERBALL (1975), FIDDLER ON THE ROOF (1971) and A BRIDGE TOO FAR (1977), argued that an editor who takes the total interpretation of the director's and writer's intentions and puts those into the movie is a good editor, but a great editor is one who is capable of “taking their intentions even further, showing them a dimension to their project

which even they may not have imaged to be there.” And the history of Woody’s Allen’s ANNIE HALL is a case in point.



The earliest edit of ANNIE HALL (1977) was less focused on Alvy and Annie's relationship and more on Alvy and his neurosis. In fact, the film's original title was ANHEDONIA, meaning the 'inability to experience pleasure.' Woody Allen said in 2012, "When ANNIE HALL started out, that film was not supposed to be what I wound up with. The film was supposed to be what happens in a guy's mind, and you were supposed to see a stream of consciousness that was mine, and I did the film and it was completely incoherent. Nobody understood anything that went on. The relationship between myself and Diane Keaton was all anyone cared about. That was not what I cared about. That was one small part of another big canvas that I had. In the end, I had to reduce the film to just me and Diane Keaton, and that relationship, so I was quite disappointed in that movie, as I was with other films of mine that were very popular." But audiences only know what they see and not what was cut and it was the movie's

editor, Ralph Rosenblum, who notably helped steer Woody Allen to concentrate more on this secondary character called Annie Hall.

Ironically, although ANNIE HALL received Oscars for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress and Best Screenplay, the person who had done much to shape the final story, Ralph Rosenblum, did not win Best Editor. That went to Paul Hirsch, Marcia Lucas and Richard Chew for STAR WARS, which, of course, is a great movie, but the storytelling in that arguably comes primarily from the screenplay. Often an editor's contribution to the storytelling is one of the most important in the filmmaking process, but as it's done behind closed doors the secrets of the editing room don't often emerge until years later. And this means that even if the role of the editor is understood and appreciated, the editor won't always get the credit they deserve.



And on this point a movie such as DRIVING MISS DAISY may appear easy and simple in terms of the edit, yet a true editor would know how difficult an edit it would have been. Most of the scenes in DRIVING MISS DAISY – which originated as a stage play – are

between just two actors. The editor, Mark Warner, had a difficult job because he had to keep performances consistent and this would have limited shot choices. ALL THAT JAZZ is a far more flashy film and so would have required a very different kind of thinking and approach.



An outside eye is always useful when putting a film together. There are many examples in film history where an editor or outsider made all the difference. When HIGH NOON was completed it wasn't believed it would work, but then the film editor Elmo Williams suddenly came up with the idea of inserting shots of the railway track and more clocks, and suddenly the movie had images and a

tempo which created tension and suspense. There was a famous sequence in THE GODFATHER where Michael goes to visit his father in hospital and finds there is nobody guarding him. Those who had been assigned to do that job were gone and that could mean only one thing: an assassin was on his way to kill Vito Corleone. But there was no tension in the edit. A draft cut of the sequence was shown to Francis Ford Coppola's friend George Lucas who suggested adding images of empty corridors. The problem was no empty corridors were filmed. Coppola then remembered that there were a few seconds of empty corridors after he had shouted 'Action!' but before the actors entered the frame. These were then edited into the sequence, giving that part of the story the apprehension and tension it needed.

More thoughts on editors and editing...

"I love editing. It's one of my favorite parts about filmmaking."

Steven Spielberg

"The notion of directing a film is the invention of critics – the whole eloquence of cinema is achieved in the editing room."

Orson Welles

"I love the idea that the editing room is the final time you write. You should still be creatively solving problems even at that point."

It's not really until you're locked that you can call it quits."

Noah Hawley, American director, producer, and writer

"I often wonder at directors who've never been editors. I just don't understand how they go to work. I kind of piece it together as we're making it. And editing is one of the, if not the, chief of the tools of my trade."

David Lean

"Writing, of course, is writing, acting comes from the theater, and cinematography comes from photography. Editing is unique to film. You can see something from different points of view almost simultaneously, and it creates a new experience."

Stanley Kubrick, movie director

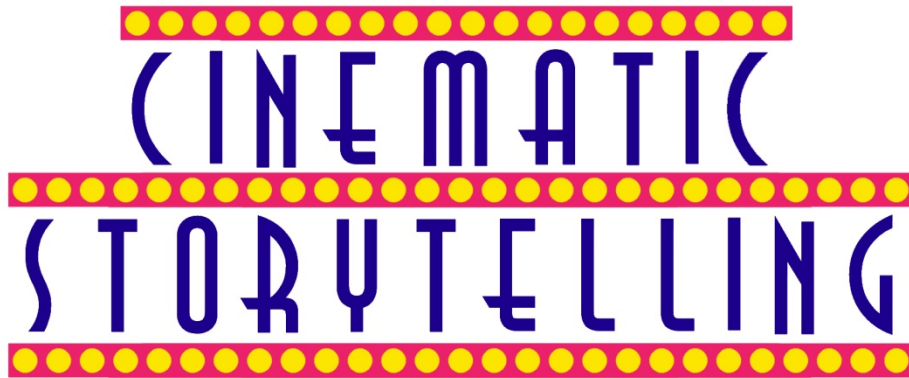
"The script is nothing but a collection of motifs which I work over with my actors as the filming proceeds. The final decisions I make in the cutting room, where I cut away all obtrusive elements."

Ingmar Bergman

"The most enjoyable part of directing or filmmaking for me is editing. It is literally the language of filmmaking. It is right there, and you learn constantly how dumb you are and how much you have to learn every time you take a picture into the cutting room."

William Freidkin





CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

Types of Edit

"Every edit is a lie."
Jean-Luc Godard

Types of Edits

There are many types of edits and the most basic is the simple shot transition. Listed below are more what you might call scene, sequence and story editing, as these are about creating a succession of edits that are linked in terms of theme, action or character.

Continuity Editing

An edit where one shot follows another in time and stays within the same location is known as a 'continuity edit' or 'continuity editing'. This sort of editing can be seen as the principles of unity of action, unity of time and unity of space carried on in the film medium. Continuity editing is unobtrusive, preserves the illusion of an ongoing narrative and is seen by many as the most natural way of

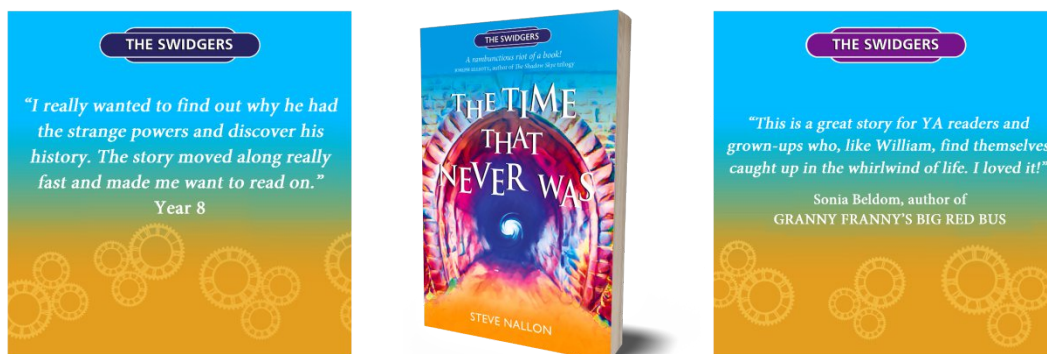
helping the flow of the action while at the same time giving that action a sense of immediacy. Other terms for continuity cutting include 'academic cutting' and '*découpage classique*', though be warned the term *découpage*, meaning 'to cut up', like many French ideas, is more conceptual than practical. If you want a rough indication of what it means then perhaps saying it is the technique of translating a narrative script into a detailed outline of visuals for a camera to capture, and the process of editing within those images into a visual narrative.

Continuity editing is the most common form of editing, especially in Hollywood, and although there are likely to be edits/cuts between scenes where locations and time periods changes, most films that keep continuity of action/time/space within scenes are known as continuity edit movies. Cuts to a different times or spaces are sometimes called 'jump cuts', but on the whole the term jump cut is used primarily for where the edit is intentionally obtrusive and as a result draws attention to the fact that the time continuity in particular is not seamless.

Elliptical Editing

Elliptical editing is a key aspect as to how cinematic storytelling works. In elliptical editing, actions are presented in such a way that they consume less time on screen than they do in the story. One of the golden rules of any storytelling is not to show the uninteresting

bits that the audience can fill in for themselves. An obvious example of this is seeing how a character travels from A to B after they say they are going to B. If the journey is uneventful and of little consequence, just cut to a shot of the location and then cut to the person at that location. A comic variation on this is a character saying that they are most defiantly not going somewhere and the next shot is that character in that exact location. An example of this is in *SWINGERS*, where the line “I’m not going to Las Vegas” is followed by that character on the way to Las Vegas. Such jump cuts have become a bit a cliché now but they are still a popular type of comic edit.



Cross-cutting

Cross-cutting is where the edit switches back and forth between scenes giving the impression that, though the action is occurring in different locations, it is unfolding at the same moment in time. Cross-cutting goes back to D.W. Griffith and *THE BIRTH OF A*

NATION (1915) but a more recent example is Christopher Nolan's INCEPTION whose cross-cutting explores the idea of dreams inside of dreams. The cross-cuts illustrate how actions in one layer can lead to consequences in another dream layer. Cross-cutting is common in action movies where events in different locations are happening simultaneously and often against the clock.



But beware unreliable cross-cutting that sets out to hoodwink you. Take a sequence in THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS. There is an establishing shot of a house. A SWAT team of FBI agents are hiding outside behind a flower delivery van and a lone agent stands at the door with a bunch of flowers. The agent rings the doorbell. The next shot is in the underground area of the killer's house. But this is unreliable cutting as the house where the police are is revealed to be empty when they break in. So who pressed the doorbell at the killer's house? Clarice. And now the killer opens the door and lets her in. The point here is that the traditional establishing shot followed immediately by an interior shot created a link that wasn't there. In

fact, there is no reason why we should have made this connection, other than that we are used to the grammar and geography of camera cutting. But it was a cheat and a mislead. And we fell for it.

Inter-cutting

Inter-cutting is similar to cross-cutting in that there are two distinct locations but the difference is that with inter-cutting there is usually a specific connection between the actions taking place. A simple example of this would be a phone call between two people. Another example might be a forest scene where there is inter-cutting of the animals who live there.

In recent years new conventions of inter-cutting have developed, such as where a description of what is proposed or will be done is inter-cut with that action being performed. An early example of this can be found in *THE GODFATHER: PART THREE* where Michael advises his young protégé Vincent on what he must do to become the new Godfather. More recent examples of this type of editing can be found in *THE SWIMMERS* (2022) and in *TOP GUN: MAVERICK* (2022) where the mission being described back at base is inter-cut with images of the training for that mission. This type of editing essentially cuts between intentions or proposals in the now with their practice and actuality in the future. Often too such edits are a means of transitioning in time to that later date. Another recent inter-cutting convention has been where someone is talking

about what they did and this is inter-cut with the actual action, showing the viewer that the person is lying.

Contrast Montage

A specific type of cutting between different but often simultaneous events is what is known as contrast cutting or contrast montage. The principle of contrast in editing was a technique developed in the early days of cinema by Pudovkin and others that challenged audiences to make the connections between seemingly disassociated images, actions or scenes. An obvious example in Pudovkin's *MOTHER* (1926) is where bourgeois women dressed in well-tailored clothes are contrasted with the downtrodden appearance of the mother character of the title. An early example of contrast editing can be found in F.W. Murnau's *NOSFERATU* (1922), where a professor shows his students meat eating plants such as Venus fly trap (known as the 'vampire of plants') and shots of these weird plants are intercut with scenes of a madman controlled by the mind of a vampire in a cell eating flies and admiring spiders. What we are perhaps expected to think is that the madman has now become, like the plants, a horrific freak of nature.

A much better known example of contrast montage is in the baptism sequence in *THE GODFATHER* where Michael is in church renouncing sin while his mafia lieutenants are out murdering his enemies. What we are seeing is not the baptism of Michael's godson

but the 'baptism' of Michael himself as the godfather. Michael is not anointed with holy oil but with the blood of those whose murders he has ordered.



Parallelism

A graphic match cut (also sometimes called a 'form cut') is a shot transition where a shape or colour or some other visual similarity is used to connect two otherwise different images. Parallelism is essentially the same technique, except it involves a series of shot transitions across a whole sequence of cuts and not just one shot transition to another. An example of graphic parallelism can be found in CITIZEN KANE, where a lit window in an old building in the opening sequence is in the same position on the screen in each subsequent shot, even though each shot is different and taken from various angles. This type of graphic match cut in editing is useful because visually it allows for a smooth transition.

But parallelism can involve more than just a visual similarity, for parallelism is, at its most basic, a way of connecting two things by matching elements within the scene or sequence. And that matching element can be sound or some sort of feature or other similarity. In Pudovkin's example in his book *FILM TECHNIQUE* it is the time of the poor man's execution and the wrist-watch of a drunken rich man. Often with parallelism there is also a thematic or symbolic connection between the images. For example, there's a shot transition in Martin Scorsese's *HUGO* that goes from a complex mechanism of a clock to an aerial view of night time Paris with the Arc de Triumphe in the centre. In the transition, the Arc de Triumphe is presented as if it is a cog and the intricacies of the roads match up graphically with the inner workings of the clock. What we have are two worlds that share many interconnecting possibilities.

As said, parallelism can involve not only visuals but sound too. A classic example of this is the scream of the cleaning lady who sees the murdered body in Hitchcock's *THE 39 STEPS* which then becomes the screech of the train. A homage to this sound edit can be found in Spielberg's *JURASSIC PARK: THE LOST WORLD* where a woman's scream becomes part of a shot of Jeff Goldblum yawning against a background of green trees (and so it looks like him screaming in the same location), but then the camera re-frames to reveal he's actually standing in a train station in front of a advertising hoarding with an image of a holiday location and a train has just arrived.

A quick word here about terminology. The baptism sequence has been referred to as ‘contrast montage’, an idea in editing that comes originally from Pudovkin. And it’s called that here because it’s up to the audience to make the relational connection between the contrasting actions. There are film theorists, however, who would refer to the baptism as ‘parallel editing’ or ‘cross-cutting’. It’s not that they’re wrong, it’s just that their definitions are different. There is certainly editing of several events and actions in parallel, so it can’t be argued that it is parallel editing, but as the key point is contrast that is the term that has been used here. Not that it matters much. No one watches a film ticking off technical terms or arguing what you should call them. What matters is the purpose and intent of the filmmaker, who very likely anyway called it something different themselves.

Split Screen Edit

A split screen edit is where there are two shots (or more) from scenes with different locations on screen at the same time. A famous example of this technique can be seen in *THE THOMAS CROWN AFFAIR* (1968) and more recently in *VORTEX* (2021), written and directed by Gaspar Noé. The two sections of the screen in *VORTEX* follow the separate actions of an elderly husband and wife. In the story, the wife has dementia and eventually dies, and when she does, that side of the screen goes black. And the emptiness and

blankness of her part of the screen is emotionally very powerful. *TIMECODE* (2000) is a movie that even splits the screen into four different sections rather than the usual two. In the film, different cameras all in long single takes, follow the four protagonists as they grapple with the problems in their lives and careers.

There's a clever censor beating example of the split screen technique in *INDISCREET* (1958). Two lovers in different beds are on the phone to each other, Philip Adams, played by actor Cary Grant, to screen left, and Anna Kalmar, played by Ingrid Bergman, to screen right. The two beds are positioned on the screen in such a way that they look as if they are in fact one bed. When Ingrid Bergman scratches, Cary Grant soon follows. The camera then goes in closer on both images. As it does, Bergman turns towards Grant and Grant turns towards Bergman, and at the end of the scene their hands are touching. Well, touching each other in the split screen image. The point here was that the Hays Code forbade scenes of unmarried couples lying in the same bed. You could have a scene in a bedroom with a bed but one foot of each person always had to be seen on the ground. But that rule doesn't apply here because they are different beds. Sort of. Another if less suggestive split screen with two beds can be found in the Doris Day and Rock Hudson comedy *PILLOW TALK* (1959), which has a plot about a telephone party line.

Freezing and Unfreezing the Frame

The 'freeze frame' is the use of a still image in a movie and it is achieved in an optical printer by the continuous reprinting of the same image. The freeze frame becomes part of the editing process when the frozen image on screen is, at it were, 'thawed' and brought to life. You'll often see this technique used in historical movies, for example, at the opening of *THE WILD BUNCH* or *HELLO, DOLLY*. But a freeze frame can also be used at the conclusion of a movie as it is in *BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID* and the Barbra Streisand version of *A STAR IS BORN*. If you want the technical term, *kinestasis* is the use of still picture in film making. And *kinestasis* in this sense includes not only freeze frames but also 'stills', that is single photographic images, in cinematic storytelling. For example, in *BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID* there is montage of photographs of their time in New York. These simple stills would have saved the studio thousands in terms of budget but they also tell the story very well because as the sequence of the stills progresses, the Kid and Sundance begin to look more and more bored and unhappy.

Freeze frames are useful when a filmmaker wants to suggest that time has somehow stopped. This happens, for example, in *A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH*, but some of the later apparent freezes are in fact just the actors standing like statues as the David Niven character, Squadron Leader Peter David Carter, walks round them.

Freeze frames are useful too at key story moments. In *GOODFELLAS*, Scorsese allows, as it were, the narrator Henry Hill to freeze-frame his favourite parts in his own story, such as when he is embraced by his fellow mob members as a teen, his lavish wedding and role in the killing of Billy Batts.

THE FABELMANS is Steven Spielberg's autobiographical tale of his childhood years, where his early film making is set against a family falling apart. One home movie includes a family camping holiday. When editing the footage, Sam (based on the young Spielberg) notices the close connection he has captured on film of his mother's friendship with Uncle Benny. And it's from a single frame in particular, with love in the eyes of his mother for Uncle Benny, that Sam realises the true nature of that connection.



Invisible Editing

An invisible cut or invisible editing marries together two scenes with two similar frames. The aim is to hide the transition from viewers and so create a smooth, nearly unnoticeable cut. Sometimes the transition itself would be impossible in real life, but with a little bit of trickery such edits are possible on film. Hitchcock was found of the invisible edit technique and it's even there as early as 1935 in *THE 39 STEPS*, where the camera moves from inside to outside the car, and you'll see it too in his 1959 classic *NORTH BY NORTHWEST* where we are in a compartment and the camera pans and to take us outside the moving train.

Nowadays there are long seemingly continuous no-edit shots but many of these are a cheat. The camera passes, for example, a pillar or a lamppost and that is probably where the film editors sewed the shots together with an invisible cut in order to make it look like one integral shot. This is now known as the 'Birdman effect', named after the movie *THE BIRDMAN* which made long takes popular. You can spot several of these types of seamless edits, for example, in the opening four minute long take of the 007 Bond movie *SPECTRE*. But it's not a new technique and Hitchcock's *ROPE* did something similar in 1948. The big problem then was that each take could last only the length of one 'reel', which was roughly twenty minutes. In *ROPE*, hidden transitions include someone's back

filling the frame. But ROPE contrary to popular belief does have some edits that cut between different objects and spaces.

'Canon' Editing

Canon editing involves a series of progressive or regressive shots that increase or decrease the size of the object. It is called 'canon editing' because the effect is like that of a shuddering canon after it has shot its cannonball. It's a particular favourite of Spielberg and can be found in one of the episodes of COLUMBO that he directed. Spielberg's most famous use of the canon edit is the moment E.T. sees the gun aimed at him, which is then followed by E.T. taking all the riders on their bicycles up into the air. Cue John Williams and *Flying*.



Crossing the Line

In any filming of an event or conversation there is an 'axis of action' and it is important that the camera never crosses that line,

otherwise when shots are edited together the people who are talking to each other will appear as if they are looking in the opposite direction. This axis of action (or 180 degree rule) is essentially the left-to-right and right-to-left eye line between the characters and it is known in filmmaking simple as 'the line'. When filming a scene, directors and camera operators are instinctively aware of this imaginary axis, and by keeping the camera on one side of it, characters in the scene will always maintain the same left/right relationship to each other.

Think of it like this. When watching a play from the stalls, the 'line' can never be crossed because you, the audience, are always one side of that line. Likewise, if you were to film a stage play from the stalls, the camera would always be the correct side of the line and so 'the line' would never be crossed. Now imagine you are filming a motor racing event with multiple cameras and you decide to put a camera either side of the track. Sounds sensible enough, but when you started to cut between those cameras what you'd get is a shot of the car going one way followed immediately by a shot of the same car going the other way. In effect, it would look as if the car was suddenly racing in the opposite direction. Very disorientating. And that's why crossing the line is one of the cardinal sins of editing.

But going back to filming that theatre play, wouldn't you want to put cameras in more places than just the stalls? Perhaps to the side or even behind the actors? Yes, of course. But if there's two

actors and you cut between a shot from the stalls and a shot from the back of the stage those two characters would 'jump frame', meaning they would instantly swop places. Again very disconcerting. And that's why 'jumping frame' is the other cardinal sin of editing.

But when a director films a scene for a movie they put the camera in many different places, so how do they avoid 'crossing the line'? And isn't it even more difficult if there were several people in a scene because wouldn't the eye line be always changing depending on who is speaking? Well, yes. And that's why dinner party scenes round a table are so incredibly difficult to shoot. Yet somehow camera operators and directors develop a sort of geography in their head for that kind of thing, but it takes year of experience. Many early filmmakers took a while to recognise and be aware of the complex positional relationships of camera geography and in *NOSFERATU* (1926) there are several scenes with dodgy eye lines between characters.

But is crossing the line always such a sin? Well, no. Every rule can be broken and in *BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KIND* there are edits of the Bolivian forces riding on horseback which are cut in a manner that in one shot they are going one way and in the next they are going the other. In effect, 'crossing the line'. But there is a story purpose in that odd edit and that is the show that the Bolivian forces are hopeless in their attempts to capture Cassidy and the Kid, and don't even know where they're going.

While we are on the subject of 'the line' it's worth mentioning here 'on-the-line-cutting'. On-the-line-cutting is where two characters are both looking directly at each other and each is filmed, as it were, from their POV, that is, from their point of view. In effect, when edited together, both characters are essentially looking into camera. This technique was used in both THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS and MANHUNTER, though strictly speaking the eye line was just slightly off looking directly into camera.

Perhaps it's also worth mention here the 30 degrees rule: the angle of the camera should change by at least 30 degrees between edits otherwise the characters or objects will, when the shots are edited together, appear as if they have jumped slightly from one position to another. Old Hollywood seemed to accept this way of cutting, and you can see several examples of it in STAGE DOOR (1937) and THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939), but it's a style of editing that has now pretty much disappeared. Oh, and one more thing: the reverse or the reverse shot, meaning the shot of the other person in any conversation or exchange, is usually done with a change of angle somewhere between 120 and 160 degrees.

Action Cut

In an action cut you begin the action in one shot and complete it in the next. The axiom of action cutting is never see the action completed but instead leave it incomplete so as to keep the forward

momentum of the sequence. Related to this is the idea of 'motivating the cut', where the actor is asked to do an action that will help justify the cut in the edit.

Non-continuity Editing

In a very strict sense, non-continuity editing includes any jump of time or place, any editing out of a part of a continuous action, any slowing of action, any speeding up of action, any repeating of the same action, any switching from one action to another even if those actions are linked. An edit that is a non-continuity cut is usually known as a 'jump cut', whereas a continuity edit is called a 'match cut', though some people prefer to use the term 'match cut' only when talking about visual connections between shots.

It should be said that there are degrees of non-continuity editing and non-matching, and on the whole the terms jump cut and non-continuity editing are most commonly used only when an edit in a mainly continuity edited movie is intentionally abrupt or calls attention to itself by being deliberately disorientating. The point here is that non-continuity all through a film is very rare, though the surrealist UN CHIEN ANDALOU (AN ANDALUSIAN DOG), the 1929 French silent short film directed by Luis Buñuel, and written by Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, comes pretty close. You might also add some sections of Jean-Luc Goddard's BREATHLESS and Nicolas Roeg's PERFORMANCE.

But as ever with STORY CRAFT, when looking at examples of jump cutting, let's concentrate on the story purpose or the reason why non-continuity editing has been used when showing a character at that particular moment in their tale.

Jump cuts are often used when characters are preparing or practising a speech. There are time jump cuts in ELIZABETH when the Queen is working out what to say to her court and time jump cuts as well in FIELD OF DREAMS when Ray Kinsella (Kevin Costner) is going through options as to what to say to Terence Mann when they meet. In RESERVOIR DOGS there's a scene where the undercover agent played by Tim Roth is seen learning an 'amusing anecdote about a drug dealer'. The speech or story that he's leaning on is to help pass himself off as one of the bad guys. However, the speech itself doesn't change but the time and the location do, and this is called *faux raccord*, which, in this context, means as if seamless jump cutting.

Jump cuts are useful to suggest the passage of time. In RAIN MAN, for example, there is a series of jump cuts in the motel bedroom as Charlie waits for the rain to stop, which his brother Raymond is afraid of. A rare example of the time remaining the same and the location of the action changing can be found in SHERLOCK JR., which is a Buster Keaton movie where the projectionist at a cinema becomes, in his dream at least, part of the action of the movie being shown. Jumping location but not time shouldn't be

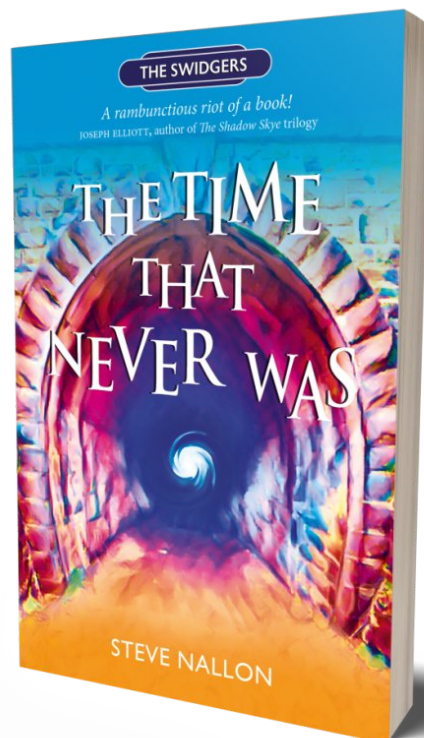
surprising because that's what happens in dreams, for dreams are entirely made up of jump cuts.

As said, non-continuity editing includes cuts where the same action is shown again and this can suggest disorientation. In *THE GODFATHER, PART THREE* there is a scene where Michael has a diabetic attack and the director Francis Ford Coppola uses jump cuts to show his sudden surprise at his change in health. Another example of this type of use of repeated shots is where Elliott first meets E.T., the alien. There are many shots of Elliott's reaction from different angles but it is essentially the same reaction. Likewise in the shower scene in *PSYCHO* there are more shots of the stabbing than there are actual stabs. *DECONSTRUCTING HARRY* is about a fragmented and disoriented life and so, not surprisingly, Woody Allen uses numerous jump cuts all the way through the movie.

One of the problems with the term 'jump cut' is that it refers to an all-embracing technical edit. But is that always appropriate? For example, in *MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH* a flower suddenly appears from nowhere as if by magic. Well, it is magic. Heavenly magic. It's a jump cut in the sense the shots don't match up, but why would they if there's magic going on? And there are annoying jump cuts in most of the movies which Alfredo shows in *CINEMA PARADISO* but this is only because the priest has insisted that all the kissing is edited out. Alfredo secretly keeps these short clips and edits them together – and that's the sequence which the grownup Toto watches when he

returns after many years for Alfredo's funeral. And that sequence is all jump cuts.

Another type of jump cut that isn't really a jump cut is when two takes are edited together and the images seem to jump for a moment. What probably happened in the edit is the director decided to splice the beginning of one take with the end of another but didn't have the 'coverage', that is other editing options, and so had to go with the awkward splice. There are examples of these in the movies TOOTSIE and STEEL MAGNOLIAS and you see them a lot in old Hollywood films, for example, George Cukor's A STAR IS BORN.



Some more thoughts on the what happens in the editing room...

“Editing is the only unique aspect of filmmaking which does not resemble any other art form – a point so important it cannot be overstressed. It can make or break a film.”

Stanley Kubrick

“To me, there are two main elements to editing: juxtaposing images and creating tempo. Sometimes an image is so meaningful or beautiful that it can capture or illuminate our original question: What is this movie about? In MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS, the shot of the train leaving Istanbul had that quality. It had all the mystery, glamour, nostalgia, action I wanted the entire movie to have.”

Sidney Lumet

“Well, you always discover a lot in the editing room. Particularly the action, because you have to over-shoot a lot and shoot an enormous amount of material because many of the sequences have to be discovered in the editing and manipulation of it.”

Christopher Nolan

“The most important requirement for editing is objectivity. No matter how much difficulty you had in obtaining a particular shot, the audience will never know. If it is not interesting, it simply isn’t interesting. You may have been full of enthusiasm during the filming of a particular shot, but if that enthusiasm doesn’t show on the screen, you must be objective enough to cut it.”

Akira Kurosawa

“If you don’t get physically ill seeing your first rough cut, something’s wrong.”

Martin Scorsese

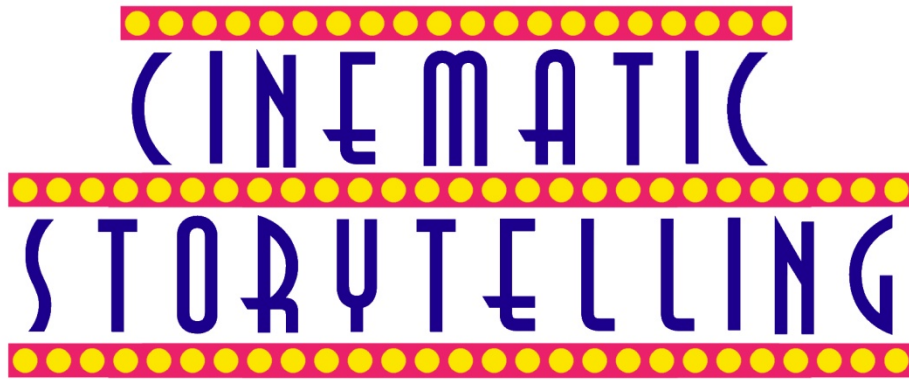
“I never discuss the plots of my films. I never release a synopsis before I begin shooting. How could I? Until the film is edited, I have no idea myself what it will be about. And perhaps not even then. Perhaps the film will only be a mood, or a statement about a style of life. Perhaps it has no plot at all. I depart from the script constantly. I may film scenes I had no intention of filming; things suggest themselves on location, and we improvise. I try not to think about it too much. Then, in the cutting room, I take the film and start to put it together and only then do I begin to get an idea of what it is about.”

Michelangelo Antonioni

“Once you start to realise that a film is the sum of its editing, then editing is the thing you’re always looking at.”

Anthony Minghella





CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

The Editing Process and the Concepts of Montage

“Editing is really like plumbing a good deal of the time. You put two things together, and a current runs through it.”

Thelma Schoonmaker, American film editor, known for her over five decades of work with director Martin Scorsese, including RAGING BULL (1980), THE AVIATOR (2004) and THE DEPARTED (2006)

Functions of Editing

The editor’s job in the cutting room (or now more likely in front of the computer) is to put into dramatic form the basic filmed material. The main consideration of any edit is usually what's going on at that particular junction in the story. The editor will try and make the scene make sense, appear continuous and yet varied enough to keep the interest of the audience.

The choices made in an edit can give insight into the psychological interplay between characters, as well as offering a

literal eye view (or point of view) of one or more of the characters. Edits can condense time or even expand it. As well as all this, the editor has to consider the mood of the scene, its context within the rhythms and dynamics of the whole narrative, plus how editing choices can elucidate a deeper meaning or expand on a theme. The editor's job, not unlike the screenwriter, and perhaps even more so, is to manipulate the audience's attention, thought processes and emotions.

A key contribution that editing has made to the experience of seeing and hearing a story is audience configuration. What this means is that the edit of a scene can be done in such a way that the film makes the audience work out for themselves what has happened. Take the bike scene in *CINEMA PARADISO*. It's a hot day and the young Toto and the priest are returning on foot to the town after funeral that involved a long and tiring procession uphill. As Toto and the priest walk along, Alfredo rides by on his bike, and as he does we cut in to see Toto thinking. Toto then fakes a fall and an injured leg. Alfredo stops, looks back and smiles. The next shot is Toto riding with Alfredo on his bike, wearing Alfredo's big hat. This is elliptical editing because story wise there's a scene that's missing and that is Alfredo offering to give Toto a ride home. But it's not needed because the shot transition allows the audience to figure that out for themselves. And audiences really enjoy that process and that stimulation.

Another key achievement of editing is in the presentation and manipulation of time. Edits can expand action to be longer or shorter than that of story duration, plus control the time of the action with flashbacks or flashforwards. Edits also have the capacity to take a single action in time and make it more frequent by simply repeating it in the edit. It's worth saying here that sometimes with rapid cutting screen time is longer than actual story time. This is the case with the shower scene in *PSYCHO* and some of the fight scenes in *BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN*, especially where the Tsarist troops hit a woman in her right eye.



The edit can alter the tempo of a film. A famous example of this can be found in Hitchcock's *THE BIRDS*, which begins slow and tense and then through accelerating cutting shifts up several gears to become frantic and frightening. The tempo of an edit is also important in comedy films where it's essential to allow an audience

the time and opportunity to laugh. Chaplin would even show his movies to a preview audience and then re-edit the films according to the length of time the audience needed to laugh at any given moment in a sequence. This is crucial in comedy films (or theatre shows for that matter) because audiences tend not to laugh if they are missing what is being said or the action moves on too quickly. Billy Wilder incidentally is a director who understood this point and whilst shooting *SOME LIKE IT HOT* he gave some castanets to Jack Lemmon and told him to shake them after each of his lines because the shake would cover the time the audience needed to laugh and yet not leave the screen with as dead image.



When looking at the 'Kuleshov Effect', the phenomenon whereby viewers create emotional connections between sequential shots, it was pointed out that editing can generate a meaning the actor did not intend, or least was unaware of when the shot was taken on the set. A classic example of this can be found in

CASABLANCA. The Hollywood legend is that during the filming of CASABLANCA, the director, Michael Curtis, asked Humphrey Bogart to do a shot where he came forward and nodded. Bogart obliged not knowing the exact context of the scene. Curtis, according to the story, just told Bogart that he needed that nod for an edit. That shot was Rick in the story of the movie giving the go-ahead for the band to play the French national anthem, *'La Marseillaise'*, to drown out the singing of the German soldiers. It's a terrific moment and Bogart, before he nods, seems to be considering the dilemma he is in. Or that is what we as an audience 'read into' that moment. Of course not all Hollywood folklore tales are true and maybe it wasn't just a nod and in fact Bogart knew exactly what he was doing. But the old adage in Hollywood is when given a choice between the legend and the truth, always print the legend. The general point that an audience reads into an actor's expression a meaning dependent on the images edited around the shot itself is still valid. The context of the edit is all.

"You have to find the movie in the editing room, and it can't be four hours; it has to be two hours."

Peter Landesman, American screenwriter, film director, producer, journalist, novelist and painter



“I never ever see a film of mine after I release it to the public. I see it when I shoot it in my dailies and while I’m editing it, re-editing it and reshooting it and all that. By the time it’s finished I never want to see it again.”

Woody Allen

Editing: Before, During and After

Screenwriting gurus always warn would be or novice screenwriters never to put in camera directions or edits such ‘CUT TO CLOSE-UP OF GUN.’ Robert McKee says there is a way of writing a screenplay that suggests how the writer is seeing it in their mind, but the writer’s job is not to tell the director how to shoot a scene or the editor how to put it together shot wise later. That said, a professional screenwriter working in close contact with their director may well start to put in basic directions and after that the next stage might be a storyboard, where the tale is told in basic sketches and images. And the point of all this is that all this occurs before the official edit as such.

But what about during a shoot? Editing as you go along, using only a traditional film camera isn’t possible, and even though a modern digital camera would technically allow you make a movie

that way, such a method would be rare and experimental. Yet in filmmaking there are what are known as ‘dailies’, where the previous day’s shooting is shown to the production team. And it may be that the editor is part of that team and they may even be editing certain sequences as the movie is being shot.

It’s worth mentioning here the French term *découpage* which is difficult to translate into English, but if you had to have a go it might be ‘a plan as to how to cut it up’. *Découpage* technique is essentially turning a story script into visual representations that a camera can capture and the process of editing those images. It’s gloriously French in its abstraction. Perhaps think of *découpage* as a visual version of the screenplay but not an actual storyboard. The term was popularised by the film theorist Noël Burch and director Robert Bresson.

“When Tom saw it, he went, ‘No, the Su-7 must chase me.’ When an editor gets a note like that, you get a chill up your spine because you’re going to have to watch all the footage again and recut the scene from scratch. It was only about forty-five seconds but it was going to take a week.”

TOP GUN: MAVERICK editor Eddie Hamilton when Tom Cruise saw a sequence where his character chases a Sukhoi Su-7 in a sky dog-fight



“We’re rolling and locked.”

Keith Lascelles, CROSSROADS floor manager ATV Television

A Little Bit of History

Editing as you go along using a traditional film camera isn’t possible, and even though a modern digital camera would technically allow you make a movie that way, such a method would be rare and experimental. But television drama is very different in this respect. Or at least was. Back in the day, studio television dramas and sitcoms were often shot by a method known as ‘multi-cam’, short for multi-camera. In traditional television production there would be two VTR machines (video tape recording machines) and these would be linked to the various camera feeds. In this way of working, someone known as a ‘vision mixer’ presses buttons on the instruction of the director as to which camera feeds are recorded. In effect, the editing, as it were, goes on as the buttons are pressed and while the action on the studio floor is in progress. Think of it as live editing. It was usually two VTR machines because there’d be one VTR machine recording whatever camera feed was chosen by the director through the vision mixer, and the second VTR machine would record everything on

what was known as the 'slave camera'. This could often prove useful later in the final edit. And for those interested in the technology behind television it was Ampex who developed VRT machines and tapes and much of it originally came from military equipment and capabilities.

There were certain television programmes in the 1960s and 1970s such as CROSSROADS which had little if any budget for editing, and if there was a mistake the VTR machine would simply be rolled back to the point of that mistake and the action on the studio floor would begin again and so the error would be wiped over. The BBC in their making of drama budgeted for only six tape edits per programme, meaning the majority of the programme was done, like CROSSROADS, 'as live' and without physical edits later. Interestingly, in the very early days of television in the 1930s and 1940s, the camera feeds could only be mixed, that is a slow shot transition between images, as hard cuts between cameras created jolt in broadcast picture.

Nowadays most television drama is shot in what is known as 'single camera' and the days of multi-camera studio dramas have all but disappeared. Multi-camera obviously still lives on for sports events, live Saturday night entertainment shows and, occasionally, for studio sit-coms with an audience, but here digital recording has now done away with those big old VTR machines.

As a matter of historical interest, a VTR machine needed to gather speed before a recording could be made, and then that speed would have to be registered as steady. At the BBC, the floor manager would call out to the studio floor, “We’re at speed... and we’re now running and stable”, whereas at the ITV companies the floor manager would say, “At speed... rolling and locked.” And woe betide a freelance floor manager who ever got those mixed up.

“We’re running and stable.”

Simon Spencer, floor manager at BBC Television



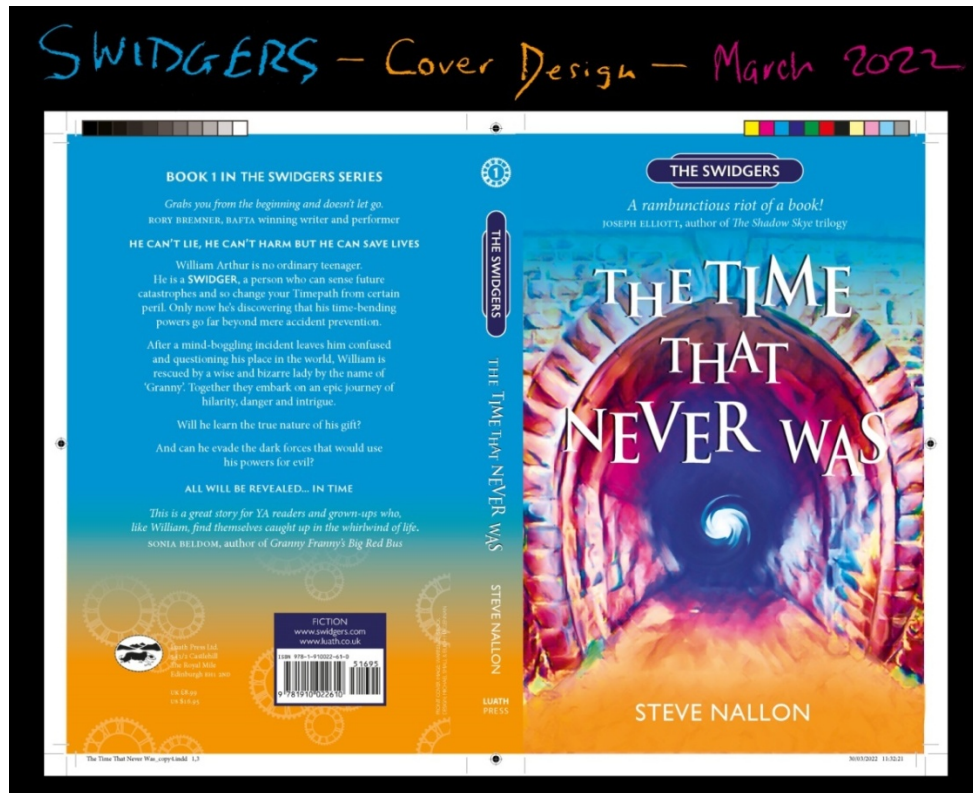
“The hieroglyphic language of the cinema is capable of expressing any concept, any idea of class, any political or tactical slogan, without recourse to the help of a rather suspect dramatic or psychological past.”

Sergie Eisenstein

Soviet Montage

The term ‘montage’, from the French word *monter* ‘to assemble’, was originally used by French critics to describe the exotic way the early Russian filmmakers put a movie together. If you had to make a distinction between montage and editing – because they are

Roughly speaking montage, specifically Soviet montage or Russian montage, falls into two categories. First, there is 'relational montage' (sometimes also called linkage editing or constructive editing), which was developed by Pudovkin, and second, 'dialectical montage' (sometimes called intellectual montage), which was favoured by Eisenstein. They are not mutually exclusive and there is some overlap between the two.



Relational Editing

Relational editing is essentially Pudovkin's theory that editing is the method by which the filmmaker controls the 'psychological guidance' – his key phrase – of the spectator. In this sense, relational editing is close to the expressionist ideas of the German Expressionists in that it asks the question, *'How can the filmmaker affect what the audience is feeling?'* "In my earlier film, MOTHER," writes Pudovkin, "I tried to affect the spectators, not by the psychological performance of an actor, but by plastic synthesis through editing." Pudovkin goes on to describe the scene where the son sits in prison and he receives a note that the next day his is to be set free. "The photographing of a face lighting up with joy would have been flat and void of effect. I show, therefore, the nervous play of his hands and a big close-up of the lower half of his face, the corners of the smile. These shots I cut in with other and varied material – shots of a brook, swollen with the rapid flow of spring, of play of sunlight broken on water, birds splashing in the village pond, and finally a laughing child. By the junction of these components our expression of 'prisoner's joy' takes shape. I do not know how the spectators reacted to my experiment – I myself have always been deeply convinced of its force." Pudovkin's theories of film can be found in two books, FILM TECHNIQUE (1933) and FILM ACTING (1935), which were written for Soviet film classes and first published outside the U.S.S.R. in 1929.

When considering montage or editing Pudovkin's five methods are: contrast, parallelism, symbolism, simultaneity and leitmotif.

Let's first consider contrast. "Suppose," writes Pudovkin, "it be our task to tell of the miserable situation of a starving man; the story will impress the more vividly if associated with mention of the senseless gluttony of a well-to-do man." Basically, cutting between a destitute man and one who is self-indulgent will give rise to greater sense of feeling for the plight of the poor man. But Pudovkin warns that although effective, this type of contrast editing is very common and so "care should be taken not to overdo it."

Next, parallelism. Pudovkin offers the example of a workman's execution set for 5 a.m. and a factory owner's actions when, coming home late one night very drunk, the inebriated rich man keeps checking his wrist-watch and asking the time. "The drunken factory-owner snores on his bed, his leg with trouser-end up turned, his hand hanging down with his wrist-watch visible, the hands of the watch crawl slowly to 5 o'clock. The workman is being hanged. In this instance two thematically unconnected incidents develop in parallel by means of the watch that tells of the approaching execution."

Then there's symbolism. To illustrate symbolism Pudovkin offers an example from Eisenstein's *STRIKE*, featuring shots of the slaughtering of a bull punctuated with the shooting of fleeing workers. "Just as a butcher fells a bull with the swing of a pole-axe, so, cruelly and in cold blood, were shot down the workers." Next,

simultaneity (or what elsewhere is called cross-cutting). Here Pudovkin discusses the end section of D.W. Griffith's *INTOLERANCE*. "The whole aim of this method is to create in the spectator a maximum tension of excitement by constant forcing of a question, such as, in this case: *Will they be there in time? – Will they be there in time?*" Finally, leitmotif and reiteration. Here Pudovkin discusses the repeated use a church bell, which is meant to send out a message of patience and love, at moments of religious cruelty or hypocrisy.



Dialectical Montage

Dialectical montage is the editing theory of Eisenstein. Rather than the 'linkage' theory of Pudovkin's relational editing, dialectical montage thrives on conflict. In dialectical editing, shots collide and draw attention to themselves and the idea is that the bringing together of the two shots (the thesis and the antithesis) then produces a wholly new concept (the synthesis). Remember, dialectical means both 'that which relates to ideas and opinions', and

‘that which is concerned with or acting through opposing forces’. In Eisenstein’s OCTOBER, for example, there’s a shot of a provisional government leader called Kerensky juxtaposed with a mechanical peacock. The new idea is that Kerensky is no true leader but instead a vainglorious, pompous and strutting fool. What the collision creates is a *terium quid*, a third something. Eisenstein in part took the principle we are talking about here from Egyptian hieroglyphics, where separate images in combination corresponds to an entirely new concept. The symbol of WATER plus EYE means WEEPING. Put simply, in relational editing if you add A to B you get A/B, whereas in dialectical editing, if you add A to B you get C. And that new idea or third thing is what you come up with yourself based on the collision.

“Film is the greatest teacher because it teaches not only through the brain but through the whole body.”

Vsevolod Pudovkin



NEWSPAPER STACK

Showing headline: "Police Hunt Cop Killer"

Newspaper headline: "City Cracks Down"

DISSOLVE TO:

Newspaper headline: "Police Captain Linked With Drug Rackets"

DISSOLVE TO:

Newspaper headline: "Mobster Barzini Questioned in Underworld Feud"

From THE GODFATHER screenplay

American Montage

American montage refers to a particular type of edited sequence often seen in Hollywood movies of the 1930s and 1940s. In American montage sequences, time collapses, images spin, shots blend and overlap, as actions are condensed and summarised through numerous images. A homage to the American montage can be found in Woody Allen's *THE PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO* where the heroine enters the film world screen and is taken on a whirlwind romantic evening. There are shots of champagne, nightclubs, dancing, all elided in one short sequence. Lovers getting together and enjoying each other's company is the classic subject of an American montage, for example, *THE WAY WE WERE*, and such sequences are mercilessly sent up in *NAKED GUN*. American montage is also useful when showing physical progression over time, for example, Rocky training in *ROCKY*, and as an expositional device,

for example, the spinning headlines in the newspapers after the shooting of the police captain in THE GODFATHER.



***“Now, children, Do-Re-Mi-Fa-So and so on
Are only the tools we use to build a song
Once you have these notes in your heads
You can sing a million different tunes by mixing them up
Like this...”***

Musical Sequences

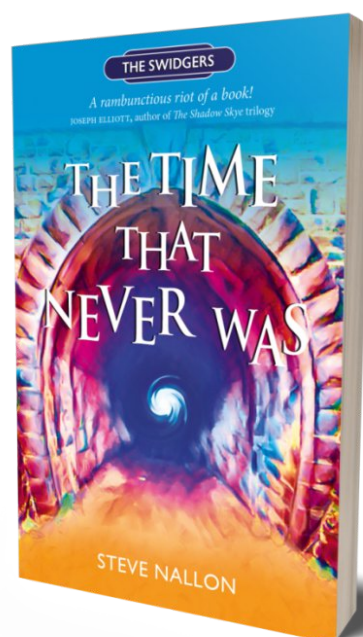
In musical sequence with songs normal continuity editing rules disappear. In THE SOUND OF MUSIC, the song *Do-Re-Me*, though sung as a continuous number, takes place over several time periods and numerous locations, with the singers in various costumes. There’s a technical term called *faux raccord*, literally meaning ‘false echo’. Usually *faux raccord* would mean continuity mistakes, for example, drink levels in a scene going up and down, hence the concept of the echo that’s out of place. However, *faux raccord* in the context of a musical sequence means as if seamless jump cutting.

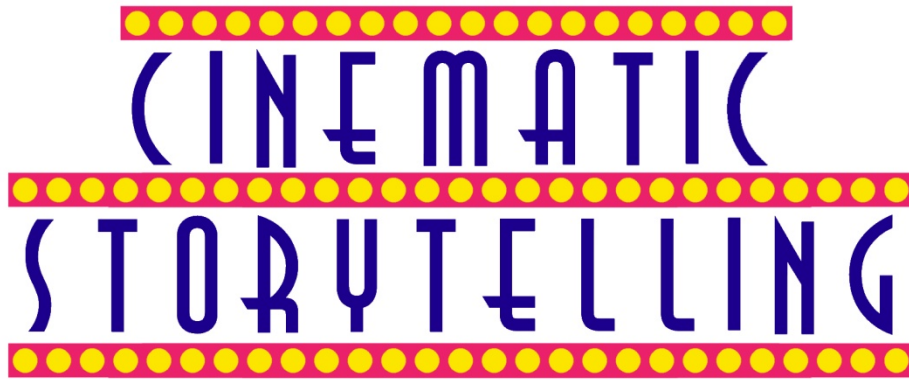
The musical sequences directed by Busby Berkeley in musicals of the 1930s such as GOLD DIGGERS OF 1935 and DAMES were supposedly happening on a Broadway stage, but the sequence which

is presented on screen is entirely filmic, meaning created exclusively for the camera, and would be impossible on actual stage. In fact, most musical sequences in the majority of musicals, where props and the like often appear from nowhere, are nearly always impossible. Reality goes out the window when the singing starts. But the point is normal rules simply don't apply in such sequences, that's just the nature of the genre. Such conventions, of course, makes these sequences perfect for parody, as can be seen and enjoyed in Disney's ENCHANTED.

***MABEL: I've got seventeen cents and the clothes I stand in, but
there's life in the old girl yet.***

**From DAMES, directed by Ray Enright , with musical numbers
directed by Busby Berkeley, screenplay written by
Delmer Daves from story by Robert Lord**





CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

Sound

“Adding sound to movies would be like putting lipstick on the Venus de Milo.”

Mary Pickford, actress and director of the silent era

The Sound of Movies

Sound is one of our primary human senses and, as a result, it shapes our interpretation of the world around us. And of course that includes the world up there on the cinema screen. The sound in movie is both selective and directive. The director and sound designer choose what we hear and so draw our attention to events both on and off camera. The way sound is presented guides our expectations and helps form anticipations. Lack of sound also has its role in storytelling in the power of silence.

Sound design offers creative possibilities in terms of editing, mixing, fading in or fading out and so on. Sound as with visual images can engender relationships and create meaning through

contrapuntal juxtapositions. Manipulation of sound in film is rare but it does occasionally happen.

Unlike the frame, sound is not limited. In fact there is the possibility of an infinite number of potential acoustic events. Sound can also offer perspective in terms of distance.

Sound includes speech, internal thoughts, narrator voice-over, music from the story world, music specially composed as an accompaniment, plus ambient noise and specifically created sound effects. An example where these appear to merge can be found in the shower scene in PSYCHO.

Acoustically sound can have volume (loud or quiet), pitch variations (high frequency and low frequency) and what you might call 'timbre', meaning it's 'feel' or 'texture', and often this is discussed either in terms of metaphor or, from a technical perceptive, its harmonic components, tonal and atonal, dominants and subdominants.

The term 'soundtrack' usually refers to the musical accompaniment, whereas 'sound mix' would be the whole of what we hear in the movie.



Q: We packed the finder with a highly concentrated plastic explosive. Sufficient to remove a door of any safe. Its magnetic. The actuating signal is personalized.

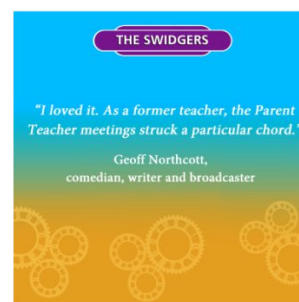
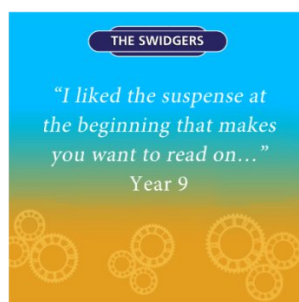
JAMES BOND: What's my code?

Q: Most appropriate: A wolf whistle."

James Bond

Aspects of Sound

Sound isn't just noise. Or at least it shouldn't be thought of as just noise. Sound can exist in different ways in different environments. Sound can be quantified in length, balance and volume, but also thought about in terms of its character and its rhythm and even melodic quality. In the recording and delivery of sound in a storytelling medium such as cinema, the sound we hear can be judged on its fidelity to reality, both in the way it accurately represents what we listen to and know from everyday life and in terms of its temporal nature – is it slower than reality or faster than reality? Then there is sound's opposite: silence. And together all these aspects of sound offer opportunities for Story and the storyteller, especially, but not exclusively, in the cinematic medium.



Duration

Obviously sound can be measured in terms of length, but deciding when and for how long a sound should be heard is ultimately a narrative choice. An important point to make here is that hearing everything all at once and all the time is a somewhat artificial occurrence as it bears little similarity to the actual human experience of listening, for the ear and brain are constantly filtering and prioritising the noise they hear.

Rhythm

Rhythm is particularly important when it comes to matching sounds, especially music, to the visual editing. A classic example of this is the opening of Woody Allen's *MANHATTAN*. The writer Isaac Davis is heard in voice over while writing and then re-writing the opening lines of his novel: *"Chapter One. He adored New York City. He idolised it all out of proportion. Eh uh, no, make that he, he romanticised it all out of proportion. Better. To him, no matter what the season was, this was still a town that existed in black and white and pulsed to the great tunes of George Gershwin."* And when Isaac finally chooses what he's going to go with we hear Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and see black and white images of New York brought together in such a way that it's impossible to say which is leading which, the image or the sound.

But human beings are rhythmical by nature. We run in a rhythm, speak in a rhythm, shoot guns in a rhythm, and, of course, make love in a rhythm. And with each of these there are accompanying sounds which, if featured in a movie, can help illustrate character and action. Think RAGING BULL, UN HOMME ET UNE FEMME, CHARIOTS OF FIRE and SCARFACE.

Fidelity

Another aspect of sound is its fidelity, in other words, its accuracy to the world as we know it or indeed you might add, as we are talking about stories, how someone has imagined a fictional world to be. The sound of the swishing of a sword is real because swords are real, but when it came to those lightsabers in STAR WARS, someone had to create an authentic sounding noise for it. The Jedi's weapon is real in its world and so the noise it makes needs to have its own believable reality.

Sometimes sound in movies can be unreal and yet still truthful. For example, the clocks in HIGH NOON don't always have an authentic tick-tick sound and occasionally the noise of the clock is represented by strings being plucked. Whether this clock noise should be classified as a sound effect or part of the musical score is a moot point. However, it does bring us to the idea of 'micky-mousing', which is an expression in the film industry referring to the use of musical instruments to imitate sounds of the real world. The term

micky-mousing comes from the world of early animation where most of the sound effects were created by the orchestra.

On the whole film is a naturalistic medium and so tends to keep the sounds real. When there is distortion, for example slowed down sound when someone is drunk, it is usually subjective, meaning that what we are hearing is how the character is hearing whatever is being said or done.



Spatial

It's important to remember that sound exists in space and what we are talking about here is, first, the idea that sound can change and vary depending on the space and environment in which it exists and operates, and, second, that sound in cinematic storytelling terms can be an on-screen sound or an off-screen sound. The questions to ask on both points are where is the source or origin of the sound? Where has it come from? Is it an internal subjective sound, meaning

in the mind of the character, or an external objective sound that comes from a physical object in the environment?

Sound's relation to space also includes perspective and distance. In the modern world where we have technically sophisticated home cinema sound systems, aircrafts can be heard coming from behind the sofa and next crashing into your fireplace. In fact sound technology has greatly altered the idea of on- and off-camera because now it isn't just a blanket on or off but instead near pinpoint accuracy as to where a sound is originating.

Temporal

It is usual to have simultaneous sound in a movie, meaning that the sound we hear matches and takes place at the same time as the actions or events we are seeing on the screen. However, it is possible to have non-simultaneous sound and if that sound came from earlier in the tale it would be called a 'sonic flashback'. It should be stressed that what we are not talking about here is a sound that is being remembered in the mind of the character, because such a sound, though not real, is happening in the moment of remembrance that is taking place right now. The point is that the term sonic flashback should be kept only for those specific sounds that are, as it were, out of time, in that they come from the earlier events in the narrative. And such sounds are exceptionally rare in cinematic storytelling. That

said, some of the films of Nicolas Roag do experiment with the temporal placing of sound.

Mostly then in films sounds are presented simultaneously with their image. However, there is editing something known as a 'sound bridge', where sound lingers from the end of one scene into the start of another, or where sound from the next scene is heard over the end of the previous scene. Usually the aim in both cases is to help create a smooth transition from one scene to another, but technically speaking for a few seconds at least sound is not simultaneous with image or action.

The temporal nature of sound also includes slow motion and fast motion, where the length of the event presented and its sound is out of sync. In slow motion, sound is longer than actuality, and in fast motion, shorter than actuality. Slowed down sounds not surprisingly are associated with 'groggy', 'dazed' or 'woozy', whereas speeded up sounds suggest 'alertness', 'vigilance' or 'crazy efficiency'. Slowed down sound is most often used to give the impression someone has been drugged or is drunk, but it can have other purposes as well. For example, in the boxing movie *RAGING BULL*, slow motion sound was used to suggest fatigue and mental exhaustion. Fast motion sound is rather obviously is used to indicate speed, though this sort of distortion can often create an unintentional comic effect.

A word here about continuity editing where story elements are presented in a seemingly non-linear way. In *THELMA AND LOUISE*,

Thelma explains to Louise about the robbery. Louise asks, “What did you say?” and Thelma replies “Walked in there and said –” only at that moment there is cut to Thelma on a video screen saying, “Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. This is a Robbery.” It’s obviously out of time with the conversation between the two women. But this isn't really a flashback – if anything it’s a flashforward, or rather jump in time – for it is revealed that what we are seeing or watching is the husband and the police looking at a surveillance recording made in the shop. It’s sometime afterwards, certainly, but as it’s what Thelma is relating to Louise as to what she said in the shop and it’s not really non-continuous or non-linear. Film makers like to find interesting and new ways of presenting their stories and the screenwriter Callie Khouri and director Ridley Scott certainly did that with *THELMA AND LOUISE*.

Another film making technique worth mentioning here is asking a question in one space and answering it in another. For example, in *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*, Clarice asks Jack Crawford “What sort of man is he?”, there’s then a shot of Baltimore prison and the psychiatrist answers the question rather than Crawford. It’s an exceptionally efficient edit in that it cuts out all the unnecessary aspects of the story such as travelling, going into buildings and initial introductions. Quick editing of questions and answers or statements and replies can also be used for comic effect. For example, the Radar scene in *AUSTIN POWERS*. A man is stationed in front of a Radar

device and a large phallic looking object in green is seen on the screen. He says, “It looks like a giant –” but there is the a cut to a guy in a military aircraft who says “Dick!” which is a reference to his co-pilot’s name. There then follows a series of quick edits to different locations, most but not all in the story world, where words for the male member such as “pecker”, “privates”, “two balls”, “Wang” (as in a Chinese boy at school), “Willy” (as in the real Willy Nelson) and “Johnson” (the name of the Radar guy) are used innocently enough but in the edit have a double meaning.



Volume and Balance

As said, the human ear and brain are constantly adjusting and prioritising what we hear. Our minds can focus on certain sounds and, as it were, filter out the rest. And likewise, the filmmaker can alter the balance of the sound in such a way that guides us as to what they want us to listen to.

A fascinating early example of experimenting with the volume and balance of sound can be found in a scene in Hitchcock's 1929 movie *BLACKMAIL*. Alice White, the sweetheart of a London detective called Frank Webber, kills in self-defence an artist who attempted to seduce her. And the weapon was a knife. After the body is found, a neighbour comes round the house and starts gossiping about the incident and what she has heard. Alice, seated at the kitchen table, listens intently. As the neighbour talk about the killing, she uses the word 'knife' repeatedly. The camera focuses on the face of Alice and as it does the words in between 'knife' are faded away so that all we hear is the word 'knife'. The sound has become subjective. All the other words are filtered out in the mind of Alice and all she can hear is "knife ... knife ... knife ... knife". Alice is then asked to cut a slice of bread and her hand reaches nervously for the knife on the table. But the neighbour keeps on talking and that word 'knife' – spoken in an unnaturally high pitched tone – becomes so overpowering Alice throws the breadknife up into the air. Alfred Hitchcock was the master of the subjective camera, but here, in one of the earliest British 'talkies', we have an example of his craftsmanship with sound as well.

In Hitchcock's *NORTH BY NORTHWEST*, volume and sound balance is used in a different way. There's a scene where a national security agent fills Kaplan in on what's been going on as the two men walk to a specially chartered plane. But we, the audience, know most

of what the agent is telling Kaplan, so Hitchcock drowns out what would be repetition with aircraft noise. The same technique, but with a different purpose, can be seen and heard in *WAYNE'S WORLD*, where in a long speech Garth says, "You know what you can do with your show? You can take a flying and the handle breaks off and you have to find a doctor to pull it out again!" but because of the landing of a jet plane on a nearby runway, the middle section of what is said, presumably invective, cursing and swearing, is drowned out by the noise.

Pure silence is unusual in films but when used effectively it can be a powerful storytelling tool. *THE SOUND OF METAL* is the true story of Ruben Stone (Riz Ahmed), a drummer who loses his hearing and tries out a new kind of device that essentially simulates sounds in his brain. However, there is a scene at the end of the movie where Ruben is sitting on a bench outside and what we, the audience, hear is a version of what is being simulated in Ruben's brain. His subjective sound, if you will. But it's a distorted and metallic noise and it lacks any human reality or warmth. And we can see the frustration in Ruben's face. Then suddenly he switches the device off and all goes silent. It's one of the most powerful moments in the movie and essentially the climax of his story. Ruben wanted to hear again but what he hears is such a poor substitute that ultimately he chooses to accept and embrace the silence.

Towards the end of THE GRADUATE, two young lovers run away together, even though the girl has just married someone else. Those in the church are seen trying to stop them. They shout and scream but their voices and cries are not heard on the screen. Why? Because the lovers aren't taking any notice of them. It's as if they are immune to whatever is being yelled. However noisy the pleas it makes no difference. And when they escape on a passing bus and make their way to the back, they don't speak. They don't need to because they're in love. And then in the closing credits we hear the song *The Sound of Silence*:

And in the naked light, I saw
 Ten thousand people, maybe more
 People talking without speaking
 People hearing without listening
 People writing songs that voices never shared
 And no one dared
 Disturb the sound of silence.

In SAVING PRIVATE RYAN when the mother is told about the death of her sons it is done without speech. In fact the whole build up, the cross referencing of names and so on, is done without a word being said. Actions and expressions on faces say what needs to be communicated. And the sequence is all the more powerful for it. In MY FAIR LADY, whispers all round the ballroom that we see but don't hear create curiosity as to whether they have worked out that Eliza isn't a 'lady' at all. This in turn creates anticipation but it's not until

the next scene that we find out whether the whispers were good or bad. When it comes to storytelling, whether it be in cinema or in fiction, ‘make ‘em wait’ is always a good maxim.

CAPTAIN VON TRAPP: Now, when I want you, this is what you will hear.

[BLOWS A NAVY WHISTLE]

MARIA: Oh, no, sir. I'm sorry, sir. I could never answer to a whistle. Whistles are for dogs and cats and other animals, but not for children and definitely not for me. It would be too... humiliating."



DRACULA: (hearing some wolves howling)
Listen to them. Children of the night. What music they make."
Béla Lugosi as Dracula in DRACULA

The Sounds of the Story World

The technical term for the sounds and noises of the story world is diegetic sound, from the Greek word *diegesis*, meaning ‘narrative’. Diegetic sound would therefore include speech, internal thoughts of characters, ambient noise, sound effects coming from objects both on and off the screen, and any music originating from devices that are part of the story world. Diegetic is a terms that is mainly used in Film Studies and so some story theorists prefer to call all this

‘motivated sound’ or ‘source sound’, or sometimes ‘indigenous’ or ‘foreground sound’. Film industry professionals have their own terms and they are DIRECT, for on-screen sounds, OFF or OOV (short for ‘out of vision’) and OVER, meaning sounds, usually voice over or music, from outside the story world that, as it were, go on top of everything else. Historically there is also MOV, which is short for ‘without sound’ and it is ‘M’ and not ‘W’ because many of the early Hollywood directors had German as their first language and would say ‘Mit out sound’, ‘mit’ being the German word for with. MOV became the shortened version and so it has stayed. Diegetic sound is the preferred term here because it is so specific, whereas ‘foreground’ or ‘direct’ or ‘over’ are open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Put as simply, diegetic sound includes any element of the story that is part of the story world and the character’s experience and would include events and actions that are presumed to have occurred that are not shown on screen.



‘Off-camera’ is roughly the equivalent of the theatrical term ‘off-stage’ and is perhaps a better way to describe those actions that are clearly happening in a scene and are heard but are not shown in the frame and later in the projected screen. Often, for example, in violent films, the camera will re-frame away from cruel or sadistic action. You can see and hear instances of this in PUBLIC ENEMY and RESERVOIR DOGS. In TILL, the brutal murder of Emmet Till is heard but the camera is placed some distance outside the building.

‘Parallel sound’ is that which has a direct connection to the story world but is not synchronic with it. For example, when music is heard as a composer writes on a manuscript even though there is no piano or orchestra or whatever in the story space. The voice over of a character telling their story is another example of parallel sound.

External diegetic sound is where a sound comes from within the story world but its origins are unknown and often mysterious. However, the important point is that the characters can hear it. An example of external diegetic sound can be heard in FIELD OF DREAMS – *“If you build it, he will come”* and *“Ease his pain”*. This ‘voice’ also says – or writes – *“Go the distance”* on a sign at a ballgame. Who or what is saying this is never clear – God? Or some primal force of the cosmos? No matter, because when you hear those sorts of voices, you tend not to quibble and get on with it. As Ray Kinsella does.

Internal diegetic sound is that which comes from the mind of a character within the story space and world. For example, at the end of *PSYCHO*, we see a fly on Norman's still hand and the voice of Norman's mother saying, even though Norman's lips aren't moving, "Let them see what kind of a person I am. I'm not even going to swat that fly. I hope they are watching. They'll see and they'll know and they'll say, 'She wouldn't even harm a fly'". Another example of internal diegetic sound can be found in *SUNSET BLVD.* where the Joe Gillis voice-over is heard as he floats in the pool. Perhaps not so much internal thoughts, for he's just been shot and so he's dead, but in this movie the corpse is the one telling the story. Internal diegetic sound can also include imagined sounds as such someone hearing voices that aren't real but exist only in the mind of the character. For example, *THE HAUNTING* (1963).

In musicals many of the numbers come from the inner world of the character, for example, all the songs in *YENTL* starring Barbra Streisand come from the mind of Anshel/Yentl. They are either her thoughts or her prayers. You could say that songs work in musicals in the same way soliloquies work in Shakespearean dramas. The important point here is genre convention. And in musicals it's not just the words that become, as it were, part of the story world, but so too does the accompanying orchestra. But here there is a blurring of boundaries because in most movies, underscoring and the

accompanying ‘mood music’ is certainly not part of the story world and would be classified as non-diegetic.

It’s worth mentioning as a final point that sometimes diegetic sounds from within the scene can act as a sort of punctuation in that a specific noise can bring a the scene, as it were, to a ‘full stop’. Examples of this can be found in Woody Allen’s MANHATTAN, where a scene at the dinner ends with the ping of the cash register and a scene between Allen and Keaton ends with the high pitch yelp of a dog.

***‘Papa, can you hear me?
Papa, can you see me?
Papa can you find me in the night?
Papa are you near me?
Papa, can you hear me?’***

From *Papa, Can You Hear Me?* from YENTL, music by Michel Legrand, lyrics by Alan and Marilyn Bergman



“Anything can become a musical sound. The wind on telegraph wires is a great sound; get it into your machine and play it and it becomes interesting.”

Hans Zimmer

The Sounds From the Non-story World

The technical term for any sound, speech and music coming from outside the story world and not belonging there, is non-diegetic sound or extra-diegetic sound. What we are talking about here is sound that has no source within the story space. Non-diegetic sound therefore includes any narrative vocal commentary that does not come from any of the characters and all accompanying mood music and scoring. However, as seen with the musical, distinctions often depend not just on the idea of what a real source or outside source is, but also on an understanding of the conventions of film making and ultimately the conventions of the specific genre itself. It should be said in this context that sometimes a film will deliberately blur or break those boundaries. For example, in *THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS*, the characters in the story world reply to the commentating narrator. And who can forget those *Pigs in Space* sketches in *THE MUPPETS*, where the characters at the end of sketch always look around to see where the commentating voice is coming from.

The non-diegetic narrator in a movie, that is one that isn't a character in the story world but is heard commenting on the

narrative, is roughly equivalent to the third person narrator of the novel, except, of course, the obvious difference is that you very rarely hear such a narrator all the way through a movie. An example of what you might call a commentative narrator in a movie is the voice-over at the beginning of *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*, who tells the Prince's back story. There is also a commenative or authorial narrator in the movie *NETWORK*. Although there is a voice-over at the beginning of *CASABLANCA*, because it is the voice of the Newsreel, that could be said to have originated in the story world, even if some of the images that accompany the voice are not from an actual Newsreel. Not that it matters that much because audiences tend not to concern themselves too much with these nice distinctions. Besides, what matters in storytelling terms is the Newsreel voice neatly and efficiently fills the audience in on the situation in Casablanca at that stage in the Second World War.

Non-diegetic sound in a film is very rare for the obvious reason that noises from outside the story world would cause confusion. In the Nicolas Roeg movie *PERFORMANCE* there are odd noises heard in the court scene that don't seem to belong there. Do these come from later in the story or from another story place? It's not clear but Roeg has always been an experimental filmmaker in terms of non-linear storytelling and he certainly doesn't keep to convention. And this applies to sound editing as well as visual editing.

Sometimes sound from one aspect of the story world can be substituted for another. For example, in *THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER* when one of the characters realises Captain Marko Ramius is defecting we hear not his heart beating, but instead the pulsing noises of a submarine. Strictly speaking this imitative noise does not come from the story space of that scene and so should be classified as non-diegetic, yet here boundaries are blurred as a submarine is the key element in the story itself. Besides, in storytelling terms, the two noises are thematically connected and so the technique is an imaginative conceit. Another example of imitative noise and boundary blurring can be found in *HIGH NOON* in the hotel room scene with Mrs Rameriz and Marshall Kane. The first point is we only hear the ticking clock when she looks at it, and the second point is that the fidelity of the sound of the clocks is not consistent, for when Marshall Kane looks at the clock we don't hear the real sound of the tick-tock but rather the plucking of a string. It's hard to tell exactly what sort of string it is, guitar perhaps, there's a guitar in the movie's theme song *Do Not Forsake Me, Oh My Darling*, but whatever it is it's certainly is not a clock. It's unreal in the story space but it is still truthful to the story world and the accompanying music

The main non-diegetic sound in a movie is the accompanying musical 'soundtrack' or what the industry calls 'over music'. But again, film convention and boundaries can be played with. For example, in *BLAZING SADDLES* there is a scene of a lone man on

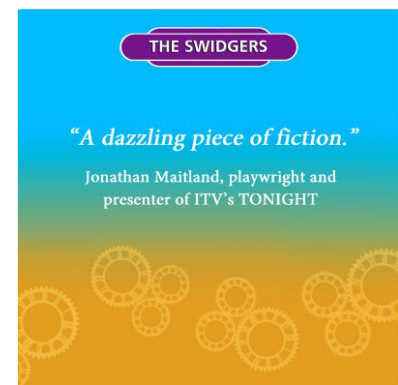
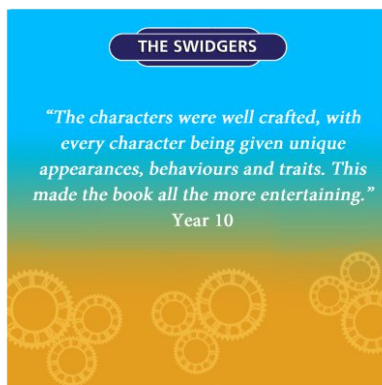
horseback riding through a barren landscape with what seems to be a musical track accompaniment, only then the rider comes across Count Basie and his orchestra playing that music in actuality. A different type of blurring can be found in *BEAUTIFUL THING* where the mother and her boyfriend have been watching *THE SOUND OF MUSIC* but the lyrics of the song *Sixteen Going on Seventeen* acts more like a commentary on her young son and his first lover in the next room. Particularly the lines 'Totally unprepared are you to face a world of men, / Timid and shy and scared are you of things beyond your ken.' Certainly the sound quality feels more 'over' and not as though it is coming from tinny television speakers. And it is played over both couples lying in their beds.

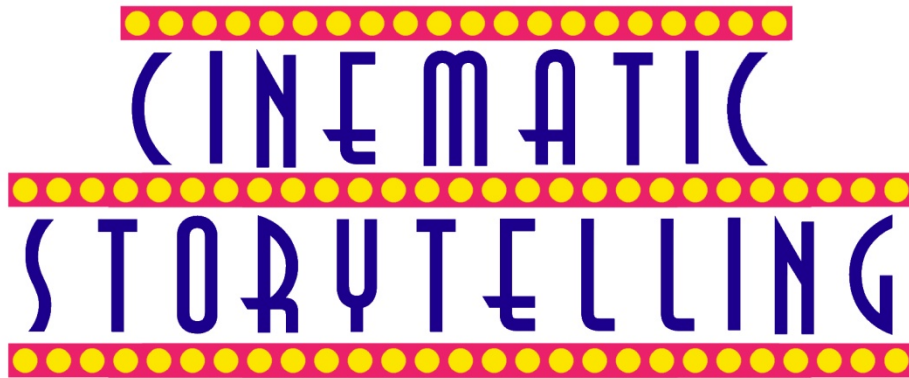
As said, sound bridges are where sound lingers from the end of one scene into the start of another, or where sound from the next scene is heard over the end of the previous scene. The aim is usually simply to create a smooth transition from one scene to another, but technically speaking sound is not simultaneous with image or action. It is, if you want to use a musical term, contrapuntal. One of the most famous examples of this kind of sound-vision counterpoint can be found in Hitchcock's *THE 39 STEPS* where the cleaning woman discovers the body and turns to the camera, except that scream then becomes, in the cut that follows this image, a train blowing its whistle. Steven Spielberg paid homage to this Hitchcock moment in *THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK* where the screams from a

dinosaur attack on a beach become in the edit the noise of a yawn from Jeff Goldblum standing against a background of trees, who, in a camera re-framing, is actually revealed to be standing in front of a poster for an island paradise in a subway station where the ‘screams’ have become the piercing noise of a train arriving.

“I come from a background of experimental music which mingled real sounds together with musical sounds.”

Ennio Morricone





CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

Music

"Without John Williams, bikes don't really fly, nor do brooms in Quidditch matches, nor do men in red capes. There is no Force, dinosaurs do not walk the Earth, we do not wonder, we do not weep, we do not believe."

Steven Spielberg, quoted from his honorific speech at the 44th Life Achievement Award Gala Tribute to John Williams

Early Musical Accompaniment

Musical accompaniment to movies began in the silent era, which means, of course, movies weren't 'silent' at all. In fact in the 1920s movies, shown in what were known then as 'Picture Palaces', which sometimes had a full orchestra and original score. Even smaller Nickelodeons or 'flea-pits', as small local cinemas in England were known, had a piano or organ, which not only added to the entertainment but also helped drown out the distracting whirling noise of the projector.

In The Age of the Silver Screen (so called because film reels used silver nitrate which gave the screen a silver sheen), musical accompaniment had a similar function to music in nineteenth century theatrical melodrama (which basically means ‘music with drama’) and that was to enhance the emotional impact of the story. But of course nineteenth century theatre did have dialogue and sound effects for noise such as stormy winds or gun fire and so early movie music also had to compensate for the lack of speech and help fill in where specific noises were missing.



The phrase film makers sometimes use for music that imitates or attempts to represent sound actions is ‘Mickey-Mousing’. The concept of ‘Mickey-Mousing’ comes from Walt Disney's early experiments with music and animation where musical instruments were used to recreate the sounds of the action seen on the screen. This can be seen and heard on *Little April Showers* in *BAMBI* where the ‘plink-plonk’ of the raindrops are in the notes of a clarinet. And

this tradition carried on in shorts such as BUGS BUNNY and TOM AND JERRY where, when there was a doorbell ringing or a plate crashing, the music would suggest that noise by means of an instrument in the orchestra. But musical imitation became part of movie convention and can be heard in many film scores. For example, the WHERE EAGLES DARE score has a 'rat-ta-ta-tat' drum beat not unlike rapid gunfire.



Leitmotifs in the early days of cinema were helpful in the identification of characters. Some people in the movie industry call this 'Peter-and-the-Wolfing', after the distinct Prokofiev leitmotifs that can be found in his symphony for children, *Peter and the Wolf*. Music proved useful in creating character motivation and moods, including sometimes a character's psychological inner world. Music was also useful in establishing time, setting and location, whether that be geographical, historical or atmospheric, and reflecting the pace and mood of the action. And many of these musical functions continued long after the 'silent' movies became 'talkies'. In fact

certain musical conventions, riffs and musical phrases from that era still exist today, for example 'chase music' or that musical phrase at a sudden dramatic moment – 'Der-der-der-der-DUD-ER'.

"There's a very basic human, non-verbal aspect to our need to make music and use it as part of our human expression. It doesn't have to do with body movements, it doesn't have to do with articulation of a language, but with something spiritual."

John Williams, quoted from the E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL CD liner notes



"Some movies work really well with music from Bach or Mahler that existed long before the film, so music has its own autonomy."

Ennio Morricone

Use of Pre-existing Music

Some of the scores in the Age of the Silver Screen were so long that composers had to turn to the classics for help and inspiration. In the 1980s when many early silent movies such as NAPOLEON were restored the composer Carl Davis was tasked with coming up with hours and hours of music. He acknowledged openly that he turned to Beethoven and others for his musical themes.

Pre-existing music has featured in many films. Richard Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and Johann Strauss's *The Blue Danube Walz* in 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (1968), Mahler's *Fifth Symphony* in DEATH IN VENICE (1971) and Bach's *Toccatà and Fugue in D* in ROLLERBALL (1975). One Hollywood producer was so impressed by the score for DEATH IN VENICE, he asked who wrote it. When he was told it was Gustav Mahler he said, "I think we should sign him."

Several *Bugs Bunny* cartoons such as WHAT'S OPERA, DOC? and RABBIT OF SEVILLE used classical scores. RABBIT OF SEVILLE used Italian composer Gioachino Rossini's 1816 opera buffa THE BARBER OF SEVILLE and WHAT'S OPERA, DOC? feature Elmer Fudd chasing Bugs in a parody of Richard Wagner's operas, particularly DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN (THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG), DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER (THE FLYING DUTCHMAN), and TANNHÄUSER. Such cartoons have proved so popular over the years that a full orchestra was put together in the 1980s for BUGS BUNNY ON BROADWAY, a collection of music based Warner Brothers animations featuring Bugs Bunny. The point here is that whereas music is usually added to the story, here music was the very basis for the story.



LAURA: *Would some music throw you off your stride?*

FRED: *No, dear, I'd like it.*

LAURA GOES OVER TO THE RADIO AND TUNES IN A CONCERT OF RACHMANINOFF'S PIANO CONCERTO NUMBER TWO. SHE RETURNS TO HER CHAIR AND BEGINS HER SEWING.

LAURA: *[Her thoughts as she looks at her husband] Fred. Fred, dear Fred. There's so much that I want to say to you. You're the only one in the world with enough wisdom and gentleness to understand. If only it were somebody else's story and not mine. As it is, you are the only one in the world that I can never tell.*

From BRIEF ENCOUNTER, directed by David Lean and written by Noël Coward

Story World Music

Story theorists talk about diegetic and non-diegetic sound, meaning those sounds which come from the story world (diegetic) and those sounds that come from outside it (non-diegetic) or 'over music' as the industry calls musical accompaniment.

In *THE SOUND OF MUSIC*, the songs sung by the Captain, Maria and the children at the singing competition are clearly diegetic because they are part of the plot and so come from the story world. Maria singing *I Have Confidence* is also diegetic because the lyrics of the song are an expression of her inner thoughts and those are also part of the story world. However, the underscoring when it is announced that the von Trapps have escaped uses musical phrases associated with 'Far a long, long way to run' and 'I go to the hills' and is non-diegetic, for the music we hear is certainly not part of the concert. Likewise, you could argue that the reprise of *Climb Every*

Mountain sung by the Reverend Mother over the credits as the family von Trapp track over the mountains is also non-diegetic, as the Reverend Mother isn't there. Yet maybe in a way she is. The Reverend Mother said she would pray for the family and *Climb Every Mountain* could be argued to be that prayer. The point here is that in musicals the music that is part of the story world and the music that is not part of the story world sometimes become blurred. And even in dramas the boundaries between story world music and musical commentary meld into one. In *BRIEF ENCOUNTER*, Laura is telling the story of her affair to her husband in her head as she listens to Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto Number Two* on the radio and that music, or excerpts from it, is used throughout the film to reflect her own psychological disturbance. *BRIEF ENCOUNTER* is one of cinema's great and literal 'melodramas'.



Not that all this compartmentalising matters very much, for what we are concerned primarily with in *STORY CRAFT* is the

storytelling. That said, certain genres allow for blurring of story source music and musical accompaniment whereas others do not. We're certainly on firmer ground with clear distinctions when it comes to thrillers, mysteries and dramas such as *film noirs*. Music played on the radio or in a car may well be part of the story world but if Sam Spade or Philip Marlow were to kiss the *femme fatale* in a dark cul-de-sac or quiet hotel bedroom and suddenly an orchestra started playing, the audience wouldn't expect the camera to then reveal Count Basie at the end of the street or in the bathroom.

***'A dream that will need
All the love you can give,
Every day of your life,
For as long as you live.
Climb every mountain,
Ford every stream,
Follow every rainbow,
Till you find your dream.'***

From *Climb Every Mountain* from THE SOUND OF MUSIC, music by Richard Rodgers and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein



“THE GRADUATE must be the best use of songs ever in a movie; it adds a layer to the movie you wouldn't ever get from a score.”

Hans Zimmer

Using Popular Song

As musical accompaniment in movies matured and its conventions developed, new possibilities and functions came into play. One was to use established popular songs to comment on the action, especially ironically. Two examples can be found in *DR STRANGELOVE OR: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB* (1964). The first is where a B-52 bomber is refuelling in mid-air by means of a long cylindrical pipe from another aircraft. An innocent enough action but the over music is the song *Try a Little Tenderness* which gives the refuelling action a comic sexual dimension. Second, and most famously, is when *We'll Meet Again* sung by Vera Lynn, known as the 'Forces' Sweetheart', is played at the end of the movie as the world is blown to smithereens by a series of hydrogen bombs.

The point here is that film makers started to use, ironically or otherwise, lyrics from popular songs to consciously comment on the action or the characters in the story. Sometimes, if the specific lyrics were familiar enough, instrumental versions could be used to make, as it were, an observation on the action. Woody Allen is a fan of what is known as the American Popular Song Book and many of his films include jazz versions of these classic Broadway numbers. For

example, in *MANHATTAN*, Woody Allen uses the music of several Gershwin songs and if you know the songs well enough, those melodies and musical phrases even by themselves offer a bonus enjoyment as you remember the lyrics which go with them. For example, the ballad *Embraceable You* is played during a dance, the march *Strike up the Band* is heard as people dash through the street and *He loves, And She Loves* is the main love theme of Isaac and Tracy, plus, of course, *Rhapsody in Blue* is the musical accompaniment to the many iconic images of New York itself. Another Woody Allen movie, *DECONSTRUCTING HARRY*, makes use of *If They Asked Me I Could Write a Book* by Richard Rodgers and Larry Hart, *The Way You Look Tonight* by Jerome Kernan and Dorothy Fields, and *She's Funny That Way* by Neil Moret and Richard A. Whiting.

But the popular songs in *AMERICAN GRAFFITI* (1973) work in a different way because, as the action takes place over the course of one evening where the characters have the radio on and are listening to the songs, the music is not 'over' as such. It comes from the story world and there's even a scene in the movie with DJ. But there are scenes with no radio in view yet the songs of the period are still heard. And this sort of blurring of boundaries between diegetic and non-diegetic possibilities opened up new ways of integrating popular songs into the fabric of the storytelling.

As conventions developed, a popular song, even if diegetic and part of the story world, began to occupy an almost parallel universe to the film's visual narrative. In *FIELD OF DREAMS* (1989), when Ray Kinsella (Kevin Costner) goes to the General Store and talks about hearing voices, playing in the background is the song *Crazy*, and later, when Ray is talking to his wife about building a baseball field, *What a Day for a Daydream* is heard on the radio. In both cases the lyrics seem to be a comment on what's going on in the film, yet both come from a story world sound sources.

More examples of this can be found in *THELMA AND LOUISE* (1991). There's a scene with a Rastafarian, riding his bicycle while smoking weed and listening to Johnny Nash's *I Can See Clearly Now* through Walkman headphones. He then comes across an abandoned police car in the middle of the road, with lights flashing, and as he stops, we hear the line "I can see all obstacles in my way." The Rastafarian next pushes his bike past the police car to the lines "Gone are the dark clouds that made me blind / It's gonna be a bright (bright) / Bright (bright) shiny day." The cyclist then takes out a flask and drinks some water and as he does he hears a knocking sound and discovers that there's a police officer locked up in the boot with bullet holes left in the boot so he can breathe. The officer indicates with finger through one of the holes where the keys are. The music track suddenly goes up in volume – "Look all around there's nothing but blue skies" – and the Rastafarian does look

around at his own blue skies and then blows smoke through one of the holes to the line “Look through your head, there’s nothing but blue skies.” It gets one on the biggest laughs in the movie and is welcome comic relief in the overall structure of the story. Those lyrics aren’t ‘over’, yet they are commenting on and indeed leading the action. You could even go as far as to say that getting high with the smoke would allow the police officer to look through his head and see those blue skies.



And there’s another example of using popular song to comment of the action and visuals on the screen earlier in the movie as Thelma is sunning herself and listening via her Walkman to Glenn Frey’s *Part of Me, Part of You* where the lyrics are:

I can hear it when I stand beside the river
 I can see it when I look up in the sky
 I can feel it when I hear that lonesome highway
 So many miles to go before I die
 We can never know about tomorrow
 Still we have to choose which way to go
 You and I are standing at the crossroads.

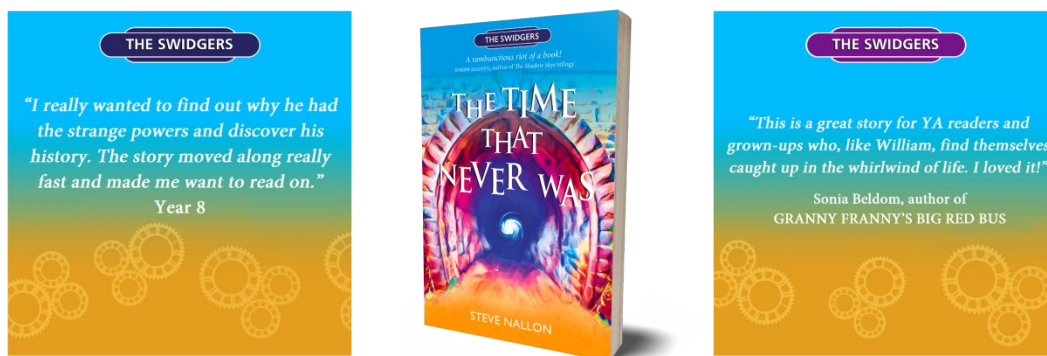
These lines really do seem to be functioning almost like a Greek chorus in the way they sum up Thelma's situation. And so too does *The Ballad of Lucy Jordan* by Marianne Faithfull: 'At the of thirty-seven / She realised she'd never / Ride through Paris in a sports car / With the warm wind in her air.' Well, maybe not Paris, but at least Thelma lived that life for a brief moment on the plains of Arizona.

A more recent example can be heard in *SINGLE MAN* on the night George (Colin Firth) meets Jim (Matthew Goode). The song *Blue Moon* is being played in the bar but the lyrics seem to reflect the thoughts going on in George's eyes as he sees Jim:

And then there suddenly appeared before me
The only one my arms will hold
I heard somebody whisper, "Please adore me"
And when I looked, the moon had turned to gold.

In 1969, William Goldman wrote a scene for *BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID* where Paul Newman and Robert Redford were to ride and play around on bicycles. The director George Hill, who majored in music at Yale, liked the idea but suggested a song to go with the scene. Hill told Hal David and Burt Bacharach to write a song in the style and with the feel of George and Ira Gershwin's *Bidin' My Time* from *GIRL CRAZY*. The song writers came up with *Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head*, which is a complete anachronism for a Western set in 1899 Wyoming and is clearly not

coming from any story world sound source. But somehow it worked, so it didn't matter and such musical interludes became a popular feature of movies. And now in our postmodern world, contemporary popular songs are sometimes used to score entire movies, even though those songs are out of time with the story world. These songs are often used in ironic contradictory juxtaposition to the image or action and examples can be found in *MARIE ANTOINETTE*, *DJANGO UNCHAINED* and *JOJO RABBIT*.



Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head also served as marketing tool for *BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID*, as did the song *The Way We Were* for the movie of the same name a couple of years later. The End Credits Song, often using musical themes from the score, became a major method of getting your movie out there. The Heart Will Go On from *TITANIC*, for example, which brilliantly sums up the theme of the movie ('Love can touch us one time / And last for a lifetime / And never let go 'til we're gone'), became a worldwide hit. But let's leave the last word to the song *High Noon (Do Not Forsake Me)*, sung by Tex Ritter with music and lyrics by songwriters

Dimitri Tiomkin and Ned Washington, which not only became a big hit but also served to foreshadows the whole plot of HIGH NOON:

Do not forsake me, oh my darlin'
 On this, our weddin' day
 Do not forsake me, oh my darlin'
 Wait, wait along
 I do not know what fate awaits me
 I only know I must be brave
 And I must face a man who hates me
 Or lie a coward, a craven coward
 Or lie a coward in my grave
 Oh, to be torn twixt love and duty
 S'posin', I lose my fair haired beauty
 Look at that big hand move along
 Nearin', high noon.

***'Tale as old as time
 Tune as old as song
 Bittersweet and strange
 Finding you can change
 Learning you were wrong.'***

**From *Tale As Old As Time*, from BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, music by
 Alan Menken and lyrics by Howard Ashman**



"Writing a tune is like sculpting. "You get four or five notes, you take one out and move one around, and you do a bit more and eventually, as the sculptor says, "In that rock there is a statue, we have to go find it."

John Williams

Musical Style and Craft

There are many different attitudes, styles and techniques when it comes to musical accompaniment in the movies. Ernest Lindgren, founder and first curator of the British Film Institute's National Film Library, even argued in the 1950s that "this use of background music cannot be too strongly condemned." The French composer Maurice Jaubert, who composed several films scores in the 1930s, didn't quite go that far but he did say, "When you go to the cinema it is not to hear music; we require it to deepen and prolong in us the screen's visual impressions." Jaubert, like many film composers, had the philosophy that film music should be supportive rather than obtrusive and that audiences shouldn't have their attention unnecessarily drawn to it. Ennio Morricone, who came to fame in the 1960s, took a very different view, for his scores for *THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE UGLY* and *ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST* are nearer in style to grand opera than subtle underscoring. And John Williams, you could argue, is somewhere in between the two.

There is much that could be said about the craft and technique of musical composition. Should the emphasis be on melody or orchestral effect? J.S. Bach provided a great musical theme for

ROLLERBALL but strong melodies were not appropriate as a supplement to the content of specific scenes and so the job went to the composer André Previn. Then there are choices as to which instrument is allocated to which character. In ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, for example, the harmonica is associated with the Charles Bronson character, the electric guitar with Henry Fonda, banjo with Jason Robards, and the full orchestra and strings with Claudio Cardinale. Then there's the question as to when the composer starts work on the score. Most composers prefer to see the finished film while others are happy to begin work on just a script. Morricone based his compositions on the script rather than the shot footage, and this meant, unusually, that the actors were aware of their musical themes and instruments and so were able to adapt their body rhythms to that leitmotif.



All these are interesting questions but musical composition, unless you are Charlie Chaplin, is the job of the composer not the writer. Certainly the writer can literally write into the script that the lyrics of certain songs are playing on the radio or the car stereo. They

can also in the script suggest ‘over’ songs, as long as they get clearance, which isn’t necessarily that easy. Steven Spielberg desperately wanted to use Irvin Berlin’s song *Always*, which had previously been used in Noël Coward’s play *BLITHE SPIRIT*, in his own ghost movie *ALWAYS*, but Berlin would not allow it. The point is that the role of the scriptwriter usually stops at the door marked ‘Score Composer’. And that is why this chapter has concentrated on popular songs and their lyrics, and pre-existing music, often classical music already in the public domain. Although usage involves rights and permissions, at least the writer can put those songs and compositions in the manuscript until the lawyers tell them otherwise.

More thoughts on musical scoring...

“I, over the years, have always felt more comfortable if I could go into a projection room and look at a film and not really know what to expect. If you read the script first, you form all kinds of preconceptions about how things look, what the location’s like, what the actors are like.”

John Williams

“There are some directors who actually fear the possible success of music. They fear that the audience or the critics will think the film has worked because there was a very good music score.”

Ennio Morricone

"I feel that music on the screen can seek out and intensify the inner thoughts of the characters. It can invest a scene with terror, grandeur, gaiety, or misery. It can propel narrative swiftly forward, or slow it down. It often lifts mere dialogue into the realm of poetry. Finally, it is the communicating link between the screen and the audience, reaching out and enveloping all into one single experience."

Bernard Herrman

"If something happened where I couldn't write music anymore, it would kill me. It's not just a job. It's not just a hobby. It's why I get up in the morning."

Hans Zimmer

"So much of what we do is ephemeral and quickly forgotten, even by ourselves, so it's gratifying to have something you have done linger in people's memories."

John Williams

"I'm trying to interpret the film through the director's head, but it all comes out through me. So, a composer is kind of like a psychic medium."

Danny Elfman

"In music, what is very important is temporality of space and length, based on the breathing space the director gives the music within the film, by separating the music from various elements of reality, like noises, dialogues... That's how you treat music properly, but it doesn't always happen this way. Music is often blamed, but it's not its fault."

Ennio Morricone

"With animated film, you have to create the sonic world; there's nothing there. You get to colour things in more and you're allowed to overreach yourself a little bit more, and it's great fun."

Hans Zimmer

"I also used these realistic sounds in a psychological way. With THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY, I used animal sounds – as you say, the coyote sound – so the sound of the animal became the main theme of the movie."

Ennio Morricone

By Steve Nallon



THE SWIDGERS