Editing

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

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- Describe how editing can affect a film's pacing, plot structure, and perception of its mise en scène.
- Explain how editing can juggle plot threads and rearrange the order of story content for dramatic effect.
- Identify the basic building blocks editing uses to tell a story, including how a variety of transitions can affect perception of time.
- Define systems of editing, such as continuity editing, discontinuity editing, and the montage theory, and describe how editing guides what a viewer is seeing and hearing in order to refocus attention and to enhance or even completely change what was in the script.

7.1 What Is Editing?

In narrative movies, the story idea usually comes first, and the screenwriter puts his or her vision into words, describing what will be seen on the screen. With most movies, the director chooses and arranges what will actually be in the scene (the mise en scène) and how it plays out. The cinematographer composes various images in the camera that force the audience to view only part of what is in the scene, and to view it in a specific way with each shot. The **editor** then decides which of those shots to use, in what order they appear, and how long they are on the screen. This can have a critical effect on how well an audience can pick up on what the director has put into the scene. Directors typically work closely with both the cinematographer and editor to make sure their visions coincide. There are cases, however, when a director who wants to maintain personal control may shoot a scene in such a way that it can be edited in only one way, or is in one continuous take with no alternate angles to cut to. Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* is a rather extreme example, an 80-minute film with only 10 individual shots running 5 to 10 minutes each and five of the cuts disguised to make it appear like only five individual shots. Sometimes viewers of *Rope* have the impression that the entire film was shot in one long take because the few cuts it employs seem so natural that they're not perceived as cuts. Effective editing is sometimes called "invisible" editing. This is because viewers often do not even realize when a shot changes from, say, a two-shot to a close-up of one actor, or even from one location to another, if the editor appropriately anticipates what viewers want to see and when they want to see it, and remembers to maintain a plausible continuity between shots.

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▲ In Baz Luhrman's *The Great Gatsby*, a flurry of short shots edited together adds to the quick-paced, almost frenzied nature of the party scenes.

Some films take the opposite approach and use certain scenes to show off their ability to edit numerous shots together, as in the battle scenes of *300*, action sequences in *XXX* and *Star Trek Into Darkness*, and party scenes in Baz Luhrman's remake of *The Great Gatsby*. A film such as *Run Lola Run* (*Lola Rennt*) looks from beginning to end almost like an exercise in all the possible techniques of editing. The **montage theory** of editing, which will be discussed later, is a rebellion against the idea of invisible editing, and instead considers that not only is editing the most important aspect

of filmmaking but that the joining of shots should intentionally juxtapose disparate images to create new meaning. Most standard character dramas and comedies, however, tend to use functional **continuity editing** that serves the story and does not call attention to itself. Editing can shorten scenes that were shot, tighten them to pick up the pace and increase dramatic tension, and lengthen scenes, stretching out reactions longer than they were originally delivered by the actors on the set and so slowing the pace for dramatic emphasis. Typically, using fewer and longer takes in a scene slows the pacing, while using more shots of briefer screen time quickens the pacing. (Compare, for example, the divergent editing styles in the 1974 and 2013 versions of *The Great Gatsby*.) Editing can even rearrange or eliminate words, actions, or entire **sequences**— segments made up of closely related scenes. For example, the last scene in the script might be split in half, with the first half placed at the beginning of the film so that the middle of the picture becomes an extended flashback. The entire plot structure can be changed through the editing. Quentin Tarantino has stated that the edited movie is really the final draft of the script. And of course editing can change the film yet again through various stages from "roughcut" to "preview print," undergoing revisions for the "premiere" version and often a shortened "theatrical cut" (sometimes slightly different for different countries), then a revised "director's cut" for home video, and sometimes even a later "definitive director's cut." Changes in different editions may be due to ratings or censorship concerns. They may be made to make story clarity more obvious for certain target audiences. Or scenes may be deleted simply to shorten the running time so theaters can schedule more showings per day.

To understand what goes into editing, it can be a useful exercise to read original screenplays in various drafts, and then to compare them with the finished film, if possible, in its various cuts. A select few DVDs and Blu-ray discs include the film's screenplay, sometimes as a DVD-ROM file (as with *Nurse Betty*, *The Stunt Man*, and Peter Jackson's 2005 remake of *King Kong*) and occasionally as a file designed to appear on screen while you watch the film (as with *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Taxi Driver*, *Pleasantville*, and *American Beauty*). Articles and entire books have examined particular films from script to screen in their many different incarnations along the way. A few films are available on DVD or Blu-ray in multiple versions that can allow you to trace the modifications in two or more different cuts for yourself, including Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, Luc Besson's *Leon: The Professional*, and Oliver Stone's *Alexander*, among others. Many foreign-language films are drastically recut for American release, primarily to shorten them and speed up pacing, but also to eliminate character development and subplots deemed unnecessary for the basic storyline or too confusing for American audiences. It can be instructive to compare the very different versions of films such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, Luchino Visconti's *The Leopard* and *Senso*, or Ishiro Honda's *Godzilla* (a.k.a. *Gojira*), to name just a few. Do the changes improve the films for an audience with a different cultural background, do they destroy the director's original intent, or do they merely present the same basic story differently?

Another useful exercise is to watch your favorite films over again, picking out an especially impressive scene to view repeatedly, sometimes in slow motion, so you can observe all the different shots that make up the scene. Try to understand how the editor's choices affect how you perceive the scene's pacing, and how you notice specific props or actions more clearly at key moments than if different shots were used or a different number of shots were cut together over the same screen time. Additionally, if a DVD or Blu-ray edition of a film offers the opportunity in its supplementary features, it can be very instructive to watch unedited takes of a scene and then see the complete edited scene (and possibly alternate edited versions) immediately following. Certain DVDs include bonus features that break down selected scenes shot by shot, explaining how a sequence is constructed, sometimes comparing it with the shooting script and "storyboards" or
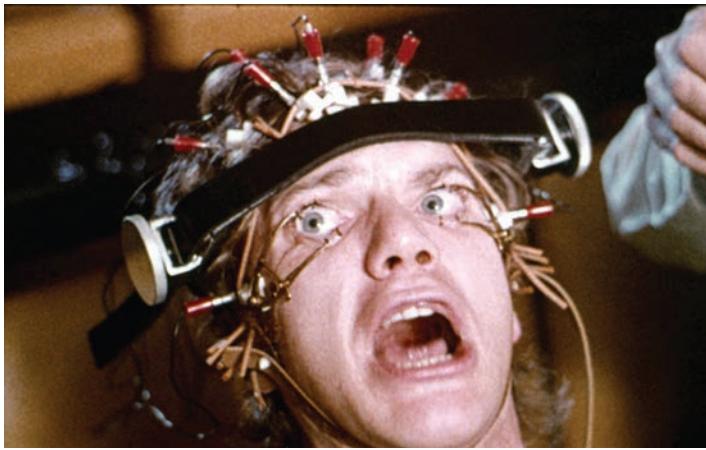
Courtesy Everett Collection

▲ Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* was originally released with an X rating. Because of concerns about sex and violence, some VHS editions were later edited and released with an R rating.

"animatics" that directors use to pre-visualize the scenes. Others give you the option of viewing alternate camera angles during a scene. Sometimes (as with the *Men in Black* Deluxe Edition) they even let you rearrange shots or remix the audio to see the effect that has.

In this chapter, we will examine some of the basic tools of editing, which is one of the elements of filmmaking that occurs in **post-production**, or after principal photography is completed. However, some aspects of editing may begin before filming ends, as the director will look at **dailies**, or the footage shot during a given day. Every editor, like every director, has his or her own style. And, as with the director's relationship with the cinematographer, his or her relationship and level of cooperation and supervision with the editor vary from film to film. But most editors operate with these tools at their disposal, so a working knowledge of them should help us to understand how the film is put together.

7.2 Rearranging the Story Into a Plot

Before we get into the technical details of what goes into editing, you must understand the purpose of editing; briefly, it is to arrange the screenwriter's story and cinematographer's shots into the film's final plot. The writer puts story elements into a plot in a certain order, the director oversees their filming, but the editor is the one who assembles everything into the final movie. Directors rely upon their editors to make sense of all the little pieces, not only to bring out the best performances of the actors but also to enhance the themes of the story and ensure the audience can follow what is going on. Because most films are not shot in chronological order, but in the order in which scheduling, weather, and other factors make the most sense, it is crucial for the editor to put the story back together for the audience.

For instance, in a huge, epic film like *The Right Stuff*, in which parallel stories of the men first assigned to the Mercury space program and test pilot Chuck Yeager are told, it is essential that the various storylines hold together. Otherwise, the audience is left confused, making the film unnecessarily complicated. The editing team of Glenn Farr, Lisa Fruchtman, Stephen A. Rotter, Douglas Steward,

◄ The complexities of the parallel stories in *The Right Stuff* (1983) have roots going back to D. W. Griffith's 1915 and 1916 masterworks. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* were films that pioneered multiple-storyline filmmaking.

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and Tom Rolf had to keep the stories flowing in a sensible order, even as focus shifted from Yeager to the astronauts and back, while also incorporating historical footage of space shots. The editing team clearly excelled at this, as they won the Academy Award for their efforts, and the film, all 193 minutes of it, was nominated for Best Picture.

Importance of the Editor

Film editing is a somewhat different discipline than what we think of as editing in other art forms. One thinks of the editor of a book, for instance, checking for grammar and spelling errors, but also ensuring that the writer has constructed a story that makes sense, that one chapter reasonably follows another (unless there is an artistic reason for it not to), and that the assorted chapters hold together as a whole work. The film editor's role parallels this to some degree, but he or she does more: The film editor helps create the film, literally constructing it, piecing together different takes of individual scenes and then placing the selected scenes in the order that tells the story the director wants to tell. The editor's role is crucial to the making of a successful film. Editing determines not only the order in which elements from the story occur in the film's plot, but also the frequency (how many times we see them) and the duration (how long they last on the screen).

And yet the best editing doesn't call attention to itself (unless the story calls for it). Instead, even if it involves **incongruous editing**, or putting sequences together out of order, it is still done in service to the story. Poor editing does the audience the ultimate disservice when it comes to film—it makes its members aware that they are seeing a film, taking them out of the transformative experience going to the movies should be.

How important is the editor's job? Actress Natalie Portman was asked in an interview whether she could tell if a film was good or bad while she was in the process of shooting it. "I can't at all," Portman said. "It really, I feel like, always happens in the editing room. That's why, whether it comes out good or bad, you sort of can't take credit for it" (Goodykoontz, 2009d).

Chronological Order

Often a film is cut with the scenes arranged in chronological order. This makes sense; most stories are told in this way, and they are easy to follow. We simply watch one scene unfold after another, from beginning to end. Don't mistake this for simplistic storytelling, however. Some are complex stories, such as *Miller's Crossing*, the Coen brothers' 1990 film about a gangster (Gabriel Byrne) who plays two rival bosses (Albert Finney and Jon Polito) against each other. There are numerous twists and turns as loyalties shift to suit the whims of the characters. Yet the film has a clear beginning, middle, and end. This is also useful when a scene refers to another that has gone before it. For instance, at one point Byrne's character is dispatched to kill a crooked bookie (John Turturro). The bookie pleads for his life, begging Byrne's character to "look into your heart." Seemingly moved, Byrne

Mary Evans/C20TH FOX/Ronald Grant/courtesy Everett Collection

▲ In the film *Miller's Crossing*, the Coen brothers push the familiar gangster genre in new and unexpected directions. The brothers are best known for breathing new life into familiar formulas.

lets him go. Later in the film, however, Byrne's character is again about to shoot the bookie. Again, he pleads, "Look into your heart." Byrne's character says dismissively, "What heart?" and shoots the bookie between the eyes. The scene is much more effective and powerful because of our knowledge of what has come before, informing us that in the previous scene, Byrne's character let the bookie live temporarily to serve his own purposes.

Incongruous Editing

Other films make intentional use of incongruous editing, or jumping around in time. Quentin Tarantino rearranges story events in *Pulp Fiction* so that we see some things long after they've already happened in the plot thread we've been following, and we see certain things a second time from a different point of view. In 1941, Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* became famous for the way it told the life story of its title character through multiple flashbacks, some of them overlapping, from different points of view, using a framing plot thread that shows a reporter interviewing people who knew him. Not nearly so influential but several years before that film, *The Sin of Nora Moran* related most of its story through flashbacks within flashbacks and even dreams within those flashbacks, sometimes making it a challenge to keep track of what was going on until the end.

In *Don't Look Now*, discussed earlier for its use of color, there is an intense sex scene between Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie. It drew attention in part because of the frank and relatively explicit way in which it is shot, especially for the time. But the scene is also notable for the unusual way in which it is cut. Director Nicholas Roeg cuts between shots of the couple making love to scenes of them dressing for dinner afterward, then back again. The unorthodox editing helps to further establish a central theme of the film, which plays with the idea of time throughout. Sutherland's character seems to have the gift of premonition, though he is skeptical. Still, he sees things that others do not, and it is unclear to him and the audience when these events are taking place. The jumping around in time during the sex scene helps to accentuate the fluid nature of time in the film.

Sidney Lumet's complexly plotted heist thriller *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (2007) constantly jumps back and forth in time, repeating scenes or partial scenes but following different characters, slightly overlapping some of the action before continuing with the story and jumping back again to where a previous scene had left off. To avoid audience confusion, often a superimposed title lets the audience know when a new scene is taking place and which character will be the focus. We know most of the basic story within the first 10 minutes, but we learn more and more details about things that were happening simultaneously, until we finally see how it all ends in the very last scene of the movie. *Vantage Point*, a 2008 action thriller about a plot to assassinate the president, has a similar structure of repeating scenes from different viewpoints, adding new layers to the story information until finally allowing the end to unfold chronologically. In Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013), the basic story is shown chronologically, but we sometimes see a shot of Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix) followed by flashbacks of the happy life together that he and Catherine (Rooney Mara) had before they decided to divorce, even though the soundtrack often keeps us in the present time. This lets us know that he is remembering, rather than merely letting us know what happened in the past.

Perhaps the most ambitious use of editing to tell a story is found in *Memento*, Christopher Nolan's 2000 film in which Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce), a former insurance investigator, has a form of amnesia that prevents him from making new memories. He is trying to investigate what he believes to be the rape and murder of his wife; unable to remember any of what he discovers,

he relies on notes, tattoos, Polaroid photographs, and other devices to try to piece together what his memories cannot. To further complicate matters, Nolan tells the story in two ways. The scenes shown in black and white unfold chronologically, while the color scenes play in reverse order. The effect leaves the audience as confused and in the dark as Leonard, but the truth about Leonard's wife is revealed by the end of the film. Although some audiences were confused by the technique, it is generally considered an ingenious, compelling way to tell the story.

Courtesy Everett Collection

▲ In *Memento*, character Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce) uses his tattoos, among other techniques, to fill the holes in his memory as he searches for answers to his wife's murder. The editing techniques used to show Shelby collecting jumbled memories puts the audience in the shoes of the protagonist, leaving them feeling equally lost and confused.

Many of these films were heavily influenced by Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), an ingenious blend of two short stories into a new and different work and a film whose unexpected worldwide acclaim suddenly introduced international audiences to Japanese cinema. Revising one of the stories into a framing story, Kurosawa has the rest of the film recount the other story in a series of flashbacks within a flashback, each of which covers the same incident, a rape and killing, from a different point of view. The original story was written as a series of testimonies by witnesses at a trial exploring the nature of subjective truth, but the film's editing takes it to a new level with the complex interaction among the incident itself, the conflicting trial testimony, the people telling the story of the trial, and the people listening to the story.

Many, if not most, films, of course, have the plot order predetermined by the screenplay, but the editing process gives the director another chance to shuffle scenes around, delete them entirely, show events more than once from different points of view, or completely restructure the plot.

7.3 The Basics

The editor is charged with the actual construction of the film. Again, working in collaboration with the director, the editor selects the best takes of individual scenes and then places them in the order that best tells the story the director is trying to tell. Often this is chronological order, which is the most straightforward method and the easiest for the audience to follow. However, some films challenge the audience with incongruous editing, using various tools to jump around in time and space. Like the cinematographer, the editor has many tools at his or her disposal to help tell the story. But also like the cinematographer, the editor must think of them as tools to advance the story, not crutches to limp it along.

Shot and Take

The process of editing involves arranging what has been photographed and joining shots into the most effective order to communicate the content to the viewer. In writing a story, an author uses words as basic elements, choosing and arranging them into sentences. Sentences are organized into paragraphs, and multiple paragraphs become chapters or sections that tell the complete

story in a carefully ordered manner. As we have learned previously, with film, the basic element is the shot, the view a camera takes from a single position or setup (stationary or moving), obtained by turning the camera on for a certain amount of time and then turning it off. Each time this is done, it is referred to as a *take*, and if a shot is performed badly or ruined for some reason, the director will order additional takes until that shot is satisfactory. The best take of a shot or the best portion of a take is later used in the film, and that portion used in the finished film is also called a "shot," even though it may not be the complete take. As we'll soon see, different portions of different takes of the same shot setup can be assembled to fine tune an actor's performance. This can be obvious, using jump cuts, or imperceptible, if there is coverage that can be exploited, both of which we'll discuss shortly.

From Frames to Acts

A shot may be as short as a single frame (one still image lasting 1/24th or 1/30th of a second on the screen) or as long as the entire movie, with the maximum length determined by how much film or tape the camera can hold, or how large a digital file will fit on a digital camera's hard drive or memory card. The earliest films, produced back in the 1890s, each consisted of a single shot about a half-minute or less to a minute or two, sometimes simply showing a place or person of interest, and sometimes depicting a brief story acted out in front of the camera. One of the most famous examples is the 1895 French comedy *Arroseur Arrosé* (*A Sprinkler Sprinkled*), sometimes called *Watering the Gardener* in English, which lasts about 50 seconds. When motion pictures were a new technology, there was no concept of editing, unless an exhibitor decided to splice together a variety of thematically related films (such as news events or travel views) into a longer presentation, turning each shot into a scene that told part of a longer story.

Photo by Mary Evans/Ronald Grant/courtesy Everett Collection

▲ This simple single-shot from *L'Arroseur Arrosé* (*The Sprinkler Sprinkled*) of a man being sprayed in the face is the great-grandfather of physical comedies. The Lumière brothers (along with Thomas Edison in the United States) are credited with inventing motion pictures.

A *scene*, as we discussed in Chapter 5, is a portion of a film that takes place in a single location over a specific time period, showing viewers an episode in the story before moving on to another scene. By the late 1890s, filmmakers who wanted to tell stories longer than a minute or two would connect a series of scenes, each one shot in a single take. Good examples include such films as the six-minute 1899 version of *Cinderella* by Georges Méliès. Even today, a scene may be a single shot, especially if it's a short scene, but ever since the early 1900s, each scene is more often made up of several and sometimes numerous individual shots that direct the viewers' attention to what the director thinks is most important at any given moment. Several related scenes follow each other to form what is called a *sequence*, a dramatic unit comparable to a chapter in a book. Several sequences then might make up an *act* of a film that follows the traditional three-act or five-act screenplay structure, or of an extra-long epic film that has an intermission between two major and dramatically cohesive sections of an hour or two each.

Transitions

When filmmakers decided to expand films beyond individual single-shot scenes into a series of single-shot scenes, and eventually into a series of multiple-shot scenes, they had to decide how to connect them in ways that would not confuse the audience.

Cuts

The most common method of changing scenes and joining shots within a scene is the **cut**, so called because film originally had to be physically cut with a razor blade or scissors before being glued or taped to another piece of film (even though almost all movies today, whether shot digitally or on film, are edited on computers rather than by physically cutting film). Shots, scenes, and sequences are assembled by the editor to tell the story, and the editing process is commonly called cutting a film. A **direct cut** is the simplest of many possible transitions between two shots. On the screen, the viewers see one shot instantly replaced by another one after a cut. Technically, a direct cut does not even provide a transition, but merely an immediate change to a new shot of the same scene (showing continuous action) or a new scene taking place at a different location or time. When action flows smoothly from one shot to the next, direct cuts are usually just taken for granted by viewers if they're noticed at all. See Table 7.1 for the different types of editing transitions.

Table 7.1 Major types of transitions between two shots

Direct cut	One shot instantaneously replaces another on the screen.
Fade-out/fade-in	Image slowly fades to black or fades from black screen slowly into the image.
Dissolve	A fade-in superimposed over a fade-out, so both shots are briefly seen together.
Wipe	One shot pushes the previous one off the screen, typically from side to side or top to bottom, but various other shapes and effects may be used, such as a page turn, Venetian blinds, multiple stars or diamonds, or a rotating cube.
Iris	A circle (or square or other shape) closes down on the image from the outer edges until the image goes black for an iris-out, or opens up for an iris-in.

If there is an obvious jump in the action with something either missing or repeated, or if the new camera position is very similar to but not exactly the same as the previous shot, the scene has a jarring effect, and this is referred to as a **jump cut**. Jump cuts may be accidental on the part of the editor, or they may be done intentionally as part of a film's style, as in the Australian thriller *Kiss or Kill* or the German film *Lola Rennt* (*Run, Lola, Run*). A scene of Lola running from the camera in *Run Lola Run* starts with her a short distance away, but as she's running she is suddenly many yards away and then several yards further, as jump cuts eliminate part of the shot's action without changing to different camera angles. Throughout *Kiss or Kill*, the editor eliminates perhaps a second or a few seconds from a shot every so often, again without cutting to a different angle. This jarring, jump cut effect, first popularized in French New Wave films such as Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960), adds to the nervous energy of the characters and the film's edginess. In Seijun Suzuki's audacious and kinky yakuza crime thriller *Branded to Kill* (1967), jump cuts and elliptical editing get straight into the heart of scenes, eliminating unnecessary connecting action and exposition that audiences are expected to understand already as part of the conventional genre formula. Many films now use this technique to indicate passage of time, such as scenes of a character getting dressed or working or eating, instead of the more traditional fades and dissolves.

Photos by Mary Evans/Ronald Grant/Everett Collection

▲ While these two shots of Lola in *Run Lola Run* are similarly framed, she is magically transported from one background location to the next. In classical Hollywood editing, jump cuts were seen as serious errors that interrupted the flow of the story, reminding viewers that they were watching a fabricated reality. Today, jump cuts are just another kind of stylization, which viewers take in stride.

Fades, Dissolves, Wipes

The second most common transition used in films after the cut is the *fade*, either a **fade-out** or a **fade-in**. These are often used at the beginning or end of a scene or sequence as a sort of punctuation mark, fading into a shot from a black screen or fading to black at the end, like bringing the lights up or down during a stage play. A fade-out/fade-in often signals a significant passage of time. Another common transition, the **dissolve** (sometimes referred to as a cross-fade), is just a fade-in to a new shot superimposed over a fade-out from the previous shot, so the two adjoining scenes can both be seen simultaneously for a moment. Georges Méliès's *Cinderella* has a dissolve between each of its single-take scenes. Like the fade-out/fade-in, dissolves are often used to indicate time passing, and a montage sequence is typically made up of numerous quick dissolves or wipes to chronicle a series of events in a short time on the screen.

Courtesy Everett Collection

▲ In this shot from *Strike*, directed by the Soviet master Sergei Eisenstein, one image dissolves as a new image fades in. At the midpoint of dissolve, the two images are briefly superimposed.

A standard **wipe**, just as it implies, looks on the screen like one shot is "wiped" off the screen by another shot, whether from side to side, top to bottom, or diagonally. More spectacular wipes may be done in fancy shapes such as stars, Venetian blinds, an imitation of a page turning, and more. Some filmmakers like to use wipes to introduce split-screens smoothly, rather than cutting directly to a split-screen or multi-image effect. *Run Lola Run* uses a split-screen to show Lola racing to her boyfriend on one side, her boyfriend waiting anxiously on the other side, and a clock ticking away at the top. Having a **split-screen** shows two or more scenes happening at the same time, eliminating the need to cut back and forth between them and allowing the viewers to

decide which scene to pay most attention to. Wipes are also frequently used in montage sequences, as well as individually, but their flashy nature calls attention to their artificiality. Baz Luhrman's stylish *Romeo + Juliet* is full of many different varieties of wipes and irises.

An **iris** is similar to a wipe but is shaped like a circle or rectangle, and instead of bringing in a new scene it usually closes down on the picture from the outer edges of the screen until the image is black, or opens up from the center of a black screen to reveal the picture. Sometimes an iris stops over a portion of the image without going black or before finishing its close to black. This is done to emphasize a portion of the scene as an alternative to cutting to a close-up or having the camera zoom or dolly in. Griffith used the iris this way in many of his features.

7.4 Manipulating the Audience

The choice of not only which shots to use, but also what transitions to use and how to use them, influences how viewers perceive the film and becomes a part of the film's style. The audience may easily follow a simple dialogue scene if it is filmed in a static medium to long two-shot (the camera showing both characters on screen at the same time). But viewers can become much more involved in the conversation if the scene cuts frequently to medium close-ups and close-ups of each person speaking, whether "single" shots (of single characters), or over-the-shoulder shots, or a variety. The identical conversation might have a completely different effect and a much stronger impact if the editor cuts to one person listening to certain lines, rather than keeping the shot on the person talking, and the effect will be different still if those cuts are done on certain words or lines rather than other words or lines. Cutting directly to something that a character is talking about as the dialogue keeps going (perhaps a flashback, flash-forward, or simultaneous action that may either verify or contradict what the person is saying) will provide yet another impression for the viewers. For example, when the detective in *The Boondock Saints* looks at a crime scene, he starts to describe how he thinks it happened, and we see it happening around him as he speaks. Films such as *The Boondock Saints* (both I and II), *Fight Club*, *Memento*, *Run Lola Run*, and others rely heavily on their editing, and any analysis of their characters, action, or possible meanings must take the editing into account.

Directors' Approaches to Editing

Some directors prefer to rehearse scenes thoroughly and allow the actors to work out their timing for dialogue, actions, and reactions, capturing the carefully planned performances in single long takes of two to five minutes or even longer. Often those long takes are "disguised" for viewers by choreographing the camera almost as if it is a character in the scene, moving in, out, and around the setting as characters move closer to or farther from the camera. The long takes allow the actors to shine at what they do best—assuming they can perform the entire scene exactly as the director wants from beginning to end.

Having an entire scene play out in a long take is an example of how a cinematography technique can overlap into editing techniques. It eliminates the need for editing that scene, because it is complete as shot. Not only that, but shooting only long takes can eliminate the possibility of the studio or an editor making cuts the director doesn't want because there is no coverage from any other angles that might be used to hide the fact that lines or gestures have been cut out. In films such as *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* and *Hail the Conquering Hero*, writer-turned-director Preston Sturges likewise filmed many long dialogue scenes running two or three minutes without a cut, often having the camera move with actors to keep the scene from looking too static. As

sort of an experiment, Alfred Hitchcock filmed *Rope* (1948), an 80-minute feature adapted from a stage play, in just 10 long takes, essentially planning all the editing in advance and shooting only what was needed. Thus, the editor merely needed to join together what was shot into its proper order without making any editorial decisions. Hitchcock would do this meticulous pre-planning with other films as well, which used more conventional styles of editing but with shots all plotted out through storyboard drawings so that only the necessary shots would be captured on film and the editor merely needed to follow the storyboard to assemble them in order. As noted above, half the shots in *Rope* were designed so they would appear as one uninterrupted shot when cut together, an unusual technique. For example, just before the roll of film would run out (cameras can typically hold about 11 minutes' worth of film), an actor might walk in front of the lens. The camera operator would load a new roll of film and would start shooting as the actor walked out of the way of the lens. The movie *Russian Ark*, shot on digital video, was able to be done in a single uninterrupted shot about an hour and a half long, and thus uses no editing at all.

Other directors may employ relatively long takes through much of a scene, so when they use a cut to a close-up or a long shot at a certain point, it then has a much greater dramatic impact, sort of a jolt to the viewer after a long uninterrupted take. Orson Welles does this often in his films, notably the long take that opens *Touch of Evil*, described in Chapter 6, which finally ends with a cut to an explosion we've just heard off screen. The scene from *Citizen Kane* described in Chapter 6, with Kane as a child playing in the snow while his mother and the banker determine his future, has two very long takes as the scene plays out but finally cuts to a brief close-up of the mother, showing her determination, and quickly tilts down to the boy, intensifying his unhappiness about leaving home. Immediately after this, a dissolve to a shot of the sled being covered with snow reinforces Kane's intimate connection with "Rosebud" and the connection of the entire scene to the snow globe we saw at the beginning of the film. In films such as *The Stranger*, Welles sometimes shot long takes with no coverage from alternate angles to ensure his scenes would not be shortened by a studio editor. However, in the case of *The Stranger*, an elaborate and very long tracking shot was drastically abridged by the editor, who hid any obvious jump in action by using a dissolve shortly after the shot began to a point near the end of the shot.

Taking Advantage of Coverage

Still other directors, especially those using less experienced actors, actually prefer using the camera to capture numerous takes of each scene from a wide variety of angles. In the editing room, they can then "build" a performance by choosing the best bits of each take (as noted earlier), and shortening or lengthening pauses between lines artificially. To do this effectively, a director must remember to shoot what is called coverage—covering the scene from numerous different camera setups, especially tight close-ups. This permits the editor to *cover* any inadvertent continuity gaps (e.g., an actor who sips from a drink or scratches his head on one word in the long shot but a few words later in the close-up) by cutting away to a shot of something or someone else before cutting back to the alternate angle of the actor. By shooting the entire scene in long-shot, medium-shot, and close-up on each actor, it also makes it possible for editing to cover up the fact that certain actors may not have been able to memorize more than one or two sentences at a time. By cutting back and forth from actor to actor in close-up, then in two-shots and long shots, the editing makes it look as if the audience is seeing a continuous conversation from beginning to end. All of the blown lines and overlong pauses are simply eliminated in the editing process. An editor can also cut in close-ups of an actor reacting at a spot in the scene where the actor's actual reaction when it was shot was very different and perhaps completely opposite. Thanks to the "Kuleshov effect" (which we'll discuss later), the audience will assume that he or she is

reacting to the shot they've just seen or the dialogue they are currently hearing. This technique is a boon to filmmakers working with amateurs, small children, and animals that are not as easily controlled or disciplined as professional actors who can perform 10-minute scenes perfectly without a break. It also allows infinitely more options in the editing room than those available to directors who know exactly what they want in advance. Such directors may shoot alternate angles of only those portions of scenes they expect to use for each angle.

Classical Editing Style

On the other hand, even with experienced professional actors, many directors make sure to shoot coverage from numerous angles. The entire scene may be shot completely in a long take, but in the editing process it will be interrupted by many cuts to alternate angles and closer views.

▲ What kind of shot is shown in this still from *Juno*? In the theater, dialogue is always a "master shot." We see all the characters involved in a conversation. In film, editors reinforce and may even create the energy of the exchange. If the director provides enough coverage—shooting the scene with a variety of shots (close-ups, two characters in the frame, etc.)—then an editor has great latitude to create pacing and rhythm to increase the impact of the scene.

The long take may thus be used as the master shot, sometimes the establishing shot, and later a re-establishing shot. A **master shot** is a single take that usually includes an entire scene and all the main actors, rather than just a short portion of it or close-up view. An **establishing shot** is a shot in a scene that sets up, or establishes, where a scene is taking place and who is in it, usually done in a long shot, possibly with some camera moves. In classical editing style, the director starts a scene with a long shot and as the action and dialogue progress, will concentrate on closer views—medium shots and finally close-ups of the main characters, inserts of what they're doing, or cutaways to others observing them—to emphasize specific elements. Words of dialogue and characters' states of mind can be intensified by cutting to just the right view at the right time instead of letting the scene play out in a long take. Periodically, the editor may cut back to the master shot, using it as a *re-establishing shot* to remind the audience of the broader view. Some directors like to begin scenes with close-ups, later introducing medium shots and not establishing the overall scene with a long shot until much later, if at all.

▲ The great Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa sets the stage for dramatic action in this establishing shot from *Dersu Uzala*, a film shot almost entirely on location in Siberia. When the environment is a character, it is important to show the expanse of the natural setting.

The term "establishing shot" may also be used in a slightly different sense. Classical Hollywood editing may carefully establish in a shot or two just where the next scene will be taking place. For example, instead of cutting directly from a character at home

to confronting his boss at the office a short time later, it may insert a shot of the character driving to work, a long shot of the office building, and a shot of the boss's office door with a nameplate, before the character walks in on his boss. This will establish unambiguously the sequence of events and exactly where the character is before the office scene begins, although it also will stretch out a film's running time and may not be necessary in many cases, especially if the audience has already seen the boss or the office earlier in the film.

Often, films may begin before, during, or just after the opening credits with a series of shots, especially long shots, that establish what the audience will be watching for the rest of the movie before the main action starts. The 1994 film *The Shawshank Redemption* opens with the camera following a bus that is driving toward a large building. The camera rises up, and we see that the building is a prison. As the scene continues, we see the bus arriving, and a cut inside it shows a man sitting in the back, now in the center of the frame. A voice-over tells us that this is Andy Dufrense (Tim Robbins), the film's protagonist. With this series of establishing shots, we learn whom the movie is about and where it will take place in less than a minute.

The Magic of Movie Editing

Whenever a shot is joined to another one, it implies a relationship between the two, and viewers will automatically assume they are connected somehow. The simplest editing merely assembles takes into a coherent order. But editing is a powerful tool that a good editor can use to create a world in the audience's mind that never really existed. Performances, actions (especially stunts), and even the locations themselves can be constructed artificially through effective editing. The seamless manipulation of time and space by means of editing is part of the "magic" of motion pictures and need not require any sort of fancy digital or optical special effects. It is sometimes the case that two actors in a dialogue scene are unable to shoot the same day, making it impossible to get a master shot of their scene that shows both characters at once. The director will instead shoot close-ups of each actor at different times, taking care to match the lighting, with someone else feeding the other character's lines from off camera. And if the entire set does not need to be visible, the scene might be shot on an entirely different soundstage with a simple partial background (such as a drape or a wall) that matches it. When the shots are edited together, the scene will look as if both actors are talking to each other in the same place at the same time.

Courtesy Everett Collection

▲ In the glory days of studio filmmaking, elaborate interiors—like this ballroom scene from *Gone With the Wind*—were created on soundstages.

Studio-made films typically shoot exteriors in front of façades constructed on back lots, with interiors shot on soundstages. Aided by careful camera composition that hides the fact that these are only partial walls and not complete structures, editing creates the illusion that people are walking into real buildings and talking inside real rooms in those buildings. For example, in Alfred

Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), a character walks up a hill and enters a gothic-looking house. The house, as anyone who has taken the Universal Studios tour has seen, is actually just a framework of the front and two sidewalls, propped up in the back. The interior entryway was shot on a studio soundstage in a set consisting of only three walls and an open ceiling. But cutting from a character entering a door from the outside, to the same character entering a similar-looking door inside what looks like a room, makes the audience assume it is two views of an actual location happening in continuous time. The actual house never existed, but editing makes the house seem solid and real on the screen.

Editing to Imply Actions

Effective editing can also make audiences believe they saw something that never really happened, sometimes eliminating the need for expensive special effects that might simulate it. At one point in *Psycho*, Janet Leigh's character is famously stabbed to death in the shower. It plays as a hyper-violent, graphic depiction of murder. In fact, however, thanks to Hitchcock's masterful planning of every element of the scene, we actually see very little. We never truly see the knife stab her, and we never see explicit nudity. But thanks to the quick jump cuts Hitchcock employs, the scene is terrifying and disturbing (Leigh supposedly limited herself to baths for years after shooting the scene). It is deservedly one of the most famous scenes in movie history, yet it is all the more notable for how much Hitchcock makes us think we're seeing, while showing us very little. The low-budget independent movie *Open Water* (shot on standard mini-DV video) is about a young couple accidentally abandoned on a scuba-diving vacation. The characters are eventually eaten by sharks, but of course the actors were not. By intercutting shots of real sharks and shots of the actors in the water, the scene looks as if they are being threatened. Showing close-ups of an actor with blood in the water around him, shots of a hungry shark, then the actor appearing to be pulled under, and cutting to shots of a shark eating something makes it appear that it is the character that the shark is eating. Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* similarly used editing to make its giant artificial shark appear to be real, never allowing it to appear on screen long enough so viewers could tell it was a fake model of a shark. In an interview for Wendy Apple's 2004 documentary *The Cutting Edge: The Magic of Movie Editing*, Spielberg noted how the mechanical shark rarely worked properly so he wanted to include as much usable footage of it as possible, whereas editor Verna Fields kept cutting shots of the shark shorter or leaving it out altogether. Spielberg admitted the result was a much scarier film after following Fields's editorial judgment to show less, making viewers more uneasy by what they could not see and building suspense so that the few shots of the shark became all the more frightening. Numerous films avoid depicting extreme violence on screen yet often convey its intensity just as effectively by cutting away to reactions of the observers.

Continuity Editing

The system of continuity editing has dominated popular cinema since the 1910s and contains a few common editing techniques that guide viewers through a scene without confusing them (and sometimes manipulate what they think they're seeing). Continuity editing involves cutting to different camera positions while maintaining the illusion that everything is happening in a continuous time and space. The reason many very early films (pre-1911) have very few or no cuts within each scene is that producers believed cutting to a new camera position would confuse the audience. They figured viewers, accustomed to watching stage performances from a single position, would assume that a new scene was starting or even a new story altogether, because many

complete films of the 1890s and early 1900s consisted of single shots or a few single-shot scenes strung together.

Some very early films that cut to different angles of the same action were careful to repeat a second or two of the action so audiences would know it was the same thing, just a different view. Very quickly, it became obvious that editing looked far more natural if the positions of the actors matched exactly at the point of each cut, so that the actions seemed to be continuous. Today, when actions do not match from shot to shot, whether overlapping or eliminating part of the action, we now perceive a jump cut that destroys the illusion of continuity. One editing technique that helps us perceive continuity, called **matching on action**, cuts from a shot to something else in the scene or even an entirely different scene, but still matches the direction of movement of action in one shot with the following shot, helping tie the two together. An example of this is the parallel sequence in *Walkabout*, where shots of a city butcher chopping meat are intercut to match the actions of the aboriginal protagonist in the desert butchering his latest catch. In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a famous shot of a bone thrown into the air by a primitive man cuts directly to a shot of an orbiting satellite of similar shape, bridging millions of years at the same time it elegantly but simply connects the progression of human technology from bone tools to space exploration.

By trial and error, filmmakers realized matching on action was not the only principle that aided the illusion of continuity. They discovered that they could indeed cut in close-ups of different parts of the scene without confusing viewers if they were careful to keep the screen direction consistent. That is, characters would always be looking right or left, whether seen in a long shot, a medium shot, or a close-up, so the audience would be able to tell who was looking at whom. This was easy to accomplish if the camera remained on one side of an imaginary 180-degree line drawn between the two main characters or groups in the scene—known as the **180-degree rule** (see Figure 7.1). If the camera ever crossed the line, the result on screen would be characters appearing to look in the opposite direction. Thus, if a director plans to use continuity editing, it is critical for the cinematographer to frame shots during production with the editing process in mind. This system is especially helpful in large-scale battle scenes and chases, so viewers immediately know which side is which by noticing what direction they are moving toward. As long as one character looks left and the other right with matching eyelines (the **eyeline match**), the audience assumes they're looking at each other. Typically, conversations are filmed so they can be edited in a **shot/reverse-shot** pattern, meaning that the audience will first see a shot with one


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▲ Close-ups of characters engaged in conversation, as the two main characters in *Before Sunset* are here, are usually edited using shot/reverse-shot. The camera jumps from a shot of the first character looking toward the other in one direction, then the next character matches eyelines by looking toward the first in the opposite direction.

Figure 7.1: The 180-degree rule for eyeline matches in continuity editing

The camera must not cross the imaginary 180-degree line that goes between the major characters in the scene, or the audience will think they are looking in the wrong directions and may be confused (unless there are frequent re-establishing long shots to help them out).

Imaginary line camera must not cross

If the camera remains on this side of the 180-degree line, one actor will appear to be facing right and one will appear to be facing left.

If the camera moves to the opposite side of the 180-degree line, the actors will appear to have switched places on screen.
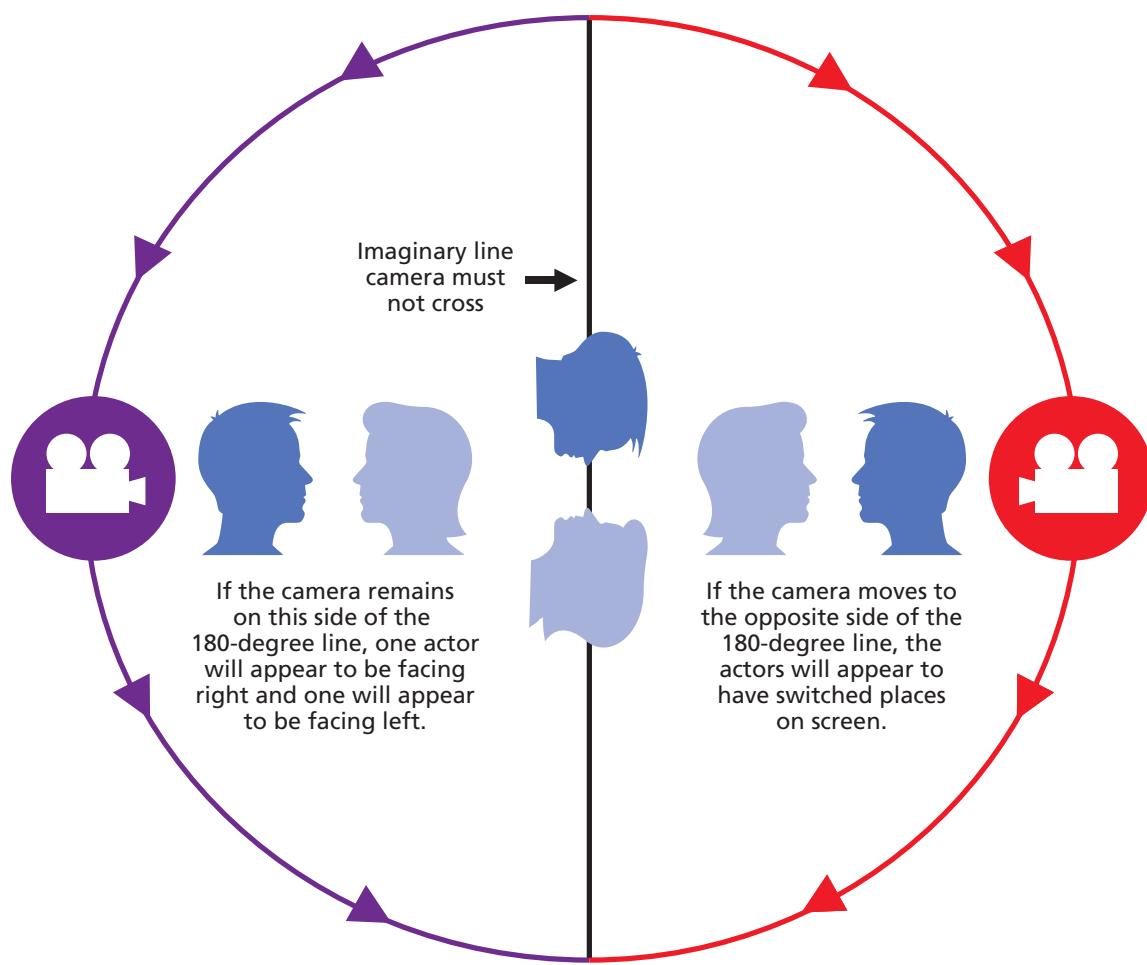
character, then a shot with a second character looking at the first. This can occur with tight close-ups or over-the-shoulder views, but it should follow the 180-degree rule. Each character must be looking toward the opposite side of the screen to reinforce the illusion of continuity.

The eyeline match concept can be extended so that a shot of an actor looking off screen that is followed by a shot of something else and a cut back to the actor still looking makes the audience assume that what's in that inserted shot is what the character is seeing. The inserted shot may or may not be from the exact point of view of the character, but the audience will still make the connection. An identical shot of an actor's blank expression, in fact, may be cut to a shot of anything, and the audience will believe that is what the actor is reacting to. This principle is known as the **Kuleshov effect**, after a Russian director who experimented by cutting in shots of a bowl of soup, a little girl, and a dead woman with the identical close-up of an actor. Audiences marveled at his expressive range of emotion—even though he not only did not change expression but was not

even looking at whatever was edited in. The Kuleshov effect is a valuable editing tool for manipulating audience reactions. Just look at virtually any mystery or detective film for countless examples. An obvious one is Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, with numerous shots of Jeff looking out his window or through his camera's telephoto lens followed by shots of the apartments across the alley. Joining the two shots together makes it obvious that we're seeing what he's seeing in continuous time.

When techniques of continuity editing are followed, viewers rarely notice them because they're paying attention to the story. When the techniques are not followed, viewers may become confused or temporarily disoriented until they regain their bearings in the scene. The spell of the movie world is momentarily broken when viewers suddenly realize they're just watching a movie and have to take the time to figure out that the scene hasn't changed, but the camera position is not what they'd subconsciously been expecting.

Courtesy Everett Collection

▲ If the editor were to break the 180-degree rule, we'd first see Lawrence in *Lawrence of Arabia* charging to the left. Once the camera crossed the line, then on screen he would be running back to the right—appearing to be retreating instead of charging on to victory.

Discontinuity Editing

Not every film follows the principles of continuity editing. Some ignore them or intentionally violate them to create discontinuity. **Discontinuity editing** is a style of editing that does just this; it intentionally violates the principles of continuity editing, making no attempt to disguise the fact that viewers are watching a movie or to create the illusion of continuous time and space. Directors may get away with violating the 180-degree rule if they remember to start with a good establishing shot and periodically cut back to re-establishing shots. This way, viewers may not mind or may not even notice when the rule is "broken" because they still have no trouble following what's happening. However, there are directors who prefer viewers to know they're watching a movie at all times; Soviet directors such as Sergei Eisenstein promoted the montage theory, which says that two or three shots joined in a certain order become much more than the sum of their individual parts. Rather than trying to create an illusion of continuity, those who follow this theory concentrate on other concerns. Instead of ensuring that time and space appear consistent, they pay more attention to rhythmic relations between shots to control an emotional tempo or graphic relationships of similar or contrasting image composition to reinforce thematic connections. They are also far more concerned with the accumulated content of a series of shots, instead of worrying whether temporal or spatial relationships seem logical.

Key films that use this editing technique include Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (1928) and Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). In the Odessa Steps sequence from *Potemkin*, citizens are depicted rallying to support a sailors' mutiny and then being massacred by the czar's troops. At one point, the battleship fires on the city, and after a long shot showing the explosion, Eisenstein cuts to close-ups of three different stone statues of decorative lions at various parts of town. Individually, the shots might seem meaningless, disconnected, or vaguely symbolic. However, when put together so that the explosion in the city is followed by a shot of a sleeping lion, a lion alert, and then an aroused lion, the film conveys the idea that the populace has been a slumbering lion that the revolution has awakened to action.

Courtesy Everett Collection

▲ *Man With a Movie Camera* is a tour-de-force. This portrait of workers' lives in revolutionary Russia combines disparate images and techniques, including superimpositions, split-screens, freeze frames, and animation. Images here are at the service of ideas, and ideas become poetry in this film.

Likewise, during the massacre, Eisenstein frequently violates both matching on action and the 180-degree rule, so that it's difficult to tell where all the characters are at any given time. But it doesn't really matter in this context because the director wants us to feel the mass chaos rather than be following individual characters too closely.

The montage theory also comes into play when directors edit in visual metaphors that are not strictly part of the story's world, as in the example mentioned in Chapter 3 of the scene in Chaplin's *Modern Times* cutting between a crowd of workers and a flock of sheep. In Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921), he employed the same concept when he cut from a shot of an unwed mother holding her baby to a still shot of Christ carrying his cross and back to a shot of the mother in the story. This type of discontinuity editing goes against the "invisible" tradition of continuity editing, but it adds another dimension above and beyond the basic story to reveal the director's intentions and story themes more clearly.

Rhythm and Pacing

Effective editing can effortlessly manipulate time and space, but what really holds a viewer's attention is the way it manipulates rhythm and pacing throughout a film. Long takes, especially when combined with static camera positions, will slow down a film to a leisurely pace, possibly as an overall editing style when a director wants viewers to concentrate on actors' performances and various elements of the mise en scène. See Figure 7.2 for a well-known scene broken down into individual shot lengths. The slow pacing is compounded when the camera is set up, mainly in long shots, a great distance from the actors and setting. Slow-paced scenes may also be used as a contrast to much faster-paced scenes that have just come before, allowing viewers to "catch their breaths" after an intense action scene, battle, or chase.

Figure 7.2: Rhythm and pacing

Timeline of a scene lasting less than 20 seconds, broken down into the individual shot lengths. The black vertical lines indicate the time at which each shot or sound begins, and arrows show what is occurring at the beginning of each. The dark blue line represents images. The lighter blue lines represent two layers of soundtracks, including the music cues and sound effects and the dialogue (each cut usually matching the picture, more or less). An editor might also have several layers for the various sound-effects tracks in addition to the dialogue and music. To watch the clip illustrated here, visit http://movieclips.com and search for the clip "Maverick vs. Viper" (Time: 0:08 to 0:24).
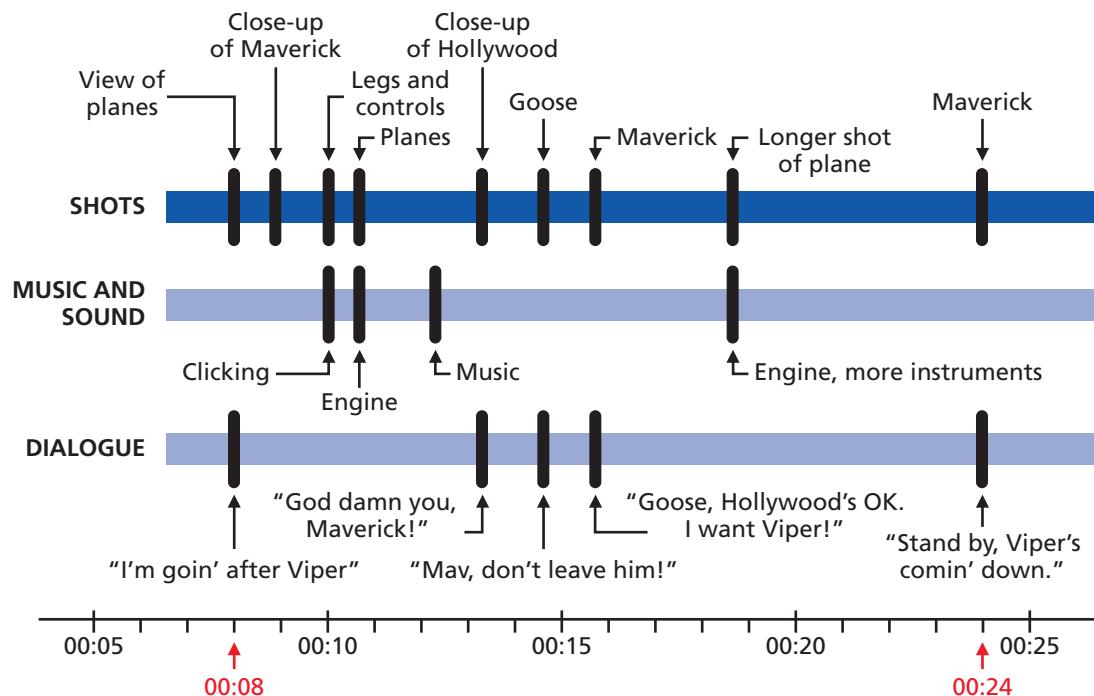
Varying Shot Length

Having shots appear on screen for very short periods of time, varying from perhaps several seconds to small fractions of a second, will speed up the pace of a scene. These so-called shortcuts are typically used in fights, chases, and other action scenes to increase the excitement, besides allowing the opportunity to include a wider variety of angles and draw attention to many individual details of the scene. The duration of shots may vary, cut longer and shorter with a certain visual rhythm that reflects the emotions of the characters, the course of the action, and the shifting dynamics of the scene. As excitement builds, the shots typically get shorter and shorter, sometimes using **parallel editing** to show two or more things happening at the same time (e.g., characters in danger while the hero is racing to the rescue), until some climax that is followed by a longer take and slower pacing. This type of rapid-pace editing was pioneered in the frenetic short comedies of Mack Sennett and the elaborate epic melodramas of D. W. Griffith as early as the mid-1910s and was taken to an extreme by Soviet filmmakers in the late 1920s.

Parallel editing does not need to be fast paced to be effective. A powerful use of parallel editing is found in *The Godfather*, when director Francis Ford Coppola repeatedly cuts between detailed scenes in a church of the baptism of Michael Corleone's godson and scenes of Michael's mobsters

Courtesy Everett Collection   *Photo by Mary Evans/DAVID W. GRIFFITH CORP./Ronald Grant/ Everett Collection*

▲ D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* combines bravura filmmaking with a story that makes the Ku Klux Klan seem heroic. Here the Klan rides to the rescue, while the heroine is threatened by an "evil mulatto." This film shows how society has changed over time, as discussed in other chapters; this film clearly would not be made today.

killing the heads of the other Mafia families. The juxtaposition between the sacred and profane is exceptionally powerful, and it firmly establishes Michael's full acceptance of his new role as the leader of the Corleone family. He has forsaken his former life as a "civilian" for good.

Extremely rapid editing became the norm after video and computer-based editing equipment made it much easier to achieve than the old system of physically cutting and joining pieces of film. While films from any era may have individual scenes that contain extremely fast- or extremely slow-paced editing, typical shot lengths in older films may vary from 10 to 30 seconds or even a couple of minutes before a cut. Films from the past couple of decades are more likely to have shots vary between about 2 to 10 seconds, possibly running as long as a half-minute or so before a cut. Movies made for smaller screens, such as television, also tend to use faster cutting, whereas films designed for theaters, especially those using widescreen processes, are more likely to let shots linger a bit longer to give time for the viewers to take in all the information that's visible at the larger size.

Pacing With Music, Slow Motion, and Fast Motion

Editing can enhance the rhythms of a sequence when the picture is cut to match beats in the soundtrack, whether it's the background music (especially in music videos), the sound effects, or lines of dialogue. Conversely, for dramatic impact an editor may intentionally cut the picture in sort of a counterpoint to the soundtrack, with long visual takes over fast-paced, chaotic sounds or a rapid-fire series of pictures over a slow, moody soundtrack. The action within an individual shot might even be sped up or slowed down or presented in freeze frames of still images. For a time, it was fashionable to end a movie, or certain scenes, by freezing the last image on the screen, which is done simply by repeating that single frame over and over on the final print. The memorable ending of François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959) helped start this trend, and George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) popularized it using entire sequences of still images within a live-action film.

Slow motion is used for a variety of reasons in films, often to give a romantic, ethereal feeling to a scene or to reveal fine details of fast action that call attention, say, to brief facial expressions or things too fast to see, such as bullet impacts. For example, the surrealistic fight

▲ *The Untouchables* includes a dramatic homage to the Odessa Steps sequence in *Potemkin*. Unlike Eisenstein, who used a montage in the original, director Brian De Palma heightens the drama by slowing down the action.

scenes in *The Matrix* are often slowed down to enhance their futuristic nature. The careful choreography of sword duelists, whose preternatural leaps become like flying in Chinese martial arts films such as *Hero* and *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, is often emphasized by slow-motion cinematography and freeze-frame effects. Another example is the entrance of Johnny Boy (Robert De Niro) into a bar in Martin Scorsese's 1973 film *Mean Streets*, while the Rolling Stones' *Jumpin' Jack Flash* plays in the background. It lends the scene a heightened sense of cool that playing the scene in real time would not have accomplished.

Fast motion is most often used for comic effect, but it is also used frequently in action sequences to make chases and punches in fights appear to be much quicker than they actually were on the set. It might also give a creepy supernatural feel to a particular scene, as in the vampire movies *Nosferatu* (1922) and *Let Me In* (2010). Fast-motion effects can be easily achieved in post-production by skipping frames, but smooth slow motion can be accomplished only through high-speed cinematography, for example 48, 96, or 240 frames per second to show action at 1/2, 1/4, or 1/10 natural speed. If a scene is shot at a normal rate, it can still be slowed down by repeating frames, but the result is a staccato, jerky appearance.

Summary and Resources

Chapter Summary

Editing is far more than merely assembling shots into some coherent order that tells a story. Filmmakers may attempt to use "invisible" continuity editing that viewers rarely notice, or they may embrace the "montage" approach, in which changes from one shot to another are intentionally obvious. Editing controls exactly what viewers will see and when they will see it and can profoundly affect how they will interpret a film. It establishes and can manipulate the pacing of a story on screen while allowing viewers to follow multiple plot threads simultaneously through parallel editing. It may rearrange the story order, creating in effect the final draft of a script. It can assemble a series of partial details, creating by skillful arrangement the illusion of complete actions and spaces that exist only in the minds of the viewers. In most cases, the director oversees the editing of the film, but editors do the actual putting together of the scenes.

The editor literally constructs the film, working from takes and scenes, knitting them together using techniques such as direct cuts, jump cuts, fade-ins, fade-outs, dissolves, and wipes to imply time and place relationships. If a director has covered scenes from multiple angles and distances during shooting, editors have nearly an infinite variety of choices, but if a director shoots only

what he or she wants to be seen, the editor may simply need to assemble shots into their correct order. Like other parts of making a movie, editing is a highly collaborative process, but it is the director who typically makes the final decision about which scenes are used and which go in what sequence as they are edited. Other editing decisions include which take of each shot to use, how long each shot will be on the screen, and what sort of transitions will be used between each shot and scene. A choice must also be made whether to follow the traditions of continuity editing, to embrace some form of discontinuity editing, or to shift editing styles for different scenes. As will be seen in the next chapter, the coordination of the picture with sounds of various types is another important part of the editing process. But directors rely on the talents of editors to help with those decisions and to execute them in as seamless a manner as possible.

Questions to Ask Yourself About Editing When Viewing a Film

- How are the shots and scenes arranged into acts?
- What kind of transitions are used (cut, fade, dissolve, wipe)?
- How is coverage used?
- Is there continuity or discontinuity editing?
- Is there any editing to imply an action that you cannot see?
- What is the rhythm like? What length are shots?
- Is there slow or fast motion, and if so, why?

You Try It

1. In a film you have at home, watch a scene and look for establishing shots. What do these shots tell you about where the film is headed? Do they do a good job of leading you in that direction from the start? For example, one of the most famous establishing shots is the opening scene from *Touch of Evil*, which can be viewed via the following link:

   http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/Periedolia/clips/touch-of-evil-opening-scene.m4v/view

2. In the same film or another, look for different methods of cutting from one scene to another. Does the director use jump cuts within scenes? Are fade-ins and fade-outs used? What about dissolves and wipes? Of the transitions you are able to identify, which are the most effective? Which are the least effective? Why?

3. In the same film, look at one self-contained scene that is about two to five minutes long. Count the number of individual shots used and time how long each shot is. How do the varying shot lengths reflect what is going on in the scene? Do you think the scene would have been more effective with longer or shorter shots at certain points?

4. In the scene you watched in the previous question (or any other complete scene from another film), try to figure out which camera setup was used as a master shot, how many actual camera setups were used, and then how many times the director uses small portions of each take (or at least the same camera position) during that scene. Then determine how often the scene cuts back to the master shot to re-establish the setting or show all the characters at once. Why do you think the director decided to show one view or another at any given moment?

Key Terms

180-degree rule Principle wherein the camera is kept on one side of an imaginary 180-degree line drawn between the two main characters or groups in the scene, which helps the audience know who is looking at whom in a scene.

continuity editing Advance planning of shots so that cutting to different camera positions will maintain the illusion that everything is happening in a continuous time and space, and the audience will not become confused; sometimes called invisible editing.

cut As a verb, to edit a film, joining shots together in a specific order; also to delete a portion, or simply to mark the point where a shot should begin or end. As a noun, the point at which one shot ends and is replaced instantly by another shot; also a completed edited version of a film.

dailies The raw footage that has been shot each day, typically processed by the film lab and viewed by the director the next day (or the same day in the case of digital productions).

direct cut An immediate, sometimes jarring cut between one scene and another.

discontinuity editing A style of editing that intentionally violates the principles of continuity editing, making no attempt to disguise the fact that viewers are watching a movie or to create the illusion of continuous time and space.

dissolve A method of transitioning between scenes that superimposes the end of one scene onto the beginning of the next (a fade-out superimposed with a fade-in), making it appear as if the first scene literally dissolves into the second.

editor The person who arranges the best film footage that has been shot into a coherent, effective order.

establishing shot As the term implies, an opening shot that establishes the essential information about the film—where it takes place and who is involved. This is typically done as a long shot, sometimes as a master shot. Similarly, a *re-establishing shot* in a scene returns to the longer view after a series of close-ups to remind the audience where all the characters are in the scene.

eyeline match A form of continuity editing, eyeline match typically shows us a character looking at an object or person off screen; the director immediately cuts to what the character is looking at, giving the audience the experience of seeing what the character sees.

fade-in When a scene begins in darkness and gradually fades to light and focus.

fade-out When a scene gradually fades to darkness.

incongruous editing Editing technique that puts sequences together out of order; jumping around in time.

iris A variation of the wipe that looks like the screen is closing in from all sides in a circular or rectangular or some other shape until the image goes black or another shot replaces it.

jump cut A quick cut that accelerates a scene by eliminating action the director believes to be unnecessary; also refers to particularly jarring cuts between shots, due to an obvious gap in continuity.

Kuleshov effect A concept related to the eyeline match, but created solely through editing, so that any shot of any actor looking at something may be intercut with a shot of anything else, and the audience will assume that is what the actor is looking at, even though it is never established in a longer shot that they're both actually in the same place.

master shot A single take that usually includes an entire scene. A master shot is often a long shot.

matching on action Cutting between two different shots at the exact point where the characters' positions match, maintaining the illusion that the action is happening in continuous time even though the shots were done at different times.

montage theory The idea that joining two or more shots together in a certain order results in something greater than and different from the individual shots, and that juxtaposition of different shots to convey meaning is more important than maintaining an illusion of continuity.

parallel editing Cutting between two or more scenes that are occurring simultaneously, showing either the similarities or the differences between them. This technique is often used during a typical race to the rescue or to convey ironic contrast.

post-production The process of completing a movie after the principal photography has been completed. This includes editing shots together, mixing the soundtrack (including re-recording and adding new sounds), incorporating special visual effects, and adding titles, among others.

sequence A segment of a movie's plot made up of several closely related scenes.

shot/reverse-shot Similar to the eyeline match; form of continuity editing that takes place between two characters, with one character looking at the other one, who is sometimes off screen. Then the director cuts to the other character, looking back at the first. This establishes that the two are indeed looking at each other.

split-screen An editing technique wherein the screen is divided into two or more images viewed simultaneously, rather than cutting back and forth between them. This may be used to show action happening simultaneously (e.g., two sides of a phone call, a robbery occurring while the police prepare their arrest), or multiple views of the same scene, or things happening in the past or the future while we see the main action.

wipe A transition that looks as if one shot is literally "wiping" another off the screen; often used to introduce a split-screen.