

Film editing

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Film editing is the connecting of one or more shots to form a sequence, and the subsequent connecting of sequences to form an entire movie. Film editing, by definition, is the only art that is unique to cinema and which defines and separates filmmaking from almost all other art forms (such as: photography, theater, dance, writing, and directing). The job of an editor isn't merely to mechanically put pieces of a film together, nor to just cut off the film slates, nor merely to edit dialogue scenes. Film editing is an art form which can either make or break a film.^[1] A film editor works with the layers of images, the story, the music, the rhythm, the pace, shapes the actors' performances, "re-directing" and often re-writing the film during the editing process, honing the infinite possibilities of the juxtaposition of small snippets of film into a creative, coherent, cohesive whole.

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Film editor

A film editor is a person who practices film editing by assembling footage into a coherent film. Film editors often are responsible for pulling together all of the elements of story, dialogue, music, sound effects, visual effects, rhythm and pace of a film. In the making of a film, the editors usually play a dynamic and creative role.

History of film editing technology

Film editing evolved from the process of a film editor physically cutting and taping together pieces of film, using a splicer and threading the film on a machine with a viewer such as a Moviola, or "flatbed" machine such as a Kem or Steenbeck.

Before the widespread use of non-linear editing systems, the initial editing of all films was done with a positive copy of the film negative called a film workprint (cutting copy in UK). Today, most films are edited digitally (on systems such as Avid or Final Cut Pro) and bypass the film positive workprint altogether. In the past, the use of a film positive (not the original negative) allowed the editor to do as much experimenting as he or she wished, without the risk of damaging the original.

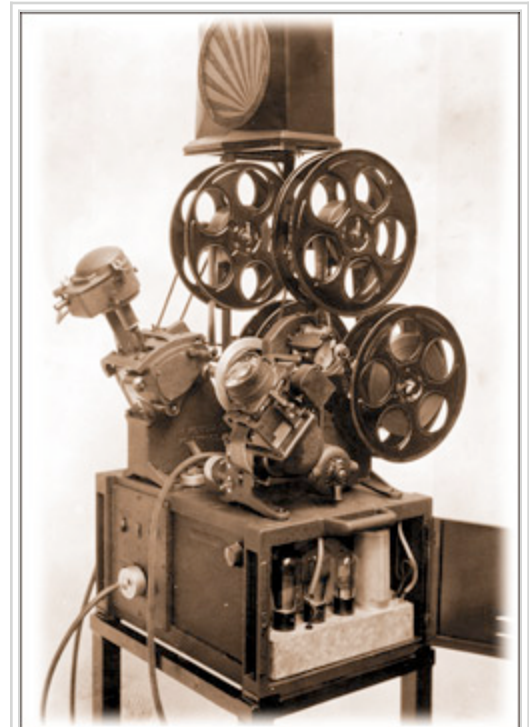
When the film workprint had been cut to a satisfactory state, it was then used to make an Edit Decision List (EDL). The negative cutter referred to this list while processing the negative, splitting the shots into rolls, which were then contact printed to produce the final film print or answer print. Today, production companies have the option of to bypass negative cutting altogether. With the advent of digital intermediate or "DI," the physical negative does not necessarily need to be physically cut and hot spliced together; rather the negative is optically scanned into computer(s) and a cut list is conformed by a DI editor.

Edwin S. Porter

Edwin S. Porter is generally thought to be the American filmmaker who first put film editing to use. Porter migrated to the United States as a young sailor and worked as a mechanic before joining the film laboratory of Thomas Alva Edison in the late 1890s.

Early Edison films were short films that were typically shot in one long static locked down shot. When Edison's motion picture studio wanted to increase the length of the short films he came to Porter. Porter made the breakthrough film *Life of an American Fireman* in 1902. The film was among the first that had a plot, action, and even a closeup of a hand pulling a fire alarm.

Other films were to follow. Porter's ground-breaking film, *The Great Train Robbery* is still shown in film schools today as an example of early editing form. It was produced in 1903 and was one of the first examples of dynamic, action editing (the piecing together scenes shot at different times and places and for emotional impact unavailable in a static long shot). Being one of the first film hyphenates (film director, editor and engineer) Porter also invented and utilized some of the very first (albeit primitive) special effects



The original editing machine: an upright Moviola.



Steenbeck film editing machine rollers

such as double exposures, miniatures and split-screens.

Post-production

The editor's cut

There are several editing stages and the editor's cut is the first. An editor's cut (sometimes referred to as the "assembly edit" or "rough cut") is normally the first pass of what the final film will be when it reaches picture lock.

The film editor usually starts working while principal photography (shooting) starts. In the first stage of editing the film editor will usually work alone (save for his or her own team of assistant editors, associate or co-editors and/or visual effects and music editors). Likely, prior to cutting, the editor and director will have seen and/or discussed "dailies" (raw footage shot each day) as shooting progresses. Screening dailies gives the editor a ballpark idea of the director's intentions.

Because it is the first pass, the editor's cut might be somewhat longer than the final film. The editor continues to refine the cut while shooting continues, and often the entire editing process goes on for many months and sometimes more than a year, depending on the film.

The director's cut

When shooting is finished, the director can then turn his or her full attention to collaborating with the editor and further refining the cut of the film. This is the time that is set aside where the film editor's first cut is molded to fit the director's vision, and before the studio and/or producers are generally allowed to have input. In the United States, under DGA rules, directors receive a minimum of ten weeks after completion of principal photography to prepare their first cut.

While collaborating on what is referred to as the "director's cut," the director and the editor go over the entire movie with a fine tooth comb; scenes and shots are re-ordered, removed, shortened and otherwise tweaked. Often it is discovered that there are plot holes, missing shots or even missing segments which might require that new scenes be filmed.

Because of this time working closely and collaborating - a period that is normally far longer, and far more intimately involved, than the entire production and filming - most directors and editors form a unique artistic bond.

The Producers vs. the director

Often after the director has had his or her chance to oversee a cut, the subsequent cuts are supervised by one or more producers, who represent the production company and/or movie studio. At times, the final cut of films produced by the major studios is the one that most closely represents what the studio wants from the film and not necessarily what the director wants. Because of this, there have been several conflicts in the past between the director and the studio, sometimes leading to the use of the "Alan Smithee" credit signifying when a director no longer wants to be associated with the final release.

Continuity

Often a film editor is blamed for improper continuity. For example, cutting from a shot where the beer glass is empty to one where it is full. Continuity is, in fact, very nearly last on a film editor's list of important things to maintain. Continuity is typically the business of the script supervisor and film director, who are together responsible for preserving continuity and preventing errors from take to take and shot to shot. Generally speaking, the editor utilizes the script supervisor's notes during post-production to log and keep track of the vast amounts of footage and takes that a director might shoot. However, to most editors what is more important than continuity is the editing of emotional and storytelling aspects of any given film - something that is much more abstract and harder to judge - which is why films often take much longer to edit than to shoot. Often a film editor will use this to focus on the theme of the film.

Methods of montage

In motion picture terminology, a **montage** (from the French for "putting together" or "assembly") is a film editing technique.

There are at least three senses of the term:

1. In French film practice, "montage" has its literal French meaning and simply identifies a movie's editor.
2. In Soviet filmmaking of the 1920s, "montage" was a method of juxtaposing shots to derive new meaning that did not exist in either shot alone.
3. In classical Hollywood cinema, a "montage sequence" is a short segment in a film in which narrative information is presented in a condensed fashion. This is the most common meaning among laymen.

Soviet montage

Lev Kuleshov was among the very first to theorize about the relatively young medium of the cinema in the 1920s. For him, the unique essence of the cinema — that which could be duplicated in no other medium — is editing. He argues that editing a film is like constructing a building. Brick-by-brick (shot-by-shot) the building (film) is erected. His often-cited Kuleshov Experiment established that montage can lead the viewer to reach certain conclusions about the action in a film. Montage works because viewers infer meaning based on context.

Although, strictly speaking, U.S. film director D.W. Griffith was not part of the montage school, he was one of the early proponents of the power of editing — mastering cross-cutting to show parallel action in different locations, and codifying film grammar in other ways as well. Griffith's work in the teens was highly regarded by Kuleshov and other Soviet filmmakers and greatly influenced their understanding of editing.

Sergei Eisenstein was briefly a student of Kuleshov's, but the two parted ways because they had different ideas of montage. Eisenstein regarded montage as a dialectical means of creating meaning. By contrasting unrelated shots he tried to provoke associations in the viewer, which were induced by shocks.

Montage sequence

A **montage sequence** consists of a series of short shots that are edited into a sequence to condense narrative. It is usually used to advance the story as a whole (often to suggest the passage of time), rather than to create symbolic meaning. In many cases, a song plays in the background to enhance the mood or reinforce the message being conveyed. Classic examples are the training montages in Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky* series of movies.

Continuity editing

What became known as the popular 'classical Hollywood' style of editing was developed by early European and American directors, in particular D.W. Griffith in his films such as *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*. The classical style ensures temporal and spatial continuity as a way of advancing narrative, using such techniques as the 180 degree rule, Establishing shot, and Shot reverse shot.

Alternatives to continuity editing (non-traditional or experimental)

Early Russian filmmakers such as Lev Kuleshov further explored and theorized about editing and its ideological nature. Sergei Eisenstein developed a system of editing that was unconcerned with the rules of the continuity system of classical Hollywood that he called Intellectual montage.

Alternatives to traditional editing were also the folly of early surrealist and dada filmmakers such as Luis Buñuel (director of the 1929 *Un chien andalou*) and René Clair (director of 1924's *Entr'acte* which starred famous dada artists Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray). Both filmmakers, Clair and Buñuel, experimented with editing techniques long before what is referred to as "MTV style" editing.

The French New Wave filmmakers such as Jean Luc Godard and François Truffaut and their American counterparts such as Andy Warhol and John Cassavetes also pushed the limits of editing technique during the late 1950s and throughout the 1970s. French New Wave films and the non-narrative films of the 1960s used a carefree editing style and did not conform to the traditional editing etiquette of Hollywood films. Like its dada and surrealist predecessors, French New Wave editing often drew attention to itself by its lack of continuity, its demystifying self-reflexive nature (reminding the audience that they were watching a film), and by the overt use of jump cuts or the insertion of material not often related to any narrative.

Editing techniques

Stanley Kubrick noted that the editing process is the one phase of production that is truly unique to motion pictures. Every other aspect of filmmaking originated in a different medium than film (photography, art direction, writing, sound recording), but editing is the one process that is unique to film. In Alexander Walker's *Stanley Kubrick Directs*, Kubrick was quoted as saying, "I love editing. I think I like it more than any other phase of filmmaking. If I wanted to be frivolous, I might say that everything that precedes editing is merely a way of producing film to edit."

In his book, *On Film Editing*, Edward Dmytryk stipulates seven "rules of cutting" that a good editor should follow:

- "Rule 1. *Never* make a cut without a positive reason.
- "Rule 2. When undecided about the exact frame to cut on, cut *long* rather than short" (Dmytryk, 23).
- "Rule 3: Whenever possible cut 'in movement'" (Dmytryk, 27).
- "Rule 4: The 'fresh' is preferable to the 'stale'" (Dmytryk, 37).
- "Rule 5: All scenes should begin and end with continuing action" (Dmytryk, 38).
- "Rule 6: Cut for proper values rather than proper 'matches'" (Dmytryk, 44).
- "Rule 7: Substance first—then form" (Dmytryk, 145).

According to Walter Murch, when it comes to film editing, there are six main criteria for evaluating a cut or deciding where to cut. They are (in order of importance, most important first):

- emotion — Does the cut reflect what the editor believes the audience should be feeling at that moment?
- story — Does the cut advance the story?
- rhythm — Does the cut occur "at a moment that is rhythmically interesting and 'right'" (Murch, 18)?
- eye-trace — Does the cut pay respect to "the location and movement of the audience's focus of interest within the frame" (Murch, 18)?
- two-dimensional place of the screen — Does the cut respect the 180 degree rule?
- three-dimensional space of action — Is the cut true to the physical/spatial relationships within the diegesis?

Murch assigned notional percentage values to each of the criteria. Emotion, with 51%, outweighed the combined value of all the other criteria.

References

- ↑ American Cinema Editors - "2004 Oscar Nominees Discuss their Craft at the Egyptian Theater" (http://www.fromscripttodvd.com/ace_2004_oscar_nominees.htm)
- Dmytryk, Edward. *On Film Editing: An Introduction to the Art of Film Construction*, Boston: Focal Press, 1984.
 - Murch, Walter. *In the Blink of an Eye: a Perspective on Film Editing*, Silman-James Press, 2d rev. ed., 2001. ISBN 1-879505-62-2

See also

- List of film-related topics
- Moviola
- 180 degree rule
- A Roll
- Axial cut
- B Roll
- Comparison of video editing software
- Cross cutting
- Cutaway
- Dissolve
- Edited movies
- Establishing shot
- Insert
- Key
- Kuleshov Effect
- L cut

- Master shot
- Montage (film)
- Motion Picture Editors Guild
- Non-linear editing system
- Point of view shot
- Sequence shot
- Shot reverse shot
- Talking head
- Wipe

Wikibooks

- Movie Making Manual

Wikiversity

- Portal:Filmmaking

Continuity editing topics

Establishing shot | Shot reverse shot | 180 degree rule | Eyeline match | 30 degree rule | Cutting on action | Cutaway | Insert | Cross-cutting

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