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Richard Raskin

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All correspondence should be addressed to:

Richard Raskin
Institut for Informations- og Medievidenskab
Niels Juelsgade 84
8200 Aarhus N

e-mail: raskin@imv.aau.dk
fax: (45) 89 42 1952
telefon: (45) 89 42 1973

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The principal purpose of ***p.o.v.*** *is to provide a framework for collaborative publication for those of us who study and teach film at the Department of Information and Media Science at the University of Aarhus.* We will also *invite contributions from colleagues at other departments and at other universities. Our emphasis is on collaborative projects, enabling us to combine our efforts, each bringing his or her own point of view to bear on a given film or genre or theoretical problem. Consequently, the reader will find in each issue of p.o.v. a variety of approaches to the film or question at hand – approaches which complete rather than compete with one another.*

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The Art of Film Editing

Alan Alda on Storytelling

On Editing

Mark Le Fanu

Cinema has two beginnings: the first, when the photograph originally budged, the limbs uncoiled, the human being *walked*, the single spool of film flickered into life - on whatever occasion we choose to date this (whether in 1893 or 1895).

Yet the second, in a way equally momentous, beginning of cinema could be said to follow some time later - if we want to date it, let us say in the years immediately prior to 1900 - when two strips of film were first spliced together to form: what? Another mode of narrative? Or maybe narrative itself - *film* narrative - for the first time? Stories may indeed be told without editing - a little one-minute gem like the Lumière Brothers' *L'Arroseur Arrosé* tells its story perfectly - but in an important way the beginning of editing is the beginning of cinema itself.

Still, we have to ask ourselves, what is so "momentous" about this joining or splicing that impels us to pause on it and puzzle out its meaning? After all, in the theatre we are used to the division of the play into acts which operate through a principle of ellipsis. Thus, at the end of a given scene, the lights go down, the set is invisibly whisked away and, when the lights go up again, we are in a different place (surely by magic), while time has moved on, sometimes by decades (this too is magic).

But the splice, in cinema, has more dialectical properties. It serves not merely as a pause or cæsura - something that separates or

provides a brief breathing space - but on the contrary something that *joins*: "syntactic" in the root sense of the word. And if we are talking about magic, the magic of cinema is surely sensed to lie here: in the strange alchemy arising out of the juxtaposition of images - images that cut through, or rather *dispense with*, pages of theatrical dialogue to achieve their effect instantaneously: a subliminal effect in the best instances, too swift to be put into words, though when we do take the trouble to find words for the experience we see that what we are dealing with is the imagistic equivalent of a metaphor. Such and such a thing, says the film, is "like" something else - in ways that we might never have thought of; only once there (*placed* there, by chance or by the genius of the editor) understood as rich, suggestive, inevitable or (when it needs to be) satirical.

The theorisation of these properties of filmic syntax is the legacy of the Russians: Kuleshov for example (in the famous "Kuleshov effect")[1] and above all, of course, the great Eisenstein. These men and their colleagues practised this sort of cinema ("the cinema of attractions", "the cinema of shocks") and wrote about it extensively. Yet to mention such names at all, since they lived so long ago (in the epoch, precisely, of the silent cinema) is to wonder if their conclusions are still valid. Perhaps it was just because, for the first

[1] Experiment arranged by the pioneer film-maker Lev Kuleshov (1899-1970) whereby a closeup of the actor Mozhukhin was juxtaposed with three different images - a bowl of soup, a dead woman in a coffin and a girl playing with a toy bear. According to Pudovkin, who was present at the demonstration, "spectators imagined that the actor was registering hunger towards the soup, sorrow towards the coffin and joy towards the girl. But the image was exactly the same all three times." See Robert Sklar: *Film: An International History of the Medium* (London, 1993), p. 151

30 years of its life, cinema *had* no spoken word that the juxtaposition of images in the way we are describing was sensed to be so fundamental. Our enquiry touches here upon something that I will revert to below: the fear, that is, that the very special form of editing patented by the Russians as "montage" is, or was, merely a passing episode in the evolution of cinema, giving way in due course to the coming of sound.

I am not sure how to answer this fully. An annual Oscar is offered by Hollywood for Best Editing, and when one tries to pin down the qualities of a really well-edited mainstream film - one of Scorsese' s movies, for example, cut by Thelma Schoonmaker (*GoodFellas*, maybe, or *Casino*) - one sees that the skill referred to is not so much montage, in the Russian sense of the orchestration or controlled dissonance of images, but rather *the ability to handle pace creatively*; more simply put, to imbue the film in question with a fine and vigorous rhythm.

Such skill where it exists doesn't rule out a more radical style of ellipsis - something closer to the Russian model in density and complexity of image placement. But it could be argued that the home for editing in this richer sense - the sense referred to of "montage of attractions" - is no longer (if it ever was) in mainstream fiction. We may be more likely to find it in certain dense personal meditations - half documentary, half film diary - of a few privileged *auteurs*: Orson Welles for example (*F for Fake* surely one of the most "edited" films of all time), or Godard, or Wim Wenders (a diary film like *Tokyo-ga* rather than his regular feature films). And we could add a few more names at this point: Johan van der

Keuken from Holland, Chris Marker, Adam Curtis (from the BBC), Frederick Wiseman, Dusan Makavejev (incomparable montage of *WR:Mysteries of the Organism*), Agnès Varda, Alain Cavalier, Alain Resnais...

A handful of examples, then, some of them very well-known, others a little more obscure.[2] What binds such artists together is that editing in their films seems to be used as an instrument of thought, not merely as guarantee of rhythm. Maybe the distinction sounds slippery - for all good art is thoughtful; and there is no monopoly (how could there be?) on the artistic means used to achieve depth and effectiveness. Yet it is one aspect of thought, at least, to be alert; to *cut through*; to surprise; to forge connections; just as it is the peculiar property of the work of the directors just cited that we seem to *see* these connections being minted, as it were, in front of our eyes.

An example would seem to be called for. But before I give one, maybe it's apposite to recall that "producing examples" is not always as easy as it looks. In film criticism, then, as opposed to the literary variety, there is no such thing as a quote. The most the critic can do is to précis: that is, to reproduce, or attempt to reproduce in words the *effect* of the extract he is talking about. He (I mean "she" of course in the appropriate context) may use stills or photograms to aid the evocation, but until (which may not, after all

[2] Maybe I should mention also the contemporary Russian film director Oleg Kovalev, whose poetic documentary on Eisenstein *Sergei Eisenstein: An Autobiography* (St Petersburg, 1995) seems to me to capture, with extraordinary gaiety and assurance, the editing rhythms of Eisenstein's work in the 1920s. To see this film in the right circumstances is to witness "montage", in the old sense, resurrected. Yet it is not a mere archeological exercise.

be too long in the future) written elucidation can be combined with push-button or CD-Rom access to the relevant extract, commentary about film is condemned to remain vague and approximate. A limitation especially onerous here, it may be thought, where the whole force of the discussion focuses on the elegance of swift solutions, and of split-second timing.

To return to our argument, and the example left hanging in the air. "Split-second timing" is one of the masteries of the elusive French director Chris Marker. After the success of *Sans Soleil* (1982), *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre* (English title *The Last Bolshevik*), which came out in 1992, reaffirmed the French documentarist as one of our finest contemporary film essayists. The movie in question is a meditation on the life of a little-known but important Soviet director named Alexander Medvedkin, who, while faithful in broad terms to communist ideology, made films in the twenties and thirties which, seen in a certain light, are distinctively subversive of the system. (*Happiness* (1934) seems to be the best known of these.)

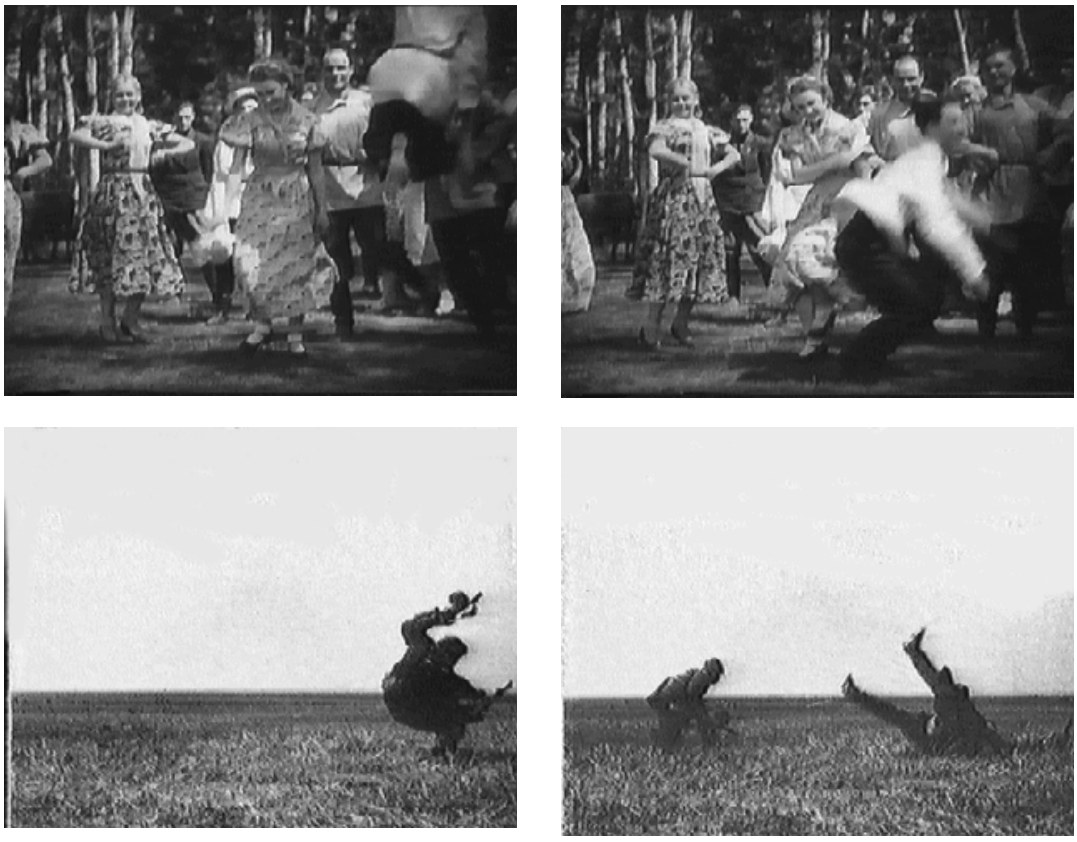
Marker' s own film, I believe, is one of the profoundest documentary meditations we have on the history of communism. Surrounding his investigation of a single Soviet career, however (and what makes the film so interesting to *us*), is a rather broader philosophical meditation on the status of images in general: their power, their ambiguity, their propensity for falsification and so on. (A quotation at the beginning of the movie by George Steiner sets the parameters of the discussion. "It is not the literal past that rules us", he says, "but images of the past.") Soviet history, of course, with its notorious revisions and occlusions, is fertile ground for the

ironical, or tragic-ironical, pursuit of such an enquiry; and one of the film' s most chilling sequences as a matter of fact chronicles the fate of a woman film editor who failed to remove completely the face of a recently-condemned Enemy of the People from a 1930s newsreel (the tip of his nose was left showing at the edge of the doctored black-out strip). For this oversight, she was herself subsequently "edited": that is, dismissed from her post, and in due course, we are led to infer, executed.

The episode, which I mention in passing (in all its sub-humorous grotesquerie), is only one of many asides and tangents in a movie that progresses on the one hand by means of the director' s voice-over commentary (it's structured as a series of loose letters addressed to the recently-deceased Medvedkin); on the other hand by a voiceless kaleidoscope of images working ceaselessly in the subliminal, underground way I have been describing to set up, across the movie, a series of rhymes, correspondances, assonances and mysterious ambivalences.

Let me cite only one such case, a juxtaposition which occurs in a sequence where Marker, thinking about the meaning of socialist realism, highlights a scene from one of Medvedkin's kitscher musical comedies. The extract in question shows a vigorous Russian folk dance. In a wooded glade, and surrounded by smiling clapping comrades, a pretty girl performs a vigorous Russian folk dance. As she finishes her solo a male dancer leaps into the arena. There is a swift cut to another set of footage: a battlefield, with fighting in progress. And a body - surely the body belonging to the man we have just seen? (only it can't be) - explodes on the ground in a

broken mangled heap. The effect on the viewer is electrifying . The frisson it delivers is like the *hammer blow to the solar plexus* that Eisenstein is perpetually theorising. What needs to be singled out for our purposes, however, is the "serendipitous", contingent nature of the splice. The cut has the air of being planned in advance; but in truth it can only have been found. *This* is the magic of editing, then: the thought comes into existence the moment the editor (or in this case the editor-director) *discovers* it. It is as if he and we are discovering it together simultaneously.



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"Magic", of course, is only critic's shorthand: a metaphor. Have I been too free with the word? Orson Welles was a practising amateur magician as well as a film-maker, and in a film like *F for Fake* (1975) we come to see how the word "magical" really does describe, I think, the effect of its overall editing strategies.The whole movie (whose subject, as its name implies, is fakery and illusion) possesses a dazzling, rabbit-out-of-the-hat quality that comes from its myriad joins, splices, feints - all stitched together (in the twinkle of an eye) by the hand of a virtuoso conjuror.[3] Yet *F for Fake*'s virtuosity serves to remind the viewer (once he has "recovered from" the spectacle) that editing is actually supposed to be invisible. There are in fact - it is time to be explicit about it - *two* main traditions of editing: the first called montage, where the cuts are designed to be noticed (how else, in Eisenstein's terms, could one register the feeling as "shock"?); and an opposite tradition, much more mainstream, where the object on the contrary is to render such cuts unobtrusive. So much so that, winding the film back in your head after the show is over, its progress is like the outcome of a seamless single take - an evenly-maintained present

[3] Though one of the greatest masters of the seamless single take, Welles was no less a master (this is the point I am making) of editing. It's worth recalling that the reason editing gradually came to define his style was relentlessly practical: filming *Othello* in his vagabond years in Europe, and frequently running out of money, Welles found himself in the position of having to "match" a shot taken in Venice with another one (from the same scene) taken in Spain, and a third, perhaps, in Morocco. Hiding the joins was a task fully worthy of his magicianship. (For a full account of the shoot, with many insights into Welles's personality, see Micheál MacLiammóir's memoir *Put Money in They Purse* (London, 1952).) Editing is always in some way the issue with Welles, as the recent controversy about the "director's cut" of *Touch of Evil* (withdrawn from the 1998 Cannes Film Festival at his daughter Beatrice's request) continues to testify.

tense from which however (in Hitchcock's famous definition) all the "boring bits" have been miraculously evacuated.

This species of editing (in fact, for many professionals, the only form of editing worth bothering about) is commonly associated with Hollywood. In fact it is the vernacular of practically all "filmed entertainment" - of television drama as much as of feature films (formally, they are indistinguishable). Two of its most striking aspects are these: that an individual scene is broken up into countless different shots; and that those shots, when stitched together , will preserve continuity of movement or "flow" - as well as respect for the scene's geographical integrity. It is one of the pleasures of studying film in the classroom to discover that these procedures, which seem to us to be so natural (and which, for the ordinary filmgoer, *are* so natural as not to be noticed) do in fact possess history and provenance. Thus, there was a first time ever, and we can still marvel at it (the film in question - or a plausible candidate - exists in the archive)[4] when a director, or maybe just a cameraman, said: "Let's stop the camera and move in to see this thing *closer*." So they stopped the shot, picked up the apparatus, moved a few feet forward (or maybe just put in a new lens) and started shooting again. And so, for variety and emphasis - since there were, in silent cinema, neither words nor speeches to carry the audience along - there arose the convention that the action should be seen from many different angles, and from many different distances from the actors. And the audience *crossed the proscenium invisibly*, as if in a

[4] Barry Salt, in *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London, 1983), suggests the British comedy *Mary Jane's Mishap* (G. A. Smith, 1903). This (rather delightful) movie is included in the two volume video selection *Early Cinema: Primitives and Pioneers* issued by the British Film Institute a few years ago.

dream; forcing us to say, as we make sense of the experience, isn't that magic too? Isn't that in fact the *main* magic of cinema?

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It never *had* to be discovered. It's not too difficult, I think, to imagine an alternative development of cinema history whereby the single-take set up or "plan sequence" turned out to be (as in the theatre) the natural syntax of story-telling. Editing "within the scene" might have turned out to be, in this alternative landscape, the exception rather than the rule: at best an eccentricity, in the last resort unnecessary and distracting. The speculation of course is not merely hypothetical, since what has just been described lies at the heart of some of the most rigorous, powerful and beautiful cinema in existence. In the work of directors as diverse (and as eminent) as Mizoguchi, Dreyer, Angelopoulos, Tarkovsky, Ophuls, Greenaway, Jancsó, Skolimowski, Antonioni (to cite only a handful of well-known names), the single shot scene, allied, in the majority of cases, to a relentlessly mobile camerawork, takes over from editing as the fundamental source of cinematic expression, reminding us, if we need to be reminded, that there are indeed alternative ways of doing these things. And since this method of film-making is the result of intellectual choice and not mere random happenstance, it crucially reminds us, too, that there is another side to the "magic" of editing. Editing, by this new argument, is another word for manipulation; whereas the *absence* of editing allows, or encourages, truth, integrity, enlightenment. You could say that the camera, in single-take cinema, awaits on Truth to emerge like an epiphany (or

not to emerge: the directors just cited are patient about the possibility of failure); whereas edited cinema "manufactures" truth, or rather, to put the matter polemically, it lies. Thus the underside of magic - we needn't belabour the point - brushes the realm of flashiness, cheap effects, virtuosity for its own sake, mendacity. Any serious essay on editing, it seems to me, is required to raise the question of manipulation as a moral and political issue. The difficulty is to do it without recourse either to cliché or to stale *parti pris*. Does one *really* think of editing as lying? is a question that needs to be answered rather personally - needs, at least, to be open to the possibility that such judgements are not always easy; unless one thinks (as some people do) that *all* films are emotionally manipulative and, for that reason, morally suspect.

It is not a position I share. (I don't think, if one really believed it, that one could write about cinema intelligently.) Still, there is an element of my response to cinema that is in tune with this rather Bazinian reserve, or austerity, about the very basis of editing itself. Sometimes I think: one shouldn't make a *fuss* about editing. It is a skill, and a very important one. I've been speaking about it as if it were the director's prerogative but, in another sense, the people who actually carry the task out - albeit in collusion with the director - are "merely" anonymous craftsmen. It would be ludicrous to lose sight of the fact that what matters overall, about cinema, is the vision of the artist, and the integrity of the chosen actors' performances.[5]

[5] The self-effacing modesty of a practising film editor is brilliantly brought to life in the classic study by Dai Vaughan: *Portrait of an Invisible Man: The Working Life of Stewart McAllister* (BFI Books, London, 1983). See also, in this context, representative interviews in the collection *First Cut: Conversations with Film*

So we may agree, then: editing *is* "magic"; editing *is* the cinema's virtuosity. And yet...Suppose one were, for a moment,to take André Bazin's position seriously, which is, in effect, that the introduction of editing was a *fall* from some earlier primeval virtue?[6] The major breakthroughs in editing technique are conventionally attributed to Griffith and Eisenstein, and in each case I find some sympathy (though it is extremely nuanced) with Bazin's hypothetical hostile dissenter. Thus with Griffith, whose achievement, of course, is stupendous, the hesitation crystalizes round the idea that the viewer *has* to be thrilled by the speed and the frenzy of his chases. The climax of so many Griffithian films being the ride to the rescue, the adult viewer can't avoid feeling, I suppose, a certain boredom and impatience at the mechanical way Griffith cross-cuts between the doughty rescuing party forging forward on the one hand, and on the other hand, the imprisoned heroine (it is usually a heroine) awaiting her last minute deliverance. Editing, in Griffith's hands, confirmed the genius of cinema for excitement, thrills, suspense, along with the pleasures of audience identification. But in doing so it cut out, or rather forced underground, another strand of film-making (beautifully

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Editors , by Gabriella Oldham (Univ. of California Press, 1992). As far as "secrets"of the trade are concerned, two of the best handbooks are *Film Editing* by Roger Crittenden (London, 1981, new edition 1994) and *The Techniques of Film Editing* by Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar (The Focal Press, London, 1989). All students editing will want to read Walter Murch's richly suggestive reflections on the subject: *In the Blink of an Eye* (Silman-James Press, 1995).

[6] For a fuller discussion of Bazin's views on editing, see my essay "Metaphysics of the 'Long Take': some post-Bazinian Reflections" in *p.o.v.* Number 4, December 1997.

exemplified in early Russian and Scandinavian cinema) whose characteristics are thoughtfulness and languor.

The case of Eisenstein is different. Without being excessively pious, let us agree to agree: the stature of the great Russian - like the stature of Griffith - is unassailable. He is a giant (even, and especially towards the end of his life, a moral giant), however one chooses to consider the matter. But montage, after all, in the hands of the Russians, was, we shouldn't forget, a specifically-honed tool, during the 1920s, for the furtherance of state ideology. The films of Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, Vertov etc pressed you to take a view, manipulated you, "battered" you, cozened you. We feel this strongly when we see their films now, because the ideology they championed is so freshly, comprehensively discredited. (There are no Marxists any more, even in universities.) But in truth there was never any doubt that cutting, in the hands of these practitioners, was designed to be partisan and polemical.[7] The British historian Orlando Figes, reviewing a recent biography of Eisenstein glosses montage as "the dynamic juxtaposition of images to force people towards ideas and emotions", but the verb "force" in the sentence is so smoothly given as to function, almost, as an equivocation. Yet is it, we ask ourselves, or is it not, sinister to be *forced* towards accepting an idea (or an emotion)? Not (we note) forced to *choose*

[7] Tarkovsky's reservations about Eisenstein revolve around this issue. Why should we need to be *told*, he used to say (concerning the famous montage in *October* where Kerensky "turns into" a peacock), that the leader of the Provisional Government is shallow and vain? The symbolism is importunate, its sarcasm too obvious and motivated. (See Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time* (London, 1986).)

but rather, it would seem, to submit: to submit to ideas and emotions that have previously been chosen for *us*. "Eisenstein", says Figes, later in the same review, "*invented modern advertising techniques*." Yes, that's it, one finds oneself murmuring. The lost world of Bolshevism and the modern world of consumer capitalism are united in this recourse to montage. So it seems to me fitting, then, - even inevitable - that that the discussion of editing should come to rest here, thinking about the astonishing manipulations and morphologies (backed up, in each case, by hundreds of thousands of dollars) which constitute, for our delight and entertainment, the modern movie and television commercial.

Yet in this case, *is* it truly editing we are talking about? And if so, editing of what kind? Classical editing involves cutting: there is an image, and then there is another image. A choice is made as to how and when they combine, but until they do so they are discrete separable entities, stored on separate pieces of celluloid. Modern editing, by contrast, is increasingly electronic and digital, and the images in question are not so much joined as *fused* together, or "morphed", in a process that comes closest, in the vocabulary of classical editing, to a continuous optical dissolve. It's all done *within* the frame, and not, as it were, *between* the frames. It's impossible now speak of editing, in short, outside the context of the whole aural and visual revolution in post-production - paintboxing, image manipulation, the drive towards "special effects" - that cinema, aided by the advertising industry, is currently going through. The symbolism of George Lucas's "Industrial Light and Magic" comes to mind here : the word "magic", which we have been using (a bit

promiscuously) throughout this essay, turns up again in the context of the work of these huge post-production powerhouses - along with the notion governing contemporary studio thinking that an audience is there to be dazzled, stupefied, taken out of itself: transported to distant poetic worlds.

Well, perhaps it is not so new, after all! Editing, since the days of Méliès, has always been associated with sorcery, almost another word for it. The devil is there. A puff of smoke - and the devil has vanished. And though its techniques may have altered in the course of its evolution, the craft remains, as we approach the millenium, as much the *mystery* of film-making as it ever was.

Film editing - a hidden art?

Vinca Wiedemann

When we watch a film, most of us have great difficulty in consciously perceiving the editing. Of course we know that every time there is a shift from one image to another, it is an edit, and we know that editing in general has to do with the establishing of rhythm in film. But we are often not sure of the concrete function of editing, and likewise of the contribution the editing process makes to the final film.

Therefore it is difficult for us to define what we mean when we discuss film editing in a specific film; when we try to categorise the different functions of film editing, we tend to mix up the issues.

For a film editor it is a cause for frequent amusement and/or irritation, that film reviewers are never able to point out the editor's contribution. If a film is described as very effectively cut but otherwise long and boring, the editor knows that the film may have contained conspicuous transitions of scenes that were invented during the shooting or in the scriptwriting, but that the editing was ineffective or even sloppy.

On the other hand many editors tend to ignore the fact that the concrete process of editing is not identical with film editing in general, and that film editors are not the only ones to contribute to the editing of the film.

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The phenomenon of editing deals with all aspects of filmic rhythm - from the transition of one image to another or the detailed musical rhythm in a small sequence of edits, to the most general balancing of pace and rhythm in the overall narrative structure.

Major aspects of the editing of a film are created outside the editing room. The editor may be primary contributor in some areas of the editing, but the scriptwriter, the photographer and of course the director are also involved in determining the editing of a film.

Editing is a means of expression, with its own language. This language is created in the editing room as well as in the script writing process and on the set. And the editing usually works best if it is completely integrated with the other means of expression used in the given film.

The creative decisions that are made in each phase of the process of filmmaking have an influence on the editing process. When the script is being written, the scriptwriter creates the psychology of the characters and their mutual relations and actions as integrated parts of the dramatic structure of the film: the overall structure, the chronological order of events and the development of the plot. The scriptwriter works to incorporate the physical surroundings as a means of expression for the characters and the plot. Take, for example, a typical cliché such as the ticking of a clock: instead of simply letting the editor insert a "tick-tock" on the sound track, the scriptwriter can integrate the clock as part of the action by letting one of the characters look at the clock to see what time it is, and the clock may even become a dramatic tool in the development of

the plot (a programmatic demonstration of this is seen in Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers*.)

On the set, many of the cinematographic effects that were invented in the script are carried out, and new ones are inspired by the physical environment and its visual and auditive potential.
The director decides where to use the master shot technique (master shots and close-ups for each character, the foundation for cross-cutting) and where to use the sequence shot technique (where the action of a scene is covered by a single shot until a new shot takes over the action that follows). Also the staging of scenes is often combined with the making of a storyboard in order to foresee how the individual images will fit together.

When the shooting starts, the manuscript is embodied by actors, locations, design, etc. This process has an influence on the story that is impossible to predict, and which often contradict the original intentions of the script.

It may be an actress that doesn't quite possess the seductive charm that the scriptwriter had imagined. It may be a beautiful sunset that turns into a miserable grey rain. Or it may be a dialogue that looked good on paper, but sounds artificial and literary when played by the actors.

It is one of the director's central tasks on the set to deal with this chaotic reality and to strive to recreate the script's original intentions in this: a “second writing” of the film. How well the director has succeeded on the set, becomes obvious in the editing room.

Not until the editor begins to assemble the different images of the film, is it clear whether - and to what degree - the intentions of the script have survived the shooting.

Typical problems that emerge in the editing room are, for example: 1) lack of different kinds of continuity; 2) cases where the emotional intention of a scene is not realized: you don't laugh at what was intended to be funny, or you laugh at a scene where you were supposed to cry; 3) the audience lacks information necessary to understand the relations between the characters or the action; or 4) the narrative creates expectations that are not fulfilled by the story as it evolves.

Such problems might not arise from the quality of the individual scenes, but from the fact that there are too many of them or that, when assembled, they do not produce the necessary dramatic flow.
It is the task of the editor to structure the build up every single moment of a scene and put those moments together into a whole with all the possibilities involved in the scriptwriting and the shooting – this can be a lot (if the story structure gives many possibilities to reverse the order of the scenes, or if the scenes contains cross cutting), and this may be little (if the scenes are built up by sequence shots or if the narrative development can be seen in the development of props).
In any case, the editing creates the flow and energy in the scenes and builds the scenes into sequences. This (re)creation of the general narrative structure is the “third writing” of the film.

Only rarely is it possible for the audience to determine whether an edit was conceived in the script, on the set or in the editing room. It

is a common belief, that most montage and dialogue editing is conceived in the editing room, whereas most continuous action editing and transition between scenes are created in the script, not to mention the fundamentals of the overall story. Of course that is more often true than not. Yet there are many examples of the opposite.

As a result of the "final cut" problem, Alfred Hitchcock was reknowned for his ability to shoot exactly the footage he needed for dialogue editing. He wanted to be sure that the producer couldn't cut the film in a different manner than Hitchcock intended. In Denmark, Erik Balling was known for the same method of shooting all his footage for *Olsen Banden*, and in Sweden it took Ingmar Bergman's editor less than 5 weeks to edit *Fanny and Alexander*, because so many editing decisions were taken in advance.

George Roy Hill's *Slaughterhouse 5* contains a complex story structure with a lot of transitions in time and space, and for these transitions the film uses an associative form of editing which is carefully constructed in the script and on the set. Yet the film editor Dede Allen explains, that many of the transitions didn't work - primarily for narrative reasons. Therefore she had to invent new transitions in the editing room, searching in the material for visual and associative connections that could be used to create the new transitions. In the finished film it is almost impossible to distinguish the preconceived transitions from the ones that were created in the editing room.

The overall narrative structure of a feature film is of course primarily conceived in the script. But during the editing it often happens that you cut out some of the characters or some of the subplots. And an often used “emergency tool” in the editing room is to insert a narrator or character voice-over. In some of Woody Allen's scripts, the ending of the film is briefly described with the words: “To be shot”. He wants to edit the film before he decides how the film should end.

In documentaries you very often have a totally different working method, where you create your narrative structure in the editing room. A radical example of this is Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*.

*
* *

Another reason it is difficult to point out the editing's contribution to a specific film is that the audience simply doesn't notice it. It may notice spectacular transitions from one scene to another, or of course the edits that were meant to be noted - such as Jean-Luc Godard's jump cuts in *Breathless* - but in many cases the editing works as do overtones in sound: you react to them, but you can't really perceive them.

Walter Murch, the editor of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* and *Apocalypse Now*, pursues an editing style that is imperceptible to the audience.

During *The Conversation* he noticed that when he had a close-up of Gene Hackman and was going to decide how long he should hold it; how long it could sustain his interest, he would try to imagine

what the character was thinking, and when he wasn't thinking the same thought anymore, he would cut. Murch found out that very often Gene Hackman blinked where Murch decided to cut.

Murch began to use the blink as a tool to determine how long to keep a shot on screen: when he edited a dialogue sequence between two characters, he would imagine that he was a third person watching that scene, and he would try to duplicate in the editing what that third person would do. As long he was thinking one particular thought he would usually not blink. But when the thought came to an end, he would blink and shift to another.

He realised that the purpose of the blink was to isolate images or thoughts on either side of the blink, and that the blink in that sense was a kind of mental punctuation mark.

So he came to see the cut as the equivalent, in filmatic terms, of the blink in human behavior.

Consequently the film can be seen as a series of thoughts, and the editor is helping the audience by determining how long each of these thoughts are; how long the audience is going to think about any given thing.

And ideally the audience would never notice the editing of such a scene, because they would blink simultaneously with the cuts.

*
* *

Storytelling in film constantly deals with breaking and creating continuity, as all films are based on fragments of reality (constructed or real).

It is obvious that if you want to explain World War II in 90 minutes, you have to be very precise in what direction the camera is pointed, and when it is turned on. The challenge to the storyteller begins in the creation of sufficient continuity throughout the film for the spectator to feel that he is watching a continuous story and not disconnected fragments, and as to Walter Murch, the best tool in overcoming the problems of discontinuity is to imitate human perception and to let the imagination of the spectator become a co-narrator.

The brain will always strive to combine two separate informations, and the wider the gap between the two informations constructed by the filmmaker, the longer connection the brain will be forced to construct. (Of course the gap can be too wide and the connection fail. The audience will then perceive the fragments and they will likely lose their sense and credibility.)

If a cut is made in the time-continuity the audience will always try to imagine what happened in the meantime. There are numeruous historic film anecdotes about scenes that people recall with pleasure, but which only took place in the minds of those self-same people and not actually in the film.

The fact that the audience will always make up a good story in such situations, Murch bases upon an experiment where a person was looking through a kind of stereoscope that separates the view of the two eyes. A portrait was put in front of each eye, but it was the portrait of two different women. The person looking through the stereoscope would perceive one image of a woman. But what image? In the brain the two portraits would fuse into a third. A

face that did not exist in reality, but only in the mind of the person - a pure figment of the brain.

If the person afterwards was told to estimate/appraise/value the looks of the three women (the two real and the figment), the person would always pick out the figment as the most beautiful!

Murch concludes that the human brain has a sort of aesthetic selection and an imagination that reality will never be able to match. And consequently the best narrative is the one that is created in the spectator's own mind. The film ideally works as a starter for the human fantasy, and the narrative gains thereby a first-rate partner and can benefit from this infinite co-poetic potential. The task of the filmmaker is to create gaps as wide as possible in every aspect of his storytelling and thus making the audience the other half of the narrator.

*
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When filmmakers hear how theorists describe "the process of film creation," they are often amused: it always sounds as if every step of the process is carefully planned and constructed. The filmmakers know how accidental or circumstancial filmmaking really is, to say nothing of how unaware most filmmakers are of their reasons for doing what they do, when they work. I think most film editors will recognize Dede Allen's description of the editing process:

> When I start cutting a movie, I always cut with ambivalence. I have a definite intention, a definite starting point: the dramatic function of the scene;. the psychology of the characters, etc. But when I become absorbed in the material, I suddenly see all the possibilities the material contains. The unexpected. Intended and unintended possibilities. I can't help wandering into the material. I milk the

material for all the small possibilities I see in it. A look, a smile – after the director has said "cut!", an unintentional juxtaposition of two images. Afterwards I form a general view again. But it is in the ambivalence, in the collision between the general strategy and the pleasant distractions along the way that constitutes editing as art; the true life of the film.

References

Walter Murch visited The Danish Film School in 1985, and in 1987 Tómas Gislason interviewed him for The Editing Symposium at The Danish Film School.

Dede Allen visited The Danish Film School in 1997.

The notion of editing

Søren Kolstrup

1 The notion of "editing".

Most books on film theory describe the phenomenon of "editing", but the word "editing" itself is not always a well-defined, precise notion or concept. Normally the reader is given a common-sense description of the word, followed by a shot-by-shot analysis of at least one specific scene from one specific film, without any real clarification of the notion itself. In fact the notion of editing raises a long series of questions, even though we all know more or less what it means.

How is the notion "editing" to be distinguished from other notions like "montage", "cutting" or "découpage"? How is the whole of this semantic area structured? Does the film theorist's knowledge of Russian and French theory have any bearing on the demarcations between the notions? Has the theoretical perspective of the author any influence? (Is (s)he semiotically oriented or is (s)he a cognitivist?)

To what extent should we proceed with an etymological description? What is the "original" sense of "edit"? If we look up "edit" in commonly used dictionaries (Oxford, Chamber's), we are given a whole range of possible definitions of the word, therefore not only its basic meaning, but also its specific sense in film theory.
There is no trace of this procedure in the books I have chosen for examination.

Is "editing" (and/or "montage") linked to the production phase (the world of the film maker), is it linked to the structure of the film as a matrix for the meaning, or is it linked to the reception, to the interpretation of the viewer? On the other hand, does the author try to draw a distinction within the same phase, i.e. the structure of the film? Or, alternatively, is the theorist content with a loose

definition of "editing" followed by the shot-to-shot analyses mentioned?

It is not surprising that many students feel rather bewildered when introduced to the terms "montage", "editing", "cutting", "mise-en-scène", etc.

I have chosen a few quite well-known books within film theory, in order to look at how "editing" is used in relation to associated notions:

David Bordwell: *Narration in the Fiction Film* (5th ed. 1997)
David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson: *Film Art* (reprint 1995)
Edward Branigan: N*arrative Comprehension and Film* (1992)
Noël Carroll: *Theorizing the Moving Image* (1996)
Bruce F. Kawin: *How Movies Work* (1992)
Ira Konigsberg: *The Complete Film Dictionary* (1985)

The Complete Film Dictionary, 1987

The article on "editing" gives us a clear and easy description of the notion (pp. 98-100). It is a practical description, which focuses on the production aspect, and even more specifically on the film maker aspect, to such a degree that the description becomes a story about the editor's work (p. 99).

> The entire process of putting a film together into its final form which includes the selection and shaping of shots; the arrangement of shots, scenes, and sequences: the mixing of all sound tracks; and the integration of all sound tracks with the images. The term "cutting" is sometimes used synonymously for editing, but is too limited since it conveys only a mechanical sense of snipping the film into pieces and reassembling them, without any suggestion of the technical, dramatic, and artistic skills to make the film move effectively and form a total, coherent entity. Nor does the term give indication of the mixing and integrating of sound for which the editor is finally responsible. The independence and individual contribution of the editor will vary according to how much control the director demands over the final product. In the Hollywood studio system, the editor had more control, though sometimes the final editing was determined by the producer or another member of the studio.

The article contains a series of descriptions of types of editing. There is no systematic definition or discussion. What we find is a

historical description of the different types of editing, without any etymological explanation.

However, if we look at the article on "montage", things have changed. We find the etymology of the word and five different (historical) definitions. These definitions are far more clear-cut than those of "editing":

> The term is taken from French *monter* "to assemble" and has the following meanings in film:
> (1) In Europe, the process of editing a film, of assembling all the shots, scenes and sequences into the final motion picture.
> The term [...] has connotations that suggest something more than the mechanical process of editing, that make the process itself appear to be a creative act of assembling the pieces of film, of constructing the work of art from its building blocks with consideration of the film's immediate and total effect.
> (2) The process of editing as it was developed specifically by the Russian filmmakers Pudovkin and Eisenstein though even here we have two distinct styles of montage"
> (3) Any editing style that seems distinct from the invisible style of cutting developed in the Hollywood studios by being more consciously constructed to achieve particular effects and to control the responses of the audiences"
> (4) The process of placing film images in a sequence so those new dimensions of space and time are created (ref Pudovkin)
> (5) A technique of editing developed in this country, especially during the 1930's and the 1940's, that condenses time and space (pp. 216 - 17).

These definitions may not be very precise, but they are nevertheless more precise than the definitions of "editing".

It is obvious that "editing" is a general term. It does not need to be explicated, defined or given any historical description. It is distinguished from "cutting", not as a result of any systematic effort to define things clearly, but only because "cutting" is a notion used in the context of production, where there is no agreement as to the use of the term.

A dictionary such as CFD should be broad, it should present all uses of the term, and it may not omit any usage, however questionable, if it is common among film makers.

What about the theorists? They should define the notions. They cannot do what the film makers do, which is just to describe their production procedures!

Kawin, 1992

The book contains a "Glossary of Key Words" (pp. 539-557) and definitions of the subject matter in each chapter. The glossary focuses on the production aspect of "editing":

> *Editing*
> The art of selecting, trimming, coordinating, integrating and cutting into projection sequence the shots and/or recordings that will become the film; organizing and assembling a workprint (p. 544).
>
> *Montage*
> (1) French for "mounting" or "raising"; the intensive or significant, and often abrupt juxtaposition of shots;
> (2) The dynamic editing of picture and sound; see "decoupage";
> (3) a series of brief shots or overlapping images;
> (4) loosely, film editing in general.

Like the CFD, this book has no etymological description of "editing". The notion is considered to be so commonly known that it has no need of explanation, quite the opposite to "montage", which is felt to be a loan word in need of description or definition.

The main text contains several descriptions of the term, especially the chapter "Within Frames and Between Them":

> Shots and cuts make up virtually the entire visual world of film, much as words and their ordering make up the sentence, or a sequence of sentences makes up a book. The general term for what has been arranged within the shot is mise-en-scène. The general term for how shots are joined together is montage (These are two of the most important and problematic terms in film study...) ...the viewer interprets the montage to establish what these separate views may have to do with one another (p. 51).

Thus Kawin seems to reserve "editing" for the production process: "To cut or to edit a film is to join its shots together physically into the order in which they are intended to be projected" (p.49).

This definition is similar to the definition given in the glossary, but it limits the sense of "editing". Kawin draws the delimiting line between "edit" and "cut":

> Editing is the art of making decisions about shot length, selection and sequence. Cutting is the act of splicing lengths of film together. To decide how much of a shot to include in a film, and to suggest and manipulate its interpretive matrix by cutting it between two shots, is the job of the film editor (p. 436).

The definition of "montage" is much more detailed. "Montage" is seen as an element of the production process and it is seen as the basis for the spectator's interpretation or reading. "Editing" is thus a general term for a rather simple procedure of putting together; "montage" seems to be a more complex notion and to involve semiosis, the creation of meaning:

> As soon as a film is made of more than one shot, editing comes into play. When one shot does not simply follow another, and their juxtaposition has dynamic significance, one speaks not about editing but about montage. The French term for simple continuity editing is découpage: it denotes "ordinary" sequential cutting, where one shot follows another in a linear, easy-to-follow manner. Montage - from the French verb monter, "to ascend, mount or assemble" - denotes the way one shot is mounted next to another, but it has the connotation of an ascending or heightened effect. Montage then is the art of assembling individual shots into a dynamic system (p. 98).

Kawin, like CFD, is bound to emphasize the different meanings of the terms. Kawin might have tried to let "montage" indicate what concerns the structure and the interpretation, and to let "editing" indicate what concerns the production. Instead he more or less tries to let both terms indicate the same phases, giving a more specialized sense to "montage". Unfortunately his definitions give rise to more problems than solutions.

Branigan, 1992

Branigan, who according to the title focuses on the comprehension (of the narrative), does not give us a description or definition of

"editing". The notion remains broad and vague and cannot be used in the context of inference (as opposed to Carroll).

"Editing" is listed together with other notions:

> I also believe that many basic concepts (e.g. realism, time, editing, the camera, space, causality, voice, text) should be broken into components and redefined according to their top-down and bottom-up aspects as well as their declarative and procedural aspects. The result will be a new complexity for some familiar concepts, but a better fit with the powers of narrative (p. 118).

Branigan makes no reference to montage, not because French theory is unknown to him (since he has references to Godreault's use of "monstration" and "narration"), but because his aim is only the interpretation of the narration by the spectator, rather than the total production of meaning from shot to shot. This is probably why there is no description or definition of "editing".

There is thus no need for a definition which draws a boundary between "montage" and "editing". What Branigan proposes is a definition that breaks down the meaning of the word into smaller elements.

Carroll, 1996

Carroll focuses both on production and comprehension in his descriptions of the editing process. There is, however, no attempt to define the notion. It is described and taken for granted as a vague notion to be examined and exemplified instead of being defined:

> The material basis of film editing is the cut, the physical joining of two shots. We can easily account for this process with a little chemistry. Of course there is also in-camera editing. To discuss this we have to add some mechanics to our story. But editing involves more than chemistry and mechanics. It is a means of communication within the social institution of world cinema. It provides a means of articulation whose practice enables filmmakers to convey stories, metaphors and even theories to spectators.
> Because editing is a form of communication, there has been a perennial tendency in the history of film theory to associate editing with that paradigm of communication, language... To understand editing we

> must understand it as a form of communication without attempting to reduce it to a model of writing and reading (page 403).

Carroll presents here two aspects or problems: editing as a means of communication, and the false understanding of editing as a language. Editing is a means of articulation in film communication (p. 403). In spite of the title "Theorizing the Moving Image", there is no discussion about editing on television. Carroll is very anxious to stress that even though editing is a means of communication, it is not a language. Obviously he dislikes the import of linguistic theory and terms into the domain of film communication. "Montage" hardly plays a role within Carroll's framework; there are only a few references to the term.

Although the original sense of "editing" belongs to the production sphere, Carroll focuses on editing as the matrix for the spectator's work in comprehending and interpreting: "How do these ideas and attitudes emerge from the flux of images? .... What must the spectator's response be as each new shot is added, if he or she is to comprehend it?" (p. 403). Carroll sees "montage" as something closely related to Pudovkin's theories, thus belonging to the construction principles of film, whereas the aim of his film analyses is to answer this question: "What must the spectator's response be as each new shot is added, if he or she is to comprehend it?".

It is in this context that he refuses to turn to linguistics in order to examine how the coherence and meaning emerge between the shots.

He refuses to make use of linguistic concepts such as "paradigm" and "syntagm". Instead, he seems to think that the principle of inference explains how one shot relates to another. Carroll does not give us a true definition of editing, but he expands the sense of the word and changes it. The production process is removed from the word; only the spectator's interpretation remains.

Bordwell

Narration in the Fiction Film (1985 /1995)
The index has many references to "editing". In some cases I was unable to find the actual word "editing" on the pages indicated, but they treat editing without using the word. As a matter of fact, the notion is never described nor defined. Here again, the meaning of "editing" is taken for granted; we all know what we are talking about. Bordwell reserves the definitions and the precise descriptions for the central concept of the book "Narration" (pp. xi - xiv), not to mention such notions as "fabula", "syuzhet" or "style".

All we find is a description of "editing", albeit in the light of a text written by Eisenstein: "(the camera) is an instrument for transforming the profilmic event so as to maximize effect. Nor does editing mimic the attention of an invisible observer. Editing as the most palpable stage of montage construction, will often violate verisimilitude for the sake of impact" (p. 14).

As for "montage" we are not much better off, as shown by the quote "editing, usually called montage" (p. 238) , referring, however, to the Soviet theories of the Twenties.

In this book "editing" seems to be a practical term; it is used before any theoretical definition appears. It does not require a definition, in stark contrast to "montage" which is used in discussions by others_(Eisenstein, Pudovkin) of the subject matter of the book. Thus it receives both a historical and descriptive presentation.

Film Art (1979/1997)
Art is different! There are many references to "editing" in the index and many references to specific types of editing. We even get general definition: "the technique that relates shot to shot, editing" (p. 168), and we have a whole chapter giving definitions and descriptions (pp. 270-314), beginning with this definition:

> Editing may be thought of as the coordination of one shot with the next. As we have seen, in film production a shot is one or more exposed frames in a series on a continuos length of film stock. The film editor eliminates unwanted footage, usually by discarding all but the

> best take. The editor also cuts superfluous frames, such as those showing the clapboard (p.18), from the beginnings and endings of shots. She or he then joins the desired shots, the end of one to the beginning of another (p. 271).

After this definition follows a presentation of the different types of joins (fade-out, dissolve, etc.)

Two points should be stressed in this context. Firstly, Bordwell-Thompson do not like making any clear-cut definitions or statements. Here they have been precise, but make the definition smoother (or weaker) by writing "editing *may be thought of as* the coordination." and not "editing *is* the."

Secondly, the perspective is the production aspect and not the interpretation.

Conclusion

We may ask ourselves whether "editing" can at all be called a notion or even worse a concept. Whether it is a notion or concept, it is at least a very elastic one. It is surprising to see to what extent such a basic notion as "editing" can be used in different ways.

All depends on the aim of the author, on his general theoretical position, his attitude to semiotics, to cognition, to linguistics, or to philosophy.

However, it also depends on the focus of the notion; whether "editing" is related to production, to structure or to reception.

Should we regret this lack of precision?

In a way, the answer is yes. If we compare film theory to linguistics, it is obvious that film theory has never reached the same level of conciseness. What film theory offers us is an endless stream of analyses of specific scenes or sequences of film. According to Carroll, editing is a means of communication, but the theory about editing is far from being as precise as the theory about language. This is probably because film theory occupies an intermediate position, between linguistics and art theory or literary analysis. It is bewildering that we have no really precise concept about a

phenomenon, which, according to almost all theoreticians, is the most fundamental construction principle in film making.

On the other hand, the answer is no. There is a practical advantage in allowing "editing" to be shaped according to the goals and the point of view of the particular authors, without forcing any author into continuous redefinition.

Greimas' concept of "isotopy" is a very precise theory about the way meaning is established from one sentence to another. Could we hope for something similar in film theory, a true theory about how the meaning emerges from shot to shot, rather than a loose use of inference principles? At any rate, such a task demands an intensive effort and a greater precision in the use of concepts than we have seen until now.

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Notes of an editing teacher

Sidsel Mundal

When a film arrives at post production, it has reached the magic moment. All the separate elements are joined together for the very first time, and the movie is about to be born. The editor is the conductor of the process, a kind of midwife one could say, a center of calmness and concentration on whom the director depends. It is a rewarding job, and a wonderful feeling to have the unedited film in one's hands and work it through.

The First Eye

The editor is the first person outside the crew who sees the daily rushes without the disturbing knowledge of how they came about and who may ignore a scene even if it cost blood. Also the editor is in the position of giving a qualified response to the director on behalf of the audience. Very often at this stage of the work the director is exhausted and may be "blind" to the material. The editor is the person who sees the possibilities unseen by others, and finds solutions to the "takes" that do not really work, and who must try to fulfill the visionary ambitions of the director whether the film is going to be brilliant or a mediocre movie.

Two Kinds of Students

I make the distinction between future editors and others who need to understand what editing is about, because I think these two groups need different kinds of training. It's extremely useful for directors, sound engineers, production managers, and most other people involved in the production, to know what goes on in the editing process. The insight into editing puts the others' functions on a film crew into perspective. Future scholars and critics also come into this category of students.

It's important that the student who is learning editing be given enough time to gain practical experience and maturity. While

students who need to understand what it's all about may attend a concentrated, theoretical study.

A Jack-of-All-Trades

Both as a personal characteristic of a future editor and to signify a well-rounded training, *versatility* is the key word. In the same way as film is comprehensive in its nature, the editor needs to be familiar with and sensitive to a variety of professions. As a director I've had the opportunity to collaborate with several editors, and my definite experience is that the imaginative editor with poor technical skills is only half good, as is the technically brilliant editor who pays little or no attention to the inner meaning of the film itself. So valuable personal qualities in an editor include: a good sense of composition both musically and visually, analytic ability, basic technical competence, tidiness, and last but not least: an ability to listen and to communicate.

I've found that the ethical aspect of editing is important to discuss with students. Ethics involves communication and how to deal with one's influence. Many destructive conflicts can be turned round and treated in a meaningful and constructive way if one listens calmly and respects the importance of dialogue. To include this in teaching is not common, but nonetheless important as an ongoing process.

Head, Hands and Feet

The process of learning to edit is very similar to that of learning to play the piano. Whereas a completely practical study is possible, a purely theoretical study is out of the question. I myself learned editing as an apprentice without the opportunity to study and analyze film theory. Yet the best thing - what I would like to have had - is a combination of hands-on exercises and theoretical studies.

In his excellent book *In the Blink of an Eye*, Walter Murch (editor of *The English Patient* among other films) writes of how he prefers standing up at the editing table or the computer. His personal preference is one I share because editing is very much a bodily effort. To find the right place to put the cut may sometimes depend

more on a person's instinctive rhythm than on her intellect. In any case the editing students must be given a chance to frequently practice their skills (sitting down or standing up) just as a student of music does.

Construction Workers

In the overall plan for teaching editing, I would emphasize the student's abilities to analyze and construct stories. The French word for editing, "montage", -mounting something, is the word that most accurately describes the process of constructing a storyline.

Editing takes place on two levels simultaneously: joining shots into meaningful sequences, such as continuity cuts, interviews, etc., and building the overall narrative structure. I believe that one can work very well from intuition on both levels, but a theoretical study of dramaturgy is essential. These studies may very well be combined with lectures on the genres which the editing students could attend together with other students.

In film schools students are assigned to produce many short films and documentaries. Of all the genres, the editor has the most influence over documentaries. Thus I see working on documentaries as a particularly valuable part of the training. The same documentary material may be assembled in several ways, and there is a lot to gain from scheduling ample time for editing, so that all students may learn about directing and dramaturgy in the editing room.

Which Pair of Scissors?

It's quite hard to recommend specific technical equipment. Every training institution must consider its financial and practical situation, and look for viable solutions. In many cases schools end up with old-fashioned equipment. It could be flatbed editing tables or videotape machines. Some computer-based tools are already becoming outdated, too. A current discussion of the technical aspect is going on in CILECT (Centre International de Liaison des Ecoles de Cinéma et de Télévision. <www.cilect.org>) and an outstanding

report on new tools was delivered at the 1997 Congress in Ebeltoft, Denmark.

1-2-3-4 or 7-8-1-2-9

My main concern would be to give the students an opportunity to work on a non-linear system if at all possible. An editing table or a computer-based system allows a freer treatment of material than a linear videotape system. But if only linear tools are available, one may also go ahead with the training. My experience is however that the linear tools represent an unfortunate hindrance in the process. If one must work on-line, very many decisions must be made in theory, and not by trying out cuts, and reshaping the sequences as one edits. It's essential to have the possibility to shorten or prolong a scene several times, and to switch one sequence with another without any major technical difficulties. Rhythmic details can seldom be solved satisfactorily in a manuscript. When the videotape machines were introduced in the eighties, the emphasis was moved from good editing to efficient editing. In a television news department, it was naturally a great advantage to work fast with simple material. But when the videotape machinery replaced the old editing tables in other departments, as well, we had a period of limitations which now is coming to an end with the non-linear computer based systems.

The first steps in editing courses must naturally focus on the equipment so that the students can master simple techniques and have a tool to work with. Along with classes of technical basics, both analog and digital, the students should also be able to recognize the principles of film technologies. The aim should be to learn how to approach any new equipment rather than become a specialist on one type of machine.

Incidentally, it is very important that editors learn sufficient sound techniques too, since processing sound is more integrated in the editor's work now than it was in the pre-video age.

Practice, Practice

When the primary technical level is reached, the focus ought to turn away from the equipment and concentrate on a number of exercises. All exercises can be looked on as primarily a training of the cerebral abilities and secondarily an intellectual comprehension of the assignments. The exercises can be mixed in such a way that the students edit small pieces where several elements are included in one piece. The elements include:

- movement and continuity between shots
- direction (geography)
- eyelines
- speech and breath
- interviews
- dialogues
- rhythms and beats
- treatment of time

The difficulty for the teacher can often be to find proper material for exercises. My experience is that the material which functions well, is originally shot to be training films, or rushes where a selection has been made to fit the assignments. Unfortunately it seems that some institutions have not given the preparation of practice-material a high priority. It certainly costs money, but without the material the teacher must spend time finding suitable rushes, which is extremely time consuming and often gives a poor result. In the end the quality of the training suffers from this lack of investment. This may seem to be a minor issue, but I'm afraid many editing teachers sweat over the lack of training films.

No Rules

I've often met students asking for the ultimate truth when they try to master editing. “How should I cut this or that?” “What's the best way to cut a fist-fight?” In responding to these questions, I have tried to make the students aware that there are no rules, only conventions which are constantly changing. I have taught rules of thumb, and the ability to study and analyze films, rather than giving instructions. I have encouraged the students to try their own solutions and to trust their own taste instead of looking for right or

wrong. To be a clever copycat can be a valuable ability for a new student. Later on she may go on and try a more personal approach.

Lectures

To achieve a good understanding of the conventions of editing I have screened and analyzed early films to show the way they are edited and directed. I then choose films from different genres and periods, fictions, short films, documentaries, news, music-videos, etc., so that the student can gradually gain a theoretical understanding of the various conventions. It's a great advantage if the series of lectures can run parallel to the practical training, so that the two elements throw light on one another. I have also found it an advantage to have a mixed group of students in the theoretical classes, because students with a specific interest in other fields open new perspectives and attitudes.

In Depth

When the students have reached a fairly high level of editing, the narrative dynamics in each film inevitably become the main issue. Versatility here finds its pay-off. The student with an intuitive and theoretical understanding of dramaturgy, rhetoric, psychology, music, etc., will find it much easier to construct storylines than someone who is a mere technical whiz-kid.

Specialties

A particular focus should be given to the relation between pictures and words. Excellent training material on this subject was produced by the BBC and by SVT (Swedish Television) in the seventies. It mostly applies to documentaries and television. Yet I've had interesting results from a workshop dealing with more poetic forms of narration. It's useful to help the students realize how we interpret words as well as moving images, and how we interpret the combination of the two. Students should also be made aware of how written language differs from spoken language, how the distance to the microphone can change the character of words, how for instance pauses, syntax and pronouns work in combination with moving images.

I should also bring in the importance of journalism. Many of the students will work in television, or edit documentaries. Consequently it is useful to bring the journalistic perspective into the classes in which analyses are done.

Another major topic in editing is music. I find that very few people in the industry have a sufficient theoretical and practical understanding of which functions music has in films. All editors ought to know as much as they can about this. Listening to all sorts of music, and understanding it, is indispensable.

Playful Earnestness

Last but not least: having fun, allowing nonsense, and playing with the material rhythmically stimulates a creative atmosphere among students. The function of the teacher is to coach as well as to instruct. To respect the students' individuality and personal attitudes also enhances a good learning process.

Separation or combination of fragments? Reflections on editing

Edvin Kau

> Editing is nothing. Bits and pieces are combined, but the combining itself is an invisible way, an aesthetic principle. It is this nothing that lets us see what is being combined in a certain way.[1]

Parts and wholes

Whether you talk about editing, cutting, montage, decoupage - or assembling for that matter - you must have something to edit, cut, etc. To make combinations, it is necessary to have some parts. And you must have some elements of material to make parts out of. To get the right raw material for the actual putting together you may cut or slice your takes into pieces. The process of combining requires fragmentation of material.

Further reflection on some aspects of this practice may need some clarifying definition of the concepts of 'shot' and 'take'. In the finished film, a *shot* is the term for the smallest, unbroken series of frames, which has been chosen during the editing process - from a continuous *take* (the amount of material that has been recorded without stopping the camera). That is: one piece of uncut film. In short, the shot is that part of a take which is actually chosen and used in the finished movie. (Furthermore, this means that if a take is cut into several pieces and edited together with other pieces in a

[1] Condensed phrasing of points in conclusions on film style and aesthetics in Kau 1989, "Dreyers filmkunst", pp. 383-84.

way that separates them from each other, we have to consider them as different shots, if we want to analyze the resulting scene). In order to make the film (audio-visual story, poem, documentary...), the raw material in the form of shots are joined together through the editing or montage process in different kinds of ways: direct cut, dissolve, fade, wipe etc.

Using a few examples, I shall discuss some aspects of the concept of editing and especially what meanings or contents different practices and ways of perceiving them may produce. To do this it will be useful to bear in mind that we may approach the editing practice from two perspectives:

1. With emphasis on: detailing or making parts out of the material.
2. With emphasis on: assembling or making wholes out of the material.

The first we may also call *separation* in general. The second we may call *combination* in general.
In his brilliant book "Elements of Cinema" Stefan Sharff has a chapter on separation (p. 59-83). His first definition is:

> Separation: fragmentation of a scene into single images in alternation - A,B,A,B,A,B, etc. (Sharff, p. 6).

This is in line with what I have said above about shots, takes, separation in general, and combination in general. In the same breath it must be said that Sharff has another, more specific and narrow definition, which he also practices, when he analyzes his examples:

> Separation: Shooting people in separate shots who are actually close together. A conversation may be filmed with one person looking right in medium shot and the other looking left in close-up (probably

> after a two-shot establishing their nearness). A unique tool of cinema which can bring people in closer relation than if they were in the same shot (Sharff, p. 180).

He reserves his concept of separation for scenes with two or more persons talking and listening to each other, filmed and visually told about in a uniquely cinematic language that tells about their intimate relationships. Sharff draws upon both sides of this practice: the fragmentation into details and the assembling of wholes and pointing out the dialectical relationship between them. This is a very clear and only apparently simple observation. In fact it is a very strong conceptual and analytical tool, and I think it is fruitful to use it about editing in general.

Intimate suspense

Sharff demonstrates his ideas about separation through analyses of scenes from Hitchcock's *Psycho* and Renoir's *Grand Illusion*. In Psycho it is the scene where Marion, who has stolen $40.000, is on the run, and has been driving all night, has fallen asleep in her car and is woken up by a cop, who detects her from his Highway Patrol car. In accordance with his definition Sharff is focusing on the intimate relation between shots of Marion and shots of the cop, stressing her nervousness, the tension, and the excitement that results from the montage of slightly different (in composition, angle, and distance) frames of the two characters (Fig. 1-2).


Fig. 1-2. Marion and the cop in *Psycho*.

> Separation can accommodate any given thematic situation, but cinematically its specialty lies in the ability to create intimate relationships between *parts* seen *separately* on the screen. This ability makes the element of separation specific in its techno-cinematic laws of structure. Those laws interlock with factors of screen reality. A more realistic alternative to two people talking in separation would be to show them both in one frame. Yet it is the strength of the element of separation that, *seen one at a time*, those people seem in a more intimate "dramatic" contact. Successfully executed, separation can be one of cinema's most effective devices. The audience is drawn to participate in a controlled fashion in unifying the separate parts (Sharff, p. 7; my italics, EK).

The editing practice of separation, then, has nothing to do with reality or realism. The potential lies in the possibility to bring the *separate* parts *together*, creating intimate relations in the special screen reality. Also, Sharff has an eye for the involvement of the viewer's activity. And all this can be achieved through the potential of media specific characteristics of cinema, which I call the ability to record and store "lumps" of space and "lumps" of time and use these to make a special kind of cinematic raw material with which it is possible to create what Sharff calls screen reality.

As mentioned above Sharff concentrates on Hitchcock's construction of psychological tension in the "cop scene" as a result of separa-

tion: matching and confronting frames of persons in certain patterns (Fig. 1-2). But to take the point a little further in order to generalize the ideas, as I have suggested, we might pay closer attention to a detail, which slips through Sharff's net because of his focus on the separation series of close-ups. I am thinking of the first cut from the separated faces to a medium close-up of Marion and the cop taken from the opposite side of the car (Fig. 3-4). Sharff does not elaborate on this as another combination, but is satisfied to call it "an ingenious resolution of the separation (...). Multiangular fragmentation starts", this last pattern taking over, as the scene ends with Marion being allowed to drive on.

Fig. 3-4.

But if we consider the principle of interplay between separation and combination[8] in a more general perspective, we notice that, combined with the preceding part of the scene, this cut - the very editing of precisely this shot to the separation series and especially to the cop's face renews the suspense, or more accurately tops it with the

[2] Another way of discussing selection and combination involves going one step further from the concept of selection; to have something to edit, to combine, first you have to make fragments of raw material, to separate your parts.

release of a moment of thrill: in the foreground between the camera and Marion and at least partly hidden from the cop in the background is her handbag, and we know that the stolen money is in it. In fact, part of the envelope with the money is visible. To get the driver's license the cop has asked for she has to dig between the things in the bag; will the cop discover anything? Precisely on the cue of his question about the license Hitchcock jumps out of the close-up series and its compositions to the medium close-up which (besides the above mentioned composition in depth) is given a special function as "pointer" with a the special and delightful "Hitchcockian touch": not something placed in the centre of the frame or highlighted in other ways, but a detail in a corner or, as in this case, at the very bottom of the picture. Through its position and Marion's eye line the envelope becomes the centre of interest. The risk of as simple an action as finding her license is given visual power through the editing's combination of shots.

Intimate understanding

The other example is a prototypical demonstration of Sharff's idea. In *Grand Illusion* a French and a German officer, both aristocrats, have a conversation in a German castle which serves as prisoner of war camp during World War I. That is, the French captain Boëldieu is colonel Rauffenstein's prisoner. But since they are of the same class, they understand each other, and Sharff shows how their "friendly chat" (Sharff, p. 65) with their views on fate, honour, etc. - and intimate understanding in spite of their roles as enemies - is given an aesthetic solution and communicated through what we

might call a symmetrical use of separation as editing principle (Fig. 5-8).

Fig. 5-8.

Following Sharff's definition the scene starts with a two-shot followed by separation and closes by returning to a two-shot frame. It is a beautiful case of separation, demonstrating that this editing practice can almost eliminate the sense of distance between characters that a two shot may show. The fact that the characters are not shown beside each other in the same frame (and consequently in a visible distance from each other), but in frames that are edited on top of each other so to speak, brings them visually together and demonstrates the psychological intimacy as a gesture, a cinematographic articulation of space and time.

Combinations of conflicts and correspondences

It is essential to Sharff to show how purely cinematic means can lead to psychological ends. How editing and the relations between separation and combination can tell stories about characters' psychological states and their relationships. This means that the narrative and its story are dependent on and told *directly* by the cinematic style.

This is not only true of conversation scenes which are as relatively simply designed as Sharff's examples. Let me mention a few other examples that may take the inspiration from this way of looking at editing a bit further and make it useful in the analysis of more complex variations of editing/separation/combination. In his film *Michael* (1924) Carl Th. Dreyer has a scene with a famous painter, Zoret, and his protégé, Michael. They have been lovers for some time, but now Zoret has understood that their relationship is threatened by Countess Zamikof; Michael is falling in love with her. Zoret has told that he is going to make a painting with the title "Caesar and Brutus", and from his and Michael's exchange of glances it is clear who Brutus is going to look like.

Fig. 9-13.

After a visit by Zamikof Zoret gives Michael another painting, "The Victory", as a present. This is told in this way by Dreyer (fig 9-13): a long shot from behind (Fig. 9) shows Zoret, who is looking at the painting; Michael enters from the right to say goodbye. Via the painting (Fig. 10) he cuts to a medium close-up of the two men en

face/in profile; Zoret puts his hand around Michael's neck (Fig. 11), saying, "'The Victory' is my best painting - I give it to you!" Following this text, Fig. 12 shows a close-up of Michael left and Zoret en face right; Michael looks down, Zoret to the right, saying, "Everything will belong to you, eventually." In the medium close-up in Fig. 13 (corresponding to Fig. 11) Zoret moves his hand from Michael's neck and puts it on his left hand; Michael puts his right on Zoret's and expresses his gratefulness. In a long shot (like Fig. 9) Zoret disrupts/breaks the situation, and goes to the right in the direction of the door out. Another long shot from the opposite end of the room shows them from the back; they say goodbye, and Michael leaves.

The scene is an early example of Dreyer developing a cinematic language using editing patterns, rhythm, and picture composition to move around and close in on his characters. In many scenes we find a development with beginning/distance - middle/intimacy - and end/distance. But at no time you will find a repetition of the same type of shot. For example, a close-up will never be followed by another close-up. With each cut a new step in the development of the scene is taken. Every shot takes us further, but *no* shot is placed *only* to get on. The string of frames is one small, complete visual story. In this way a director, in this case Dreyer, is narrating the story tightly, functionally, without unnecessary repetitions, but with great visual variation. [3]

Apart from different ways of connecting shots, like direct cut, dissolve, wipe, and others, Sharff has a special concept for certain

ways of binding shots together that he calls *penetrations*: actions or things which 'penetrates' from one shot to the other. One example would be a person in one shot giving a person in the next something. In this way a cup and the action of giving/receiving may link two shots together. This may also be taken a step further, I think, and it is possible to find such a mechanism in many, more subtle versions. One example we find in Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. In her cell Joan is asking to be given the sacrament, and bishop Cauchon is apparently willing to grant her the opportunity; "The church is merciful (... etc.)." But when Joan reaches out and tries to take his hand, he is almost scared and draws his hand away (Fig. 14-15). This is told just by showing Joan's face, her eyes looking in his direction and followed by the next shot, where her hand only just comes into sight in the bottom right corner of the frame, and in which we se Cauchon's reaction.


Fig. 14-15

Examples of another kind - but still showing editing's potential of bringing separate things together across cuts - can be found in abundance in Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now (1973)*. The main

character, John Baxter, is clairvoyant. From a present situation he can in fact "see" what is happening in other places or even in the future. He is not ready to realize that he has this gift. But the film can demonstrate what is going on when John senses things beyond the ordinary space and time limits of a situation. Already during the first minutes of the film Roeg is telling us about this, using almost nothing else but precisely his way of editing. I shall mention just one example: when his daughter, who is playing outside the house, throws her ball (into the pond in which she is going to drown a few moments later), the action and movements are mirrored exactly in the following shot showing John tossing a packet of cigarettes to his wife (Fig. 16-17).


Fig. 16-17.

The supernatural connections that John has a gift for but won't admit to - the film can quite literally show. In this case Roeg's editing is an incarnation of what is told about this way of "viewing"

things. A very subtle way of using editing as part of the cinematic language to combine separate elements.

Editing as style. Style as story telling

My last example is taken from the Danish television series Matador (Erik Balling, 1978; episode 5, set in 1932). During this sequence we see scenes from three different homes. It is early morning, people are waking up, and some of them are doing their morning gymnastics following a radio programme, in which one of the first Danish radio stars, Captain Jespersen (in a very sergeant-like commanding voice), tried to drill the Danish population into getting sound bodies for hopefully sound minds.

I shall describe the shots, frames and editing in some detail and go a little beyond Sharff's use of the concept of separation (reserved for dialogues and a limited range of visual variation). I do this to reach a wider perspective in my discussion of the relation between separation and combination - that is, of editing - and its consequences for the construction of meaning and screen reality in audiovisual media.





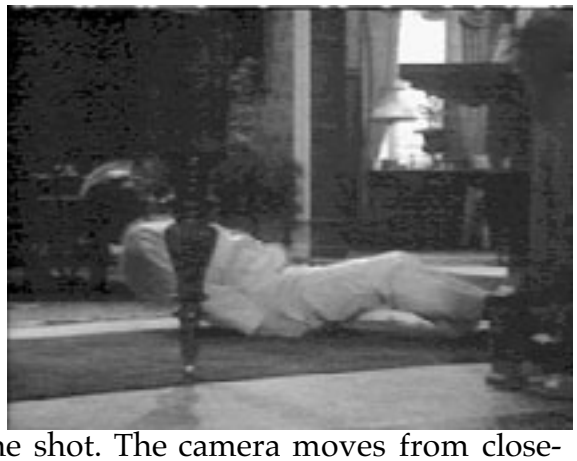

Fig. 18-22. 18-19 are two frames from one shot. The camera moves from close-up to medium long shot, while Maud half awake finds out that Hans Christian has gone to the living room to do his gymnastics.

I. The Varnæs house. (Varnæs is the managing director of the local bank).
Shot 1. *Medium close-up* of Maud (Mrs. Varnæs). Without opening her eyes she reaches out trying to find her husband, Hans Christian's face, but all she can feel (opening her eyes) is the empty pillow. During this the *camera pulls backwards*, and the shot ends in *medium long shot*, while Maud draws her eiderdown over her head, staying in bed to sleep. She is clearly disappointed, and although she can hear nothing, she knows. He's at it again. CUT TO

Shot 2. Close-up of a modern, up to date radio. (Fig. 20). Capt. Jespersen: "Sit down on the floor! (etc. ... giving instructions without stop). CUT TO

Shot 3. Medium long shot of Hans Christian starting the exercise (Fig. 21), following the voice from the radio. The camera near the floor, below table level and shooting him in a direction partly under the grand piano (fig 22). CUT TO

II. Dr. Hansen having breakfast in bed.
Shot 4. Close-up of an older and more primitive radio, a crystal set with ear phones. In the middle of Capt Jespersen's explanations a cut brings us to Dr. Hansen's bedroom. Camera pans right showing part of his body and the tray. The camera's tilt up combined with a short pull backwards reveals the identity of the man sitting in bed eating, but otherwise doing nothing in spite of the captain's orders. When he starts showing his annoyance with the health fanatic, we have a CUT TO

Fig. 23-25.

III. Skjern's getting up.
Shot 5. Close-up of a third radio (better than Dr. Hansen's, but not quite as modern as Varnæs'; Fig. 26) in yet another house; we are now with the Skjern

family.[9] The captain's "fitness programme" is carried on through all three parts of the sequence. We hear it continually while the sound quality, the standard of the technical equipment, and the rooms are demonstrating their own story about social positions in the small town. CUT TO

Fig. 26-28

Shot 6. Medium long shot of Mads Skjern's wife, Ingeborg (Fig. 26). She wakes up and gets out of bed stretching out to look for her husband, who is exercising in the living room next door. To follow her eye line the camera pulls a little away from her and pans to the left. In a long shot through the door we see Mads work out, still in his pajamas (Fig. 28). CUT TO

Shot 7. Long shot of another door opening. From inside the same room as Mads we see the maid looking in wonder at Mads (Fig. 29). Going towards the kitchen she disappears to the left, but a pan left shows her take another glance through another door (Fig. 30). When she turns away to go on with her work Mads appears from the bottom of the frame (Fig. 31). He is still bending and stretching his knees, moving up and down. The camera follows him, tilting down and up one time; while he is on his way to a standing position again Ingeborg arrives from the left and in the extreme foreground of the frame (Fig.

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4 Mads Skjern has taken just a few steps up the social ladder on his way to become the local "matador", building and expanding his hosiery shop and eventually becoming a manufacturer himself.

32). Going down again he ends sitting on his knees with an astounded expression on his face (Fig. 33). CUT TO

Fig. 29-33

Shot 8 . Long shot (like the end of shot 6) showing Mads and Ingeborg through the door (Fig. 34). She is sitting down right in front of him. CUT TO

Fig. 34-36.

Shot 9. Close-up of Ingeborg, "You are going to be a father." (Fig. 35). CUT TO

Shot 10. Long shot (like 8). Mads lowers his arms, "Is this a way to tell it?" Ingeborg gets up with a small laughter, while getting up: "I've always wanted to beat Capt. Jespersen." (Fig. 36). CUT TO

Shot 11. Close-up, slightly from above, of Mads looking up at Ingeborg (Fig. 37) who continues, "He ought to see you now." Camera tilts upwards with Mads, holding the close-up; "Thank you, Ingeborg." (Fig. 38). CUT TO

Shot 12. Close-up of Ingeborg: "Thank you!" (Fig. 39).

Fig. 37-39.

For some shots (12-16) the editing and camera work is pure separation in the Sharff sense, cutting back and forth between close-ups of the two characters. Mads is asking, if she is sure, and Ingeborg assures him that Dr. Hansen has confirmed that she is pregnant. Mads talks about taking special care of her from now on. But in

Shot 16. Close-up of Ingeborg, she replies: "No, that certainly would be a terrible idea!" She starts moving to the right and forward towards the camera. (Fig. 40). CUT TO

Shot 17. Medium close-up in a reverse shot compared to shot 15; with Mads standing to the right Ingeborg is seen from the back moving into the background. The camera follows her in a pan left, in the doorway she tells their son and daughter to hurry up. Pan right as she disappears on her way to the kitchen. Mads now in medium close-up. From the other doorway Ingeborg tells Mads, "And you too. Unless you are going to arrive in that outfit." (Fig. 41-43).

Fig. 40-43.

The important thing to notice in this sequence, in relation to editing of course, is the way some parts are separated (singled out/selected) and combined while others are shown as uncut shots. In other words, what patterns of separation and combination are constructed, and what do they offer the viewer as material for consideration or interpretation? And how are sounds and shots distributed in relation to each other? I shall characterize some of the results I find through the break down of the sequence.

The first three shots (Fig. 18-22) not only show Maud in bed and Christian exercising. The important thing is that her situation and reaction are described in a separate shot, and through the subtle

camera movement. She is isolated (and frustrated) in the bedroom; and not only visually: it is only with the cut to the radio (Fig. 20) that Capt. Jespersen's voice is heard. So, both visual and sound editing is about a certain degree of isolation within this marriage.

The scene with Dr. Hansen (a single shot; Fig. 23-25) gives the audience a hint of his life as a bachelor, and he is shown as a contrast to the other two men; one trying to stay in shape on the (lonely) top of the social ladder (Hans Christian; Fig. 21-22), and the other getting in shape to be able to climb and struggle together with his family (Mads; Fig. 28). At the doctor's there is no need to cut in order to show any conflicts at the moment.

At Skjern's all doors are open. Ingeborg can hear the radio through the door from the living room. Still, Mads' activity at this point is separated from the bedroom; this is also shown through the cutting (Fig. 26-27) from radio to Ingeborg, combined with the pan (Fig. 27-28) from her to Mads seen through the door. An even higher degree of connection might have been shown, if a pan from radio to Ingeborg and perhaps even continuing to Mads had been used. But this is not the case. Still, the solution that has been chosen shows another degree of separation than that of the Varnæs marriage. Maud can't even hear the radio, she just knows the reason, why Hans Christian has left the bedroom.

In contrast to this, the radio can be heard all over the Skjern apartment. The maid, too, can hear what is going on, she can even have a look at her boss' morning exercise (Fig. 29-30). (This is

something that will change as Mads takes his family to higher steps on the social ladder. The separations, also shown in the setting of their homes, come to resemble the Varnæs way of life more and more).

In this way the *audiovisual definition* of *chosen parts* and their *connections* - or as we have called them: the *separation and combinations* - characterizes these people socially and psychologically. This, too, is what can be done by editing. Are things and characters shown or brought together through direct cuts , or in pans or other uncut camerawork? The last part of the scene with Mads and Ingeborg shows them in a separation series of shots (like Fig. 38-39) in the strict sense, as defined by Sharff; and in accordance with what I have written about the scene as a description of an "open" home, it is true that their dialogue becomes a peak of intimacy. At this moment "pure" separation is embedded within the larger pattern of separation and combination that I have been trying to develop from Sharff's concept.[10] Principles of editing and details of camera work give each of the three scenes their special internal qualities, and across the sequence as a whole these features are brought together in an interplay of variations which gives the audience further story potentials to play with.

Editing another, artificial world

Not only during the production process (shooting), but also in putting bits and pieces together in the editing process (that even if they have been filmed as a kind of print from reality, are *not* reality

[5] This larger scale of combination Sharff would probably call 'orchestration'.

any more) - films are, in Murch's words, "no longer 'earthbound' in time and space".[6] Murch goes on to say that if "we could make films only by assembling all the elements simultaneously, as in the theater, the range of possible subjects would be comparatively narrow." Instead, he points out : "Discontinuity is King". This is a central fact during film production, the actual shooting, and in the light of the reflections on editing above I would like to stress this fact of discontinuity: Neither in production, nor in result is film material to be confused with, understood as, or interpreted in the same way as the real world we experience in our everyday life. The world of audiovisual media are constructions of meaning. The discontinuity[11] opens up a range of possible combinations in the finished productions, and consequently for the experience of the edited material.

In a number of examples we have seen that editing with its separation, selection, and combination builds even "smaller" dynamics of space and time, and does this in a variety of ways. This, together with Murch's way of foregrounding discontinuity, can serve as a reminder that when working with film theory and analysis it is important at all times to keep in mind that 1) the very material - 2) the production of it[8] - and 3) the result - are drawn or cut away, so to speak, from the continuous time and space of reality.

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6 Murch 1995, p. 7.

7 Discontinuity in this case meaning: not following the unbroken and homogeneous nature of time and space of the real world. And just as it is possible during shooting to make takes in any order of time and space, it is possible to edit them in any order.

8 For instance the selection of elements of reality to be recorded/filmed in order to *become* raw material; or drawings (for animations), or computer generated material, etc.

This is a clarification of the definition of film as art(ificial) product, where the rules or modes of time and space experience in the real world has been suspended. In their place we get: rules of the medium itself. Maybe rhetorics of audiovisual media. Or we might say: possibilities of exploring or finding rules and rhetorics 1) through the practice of cinematic production, and 2) through analytical/theoretical reflection of potentials in the production of audiovisual meaning.[9]

The important thing is not to confuse the way we experience and navigate in the real world with how we understand and interpret film. Fundamentally, editing is one of the things that separates film

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[9] A comment as an attempt to position my own work in relation to what recently has been labeled Grand Theory and met with criticism by people (most prominently David Bordwell and Noël Carroll) representing so-called Post Theory: Grand Theory has been dominated by attempts to develop all encompassing film theories inspired by and subsuming it under frameworks taken from fields like semiotics, psychoanalysis, Marxism, postmodernism, cultural studies, schools of philosophy. After having done research in such areas as philosophical problems of film theory, narration and classical American film style, Bordwell and Carroll in their articles in "Post Theory" suggest that researchers at least for a period leave the grandeur of shaping the medium after ideas about how the human race and the world are to be understood, sociologically, psychologically, culturally, philosophically, politically - as a whole. Instead, they prefer "piecemeal theory" or "middle-level research", taking up more focused problems. This sounds very reasonable to me. What may be a little surprising, is that their "programme" looks like a return to detailed analysis and theorizing that has been going on "behind" the barricades of the grand theorists (and, in fact, instead of a programme we may call it an attempt to stimulate people to do a lot of very diversified research precisely without being restrained by preconceived ideas). In this way I think I can say that although I have been inspired by at least some of the "big guys" (like Metz, the semiologist, or Hjelmslev, or Freud, himself, and others...) almost all of my production exermplifies of what Bordwell calls "in depth inquiry" (Post Theory, p. 29). This is because, in my opinion, it doesn't make much sense to fantasize about grand perspectives, if you don't do your homework and try to understand the aesthetics and the rhetoric of the cinematic language. So, in many places around the world this kind of work has already been going on for many years.

from any link to the experience of everyday life. You can't cut the world - but it is perfectly possible to cut and edit a film.

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Editing in the depth of the surface
A few basic principles of graphic editing

Lars Bo Kimergård

The history of film editing can be roughly divided into three major steps:

> From the single shot of the very first films - the only 'editing' being the timing of the action to take place in the short time of approximately one minute between the beginning and the end of the take - to the 'photoplay' where several single shots of this kind were joined together, some of them with texts in between.
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> Secondly, the step towards different ways of establishing time and space, the so-called continuity principle, with the actual footage being shot *discontinuously* - in numerous pieces, from different angles and in varying scales. This principle evolved mainly in the United States in the first decade of this century, but soon was adapted by most film producing countries.
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> And finally the step towards the breaking up of these conventions, with an emphasis on the graphic qualities of the picture at the expense of clear time and space configurations.

It is, however, impossible to assign an exact date, year or even decade to these various steps. They somehow exist simultaneously. For instance, you still see films made in only one shot. Alfred Hitchcock's *The Rope* (1948) is a feature film example (with the well known fact to be added that the film of course *does* contain a few hidden cuts – each reel runs only about 11 minutes), but single shot

films can be seen even on the MTV channel, one of the heaviest users and developers of the new editing style. The Massive Attack music video *Unfinished Sympathy*, from the album *Blue Line* (1991), is made as one long steadycam ride that follows the band as they stroll down the street.

Correspondingly, the breaking up of continuity conventions, the last step in our three step history of film editing, is far from new. Some of these *new* principles date back to the European avant-garde movements of the twenties, others to the French 'Nouvelle Vague' of the sixties, and documentary aesthetics, of course, have always been less compulsory and conservative, probably because this genre doesn't feel the tight limits of a narrative structure. And even though this third step is the latest, the continuity tradition is still in the best of health. The vast majority of films are still edited according to continuity principles[1], and the growing school of new editing will probably co-exist with classical continuity well into the future, maybe even forever.

When a film is edited according to the rules of continuity, you will know exactly where everybody is and how the different persons, locations and props are situated in relation to one another, and there are no explicit time lapses - no elliptic editing. It is important to remember, however, that even though the continuity system is meant to give the impression of a coherent time and space, it is - de facto - only an illusion. Even Hollywood continuity classics such as

[1] Definitions and terms on traditional continuity editing are used as in Bordwell and Thompson: *Film Art*.

Casablanca (Curtiz, 1942) and *The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, 1941) manipulate time and space quite heavily. Likewise, if you try to make a map of the labyrinth in Orson Welles' Kafka adaptation *The Trial* (Welles, 1963), you'll see that this is not at all possible with real three-dimensional space as your yardstick.

The important thing, however, is that time and space relations appear to be solid. Cuts are not used explicitly, unless you have a dissolve or a wipe as a filmic punctuation between scenes, but implicitly, without attracting the spectator's attention to the cut itself. The spectator thus makes a kind of functional, cognitive map of filmic space and doesn't care that editing only makes the film *look* right and doesn't reflect a true space. And this holds true for the experience of time in film as well.

The development of a new editing style

This article will present some of the editing principles *after* the third step. The questioning of the continuity style started off as avant-garde, but has now entered mainstream film and television 'language', first through MTV and other youth programmes. Then it entered the world of television jingles, mainly in sport programmes, and now it is used in widely distributed TV-series such as *Homicide* and *The Kingdom*, in features like Woody Allen's *Husbands and Wives*, Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves*, not to mention the films made as part of the *Dogma 95* project. In the documentary genre, not only directors such as Jørgen Leth and Jacob Thuesen have had great success in employing the new style[2], also TV-

[2] As I have described in the article *Fresh Cuts*; DOX no. 12, 1997.

documentaries and docu-soaps are now using this aesthetic approach.

As a first principle, this new kind of editing is based, not on explaining the spatial relations as is the case with the continuity system, but on using different visual and auditive tricks to make the audience relate to a two-dimensional picture surface, thus not missing the explanation of the third dimension.
The American film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson[3] list four different relations between two shots joined together:

1. Graphic Relations
2. Rhythmic Relations
3. Spatial Relations
4. Temporal Relations

According to Bordwell, graphic and rhythmic relations are present in any kind of editing, whereas spatial and temporal relations are irrelevant in more abstract forms of non-narrative film.

Another way of treating the four relations would be to suggest that the graphic and spatial relations both have to do with the picture, while the rhythmic and temporal relations have to do with time.

In traditional continuity editing, spatial and temporal relations serve to tell the story, explaining where we are and what is happening at any given moment. The two other sorts of relations are often thought of as a kind of polish, making the nice and meaningful flow of shots look even better.

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[3] In Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*.

Conversely, in the style of new editing, spatial and temporal relations are given a lower priority. Consequently, the graphic and rhythmic relations get more important, but even though the style to some people may appear more abstract, the films are still narrative.

Changing emphasis to the two-dimensionally based, graphic editing principles, new style editing allows itself to overrule two of the most basic continuity principles: it breaks the 180 degree rule and makes jump-cuts.

But this is not easy at all, it's not just something you do. The continuity convention is so established not only as a construction principle but in our conception of a film that when you chose to ignore it, it's important that you make your own contract with the audience. When using the continuity system it's enough to 'refer to the law', but when you don't recognize this basic law, you have to make a special contract with your audience - every time.

A guide to two-dimensional editing

There are two basic ways to make the audience accept violations of the continuity system. Either you build up a whole new set of rules or you distract spectators to make them overlook that you are breaking well-worn continuity rules.

Eye-scanning

The principle of eye-scanning is by far the most important feature among graphic editing principles.

It's based on the fact that the human eye is pre-cognitively attracted to whatever 'it' finds interesting at a given moment. As in

normal, minute-to-minute perception, when looking at a picture or a film, the eyes move in saccadic patterns, relatively consistent from individual to individual, even considered over time. This is a pre-cultural aspect of visual perception, a bottom-up process[4], and is thus something we do involuntarily.

If you show a picture of a human being to someone, his interest is most likely to lie in something like the question ”who is this?”, and the eye will travel directly to the face of the person. If it's a close-up, and thus already a face, the eye will go directly for the eyes and after that for the mouth, the ears or other recognizable facial elements. All the different elements that attract the eye are called eye-catchers.

One of the most powerful eye-catchers is movement. Other important eye-catchers are contrast, bright colours or objects with a clear-cut meaning that can be used in the construction of the narrative logic or in the description of characters.

Movement

Movement, as mentioned above, is one of the most potent seducers of the eye. In the 'animal part' of our brain, we turn to see every movement, to check whether it involves some kind of danger - a predator in the jungle, a car on the road. Scanning the film frame, the same thing happens. If a person suddenly makes a fast move

[4] A bottom up-process is a fast, involuntary operation, whereas a top down-process is guided by expectations and assumptions, and therefore tends to be more conscious.

with the hand, our eyes are glued to the movement until it stops or another stronger movement takes over. Accordingly, there are basically two ways of using movement in editing.

A sudden, but relatively short movement can move the spectator's eyes where you want them, and you can cut to a shot with the eye-catcher at approximately the same spot.

If the movement is longer, you have to consider its speed and direction – i.e. to get the movement to flow from one shot to the other.

Meaning

An object always has a certain meaning, either for the narrative or in the description of a person or a location. When a man suddenly reaches for a gun, our attention obviously follows the hand because of the movement. But if we know that our hero has a gun, and he finds himself in a dangerous situation, our eyes check out the gun even without the movement.

Imagine an untidy nursery, with toys lying scattered on the floor. Between all the toys, there is a teddy bear, which a child got for Christmas two scenes ago. This is what we are looking at.

Contrast

Eye-catching based on contrast is not only a question of light versus darkness. It's obvious that our eyes are attracted by the little black dot in the snow or the flashlight in the midst of the trees in the big dark forest. But contrast can also be applied more generally. If all but one of the elements in a picture are alike, the

one sticking out - in size, colour, light, texture or any other quality - will surely catch our eye.

Colours

You turn your head when you see bright red or yellow, nature's own alarm colours. They are used to signify danger. Some animals or flowers use them to warn other animals, since if they are eaten, it doesn't help the brightly coloured entity that the predator dies afterwards.

These colours catch our eyes before the message reaches our consciousness, and only at a subsequent level, our cultural background will add a conventional, coded meaning such as red for love and yellow for cowardice.

But there are also other eye-catchers in colours. For instance, you can apply the principles of contrast to colour, when a brightly coloured object appears in a pastel-shaded environment. Or more extremely, only one colour in a black and white film, such as the little red girl in *Schindler's List* (Spielberg, 1993) or the red smoke in Kurosawa's *High and Low* (1963).

All these elements should be considered relatively. In a red room with red furniture, as in *Cries and Whispers* (Bergman, 1972), the alarm colour is white, since red has become the general colour backdrop. In a panicking crowd, a calm person is the one who attracts our attention.

Focus

If every picture element but one is out of focus, our eyes will be caught by the part in focus. Then if the focus changes so that a

different part of the picture gets in focus, our eyes will migrate almost instantly to the new center of focus. If a new defocused object enters the screen, our eyes will try to focus on it, and if the camera doesn't try to do the same and the object remains in a central position, we get annoyed. In good films this is rare. Either the object (or person) is irrelevant and just passes through the picture, or it is meant to take over focus as soon as it enters the frame.

Tolerance in time

But how do you decide when to apply the above mentioned rules? The answer is quite pragmatic. To find a strong eye-catcher at a certain point in a shot is relatively easy. There is little difference between the behavior of human eyes. All you have to do is watch the screen and notice where you have your eyes - everybody else's eyes will be there too.

There is always, most editors will claim, one specific frame - and nowhere else! - to place a cut if it's to be perfect. Of course, it depends on a lot of things, for instance what the next shot is like, and certainly also the rhythm of the whole sequence as such. But one thing is the perfect frame, the perfect split second for a smooth cut, another the tolerance for an unacceptably bad one. This tolerance is much greater within traditional continuity editing than within new style editing.

When you have looked at a picture for a while, your eyes get bored and start to move about to find new places of interest. This process is not very consistent from individual to individual. The

eyes of the spectator will still concentrate on eyes and facial expressions, but now this activity is not so synchronized any more. The eye-catcher is becoming weaker. This is what you use for instance in shot/reverse-shot editing and eyeline matches, but it's not enough to carry over a jump-cut. Here you have to introduce a new and strong eye-catcher to divert attention from the jump-cut. Almost all eye-catchers start off strong and grow weaker, as spectators get used to their presence.

This means that tolerance towards editing on strong eye-catchers is quite small. In a case where your eye-catcher is a movement that has to continue in the next shot, your tolerance could be down to one single frame. Whereas a simple dialogue scene edited in shot/reverse-shot can be cut almost at any point without breaking the concentration on the dialogue. That a cut in this case will be acceptable anywhere is not to say that it cannot be better or worse, and getting the right rhythm into a shot/reverse-shot scene is quite an art of its own.

Distractions

The other basic way to cover up that you are not using the traditional continuity convention is to distract the spectator every time you break the rules. Distraction works almost like a magic trick. The magician attracts your attention to an innocent thing, while the 'magic' is going on in his other hand. In film making, you can make the viewer think of something else, while breaking the rules of continuity. The distraction can be visual or it can be auditive.

White flash editing

One of the most used visual features is called white-flash-editing. The distraction is a short white fade-in/fade-out or sometimes just one or two white frames between the shots. It is, as most tricks in graphic editing, not a new trick. But in traditional editing it is mostly used in environments where white flashes occur naturally: lightning in a thunderstorm or the flash of a photographer's camera, for instance in the beginning of *Highlander* (Mulcahy, 1986), where a helicopter ride around a boxing ring at the Madison Square Garden ends with a close-up of Christopher Lambert amidst the audience. To make the transition from the helicopter to the tripod, a flash from a boxing spectator's camera beside Lambert covers up what would have been a jump-cut.

In other films, especially music videos and commercials, a longer, more dynamic fade to white (and back) is used, referring to the over-exposed frames at the end of a shot that people mainly know from Super-8 home movies.

Swish-pan

Making a very quick pan blurs the picture so that you lose any sense of place, giving you the opportunity to cut to a totally different location than where you started. If you look attentively at a piece of film where a violent pan starts, you'll notice that there's only one frame between the clear and the blurred picture. This means that it's possible to cut from anywhere in the blur to any picture, or from any picture to the blur. Sometimes the trick is made with a short dissolve between two blurry frames.

This is not a new trick either. One of the most famous places it's used is *Some Like it Hot* (Wilder, 1959). Marilyn Monroe is trying to seduce Tony Curtis at a yacht and at the same time Jack Lemmon is dancing rumba with the actual owner of the yacht in a restaurant ashore. A distance of several miles is covered only by panning the camera.

But there is a difference between this swish-pan and the use of swish-pan in for instance Lars von Trier's *The Kingdom*. In *Some Like it Hot* and Hollywood-like productions the swish-pan always moves left or right according to the continuity of space. The pan from the yacht to the dance hall is in the opposite direction than the earlier wipe from shore to yacht and thus perfectly in concordance with the shore/ship relation as it's explained to us.
In *The Kingdom (Part 1)* there is a confusing morning-conference where the camera is swish-panning from person to person. Here, the swish-pans are used to cover up the breaking of the 180 degree rule and there is even one special cut where two pans cut together move in opposite directions, one left-to-right, the other right-to-left.

The sound-bridge

Sound is, however, one of the most frequently used distractions. Obviously in MTV productions the music plays a very conspicuous part and loud music seemingly makes almost everything look good. To pick up on David Bordwell, you could say that the rhythmic relation takes over.
But there is also another, more specific use of sound: the sound-bridge. In traditional films, the slam of a door, someone's blowing

his or her nose or the shot of a gun often carries a bad cut from one shot to the next. In new style editing, these sounds are added without any connection to the story. Cartoon-like sounds such as SSSWWWHISSS or WHOOOOWHH are added, almost as a kind of auditive white flashes.

Structure

In many films based on two-dimensional editing, there is a tendency towards more cross-cutting than in most films. In continuity based films, cross-cutting is mainly used to show that two actions are taking place simultaneously, but in new style editing this is far from always true. To start in the extreme, music videos often have two, three or more layers from totally different worlds. One might be a narrative structure with actors, another the musicians on a moody location, all mixed up with documentary footage from a concert and so on, with an abstract connection only through the music and lyrics.

This type of woven structure has been taken over by some of the new style documentaries. For instance, in *Heart and Soul*, Tómas Gislason's portrait of Danish documentarist and poet Jørgen Leth, in one scene Leth is talking about the similarities between making films and writing poetry. There are shots from three different interviews intercut with Leth reading his own poetry and pictures of the carnival in Haiti. And the interviews are shot in different qualities, and, of course, intermingled with the rest of the film, as though it was one long plait – a 'plait structure' rather than the 'pearl-on-a-string structure' that most documentaries employ.

It's difficult to say whether it's the freedom from spatial relations that gives the possibility of making this structure or the wish to make a kind of structure that makes the style necessary…

In new style fiction, however, the narrative structure is normally quite ordinary. Fictional TV-series, of course, may have a plait-like structure, but this is only on a scene-to-scene level, which is a general rule rather than an exception in soaps and series.

But ”why this new style?”, a lot of people might ask. Isn't continuity editing good enough? These questions sound like the ones posed to the first modernist painters. Weren't realistic paintings based on the conventions of central perspective good enough?

Breaking down conventions gives a freedom to express feelings in different ways. Carl Th. Dreyer once wrote[5] that he was tired of the fact that the grass was always green. That reality in itself isn't art, only when it's made into a style. I don't think that the confusion at the morning-conference in *The Kingdom* would have been the same with continuity editing, nor the insecurity of Bess in *Breaking the Waves.*

[5] In “Farvefilm og farvet film”, in *Om Filmen* (Gyldendal, 1964).

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The urban inferno. On the æsthetics of Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*

Martin Weinreich

In the USA of the 1970's, a new generation of film directors emerges, generally designated New Hollywood Cinema, The American New Wave, or The Brat Pack.[1] A common trait shared by these directors - Robert Altman, Francis Ford Coppola, Arthur Penn, Martin Scorsese, and others - is that they all achieve an extension and vitalization of the language of film by making personal and modernistic films. As opposed to the American filmmakers of earlier times, they have university degrees and possess knowledge of film theory and the film traditions of other countries. They are particularly inspired by the French New Wave[2] and the films made by this movement in the sixties, with their modernist qualities.

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[1] For a more thorough discussion of this generation of filmmakers, see Michael Pye and Lynda Myles: *The Movie Brats; How the Film Generation Took Over Hollywood* (New York 1979).

[2] Term coined by the journalist Françoise Girard, who launched the expression *la nouvelle vague* in the French newspaper *L'Express* on August 23rd 1957. The term 'The New Wave' covers a group of rather diverse French film directors, all of whom began making movies at about 1960. They had in common the fact that they all made their debuts at this time, and that they all wished to develop film as an art form under the slogan 'The Camera as Pen'. They wanted to break with the film industry's standardized film language and use the camera as personally as the writer used his pen. Directors generally thought of as belonging to this New Wave include: Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Alain Resnais, and Jacques Demy.

Modernism is a paradigm which by now carries a lot of different connotations, within the sphere of literature as well as film. Thus, in film history, both the German expressionist films (Murnau, Wiene, and others), the Russian montage films (Eisenstein, Vertov, and others), and the surrealist films, for instance Buñuel, are comprised under the designation *modernistic*. But most often, however, the expression is used in connection with the experimentalist European films of the 60's and 70's, such as Jean-Luc Godard's *A Bout de Souffle* (*Breathless*), 1960, Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up*, 1966, and Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, 1960. These films care less about a progressing continuity and are often experimental and fragmented in form. In contrast to Hollywood's traditional focus on outer tension, the European films dare to take as their starting point the psychological and existential problems of the individual in a modern world.

When the American directors of the 70's begin to make films inspired by modern European films, their productions are financed by the big Hollywood companies, which is why there is not much room for the formal experimentation that is present in their European precursors. The films are - as is the case for commercial films in general - still oriented towards an audience; they don't have room for wild stylistic and narrative experiments, such as intellectual montage[3], found in European modernist films. But the American films of the 70s still deal with modernist problems.

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[3] According to tradition there are two primary modes of editing: analytic montage and intellectual montage. The former designates the ordinary mode of narration, continuity editing, which is used in Hollywood films, whereas the latter designates the type of editing that the Russian montage- directors, e.g. Sergei Eisenstein, invented and applied. Here the juxtaposition of a series of images is used to create an abstract idea not present in any one image. An

Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, which won the 1976 *Palme d 'Or* at Cannes, is one of the finest examples of this subdued modernism which we find in the American movies of the 70s. The film was written by Paul Schrader[4] and stars Robert de Niro – an actor Scorsese has worked with often – in the all-important lead role as the taxi driver Travis Bickle.

In this essay I intend to look at urbanity, modernity, and modernism in *Taxi Driver*. My focus will be on how the problems of modernity are expressed through the aesthetics of the film. I will look at the use of style, narration, and editing in an expressive and modernistic context.

Urbanity, Modernity, and Modernism

Taxi Driver is a city film. It is about the city and human existence in the city – about how the city and the culture influence human life. The cityscape of *Taxi Driver* is not idyllic; it is a city dominated by unrest, noise, dirt and suffering, by a disintegrating culture. A city in which man is lonely and alienated. A city where nature is absent. A city modeled on Babylon rather than heavenly Jerusalem. The city as an inferno.

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example is Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* (1924) in which intellectual montage is used metaphorically, as when he cuts from the real plane of the film - the shooting of the strikers - to the slaughter of cattle. In another instance, an orange is being squeezed as a metaphor for the capitalist exploitation of the workers.

[4] Apart from *Taxi Driver*, Paul Schrader has written the scripts of many famous films, such as *Raging Bull* (1980), also for Scorsese, and Sidney Pollack's *The Yakuza* (1975). Schrader has also directed a number of movies himself: *Blue Collar* (1978), *Hardcore* (1979), *American Gigolo* (1980), *Mishima* (1986) and others, and he has written on film theory in *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (University of California Press, 1972) and in articles on film noir.

The city is the birthplace of modernity. By modernity I understand the historical upheavals that via industrialization and urbanization have taken place since the mid-18th century. Modernity belongs to an epoch. But at the same time modernity is a standard. Baudelaire[5] defines modernity as the transitory and fleeting, which is opposed to the eternal and constant. Terms that could just as well be applied to the city. Modernity can be viewed as a process which breaks forth and shows itself in urban environments. For the city is before anything else the environment of the modern, and as such a consequence of modernity. Urbanity and modernity are intertwined notions. But modernity is also bound up with the break-down of values in general, with Nietzsche's negation of God. The city is transitory, the place of the ever-changing. And in an unstable world stability is absent. The individual has to create a meaning himself. God is dead, and the only certainty is uncertainty. *Taxi Driver* is part of modernity. It is about experiences of modernity, about the existence of the human subject in the modern city.

That *Taxi Driver* is set in the city and deals with city existence is no coincidence. The individual in the city is something Scorsese has portrayed throughout his career. Apart from *Taxi Driver*, especially his first film *Who's That Knocking at my Door* (1967), the breakthrough film *Mean Streets* (1973), the boxing-film *Raging Bull* (1980), and *After Hours* (1986), a film about the city as a Kafkaesque labyrinth, all deal with city themes. Scorsese's business is the conflict

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[5] Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* (1863) in *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris 1982), page 553.

between the individual and urbanity, modernity, and the loss of values. To delineate these themes his films must necessarily take place in the city after it has become modern.

It is important here to distinguish between modernity and modernism. Modernism is a concept which, with its "-ism" suffix, is a typological classification directed entirely towards products with an aesthetic dimension. This is a complete opposite of the notion of modernity, which primarily designates a period in time. It is possible to discern ties between modernism and modernity; modernism is about experiences of modernity, such as urbanity, industry, and technology. It is a characteristic of modernism that it takes conditions of uncertainty and asymmetry seriously. Reality is perceived as split, man is alienated and objectified. From these conditions the necessity arises for the modern individual to fill the void and create a new order. Modernism is further defined by its idioms, in that it ordinarily attempts to describe the problems of modernity in its aesthetics and form. One definition of modernism is found in Brian McHale's book *Postmodernist Fiction*.[6] Here modernism and postmodernism are compared. The author's main point is that what separates the two types of fiction is the fact that modernism utilizes themes and strategies to raise epistemological questions about the meaning of life, and our understanding of the world. In contrast to this, postmodernism raises ontological questions such as: which world is this, and which of my selves is in this world? In *Taxi Driver* a lot of epistemological questions are asked through the main character Travis, such as, How should I

[6] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York 1993).

understand reality, What's my role in it, and What's the meaning of life? The pivotal point of the film concerns existing in the world, which, according to McHale's theories, makes it a good example of a modernist film.

The homogeneous and the heterogeneous

The main character of *Taxi Driver* finds himself in a city, a country, an environment to which he feels he doesn't belong. The film depicts Travis' experience of the world via its modes of expression, such as narrativity, cinematography, and sound.

The city as we see it in *Taxi Driver* contains all the negative aspects of the modern city: noise, chaos, restlessness, poverty, loneliness, the mass of people, and rapidity. This is shown already in the first image of the film, where Travis emerges from a cloud of smoke, as from an inferno. Typical qualities of modernity such as fragmentation, emptiness, alienation, and senselessness are in the city as depicted in the film.

Like the city, Travis' apartment is not a nice place to be. It is small, ugly, and claustrophobic, with kitchen, living room, and bedroom contained in the same room. It is messy and city noises are continually heard, passing cars and especially fighting neighbours. Travis cannot find peace even in his own home, the city intrudes even here. The windows are barred, and Travis is as imprisoned by his problems and thoughts inside as he is outside.

The same is true of the culture of the city, which is also negatively described. It consists to a large degree of crime, drugs,

prostitution, insanity, porn theaters, violence and suchlike. There is the constant, pervading noise of arguments, sirens, and honking cars. The police are conspicuously absent.

Characteristically, the family, that pillar of culture and society, is also disintegrating. Not a single ordinary family is present in the film. Iris (Jodie Foster) has run away from home at the age of eleven, and Travis is totally cut off from any family relation, excepting a few lying postcards he occasionally mails to his parents. Culture is disintegrating. The symbolic order, that which holds culture together, has become destabilised. Laws, norms, and values are disappearing. Travis' actions are an attempt at creating order, making a difference in a world where everything has become undifferentiated.

Georges Bataille[7] contrasts two concepts: the heterogeneous order and the homogeneous order. The heterogeneous order refers to uselessness, dissipation, the irrational, kinds of sexual ecstasy. Within the heterogeneous order intensity is pursued, the intensity which is reached through the crossing of cultural boundaries, sexual perversions, and exploration of limits as for instance playing with death. The opposite of this is the homogeneous order. This is the edifying order, where things are produced. Here logic is subordinated to utility. In *Taxi Driver*, culture as we see it in the streets, has gone from a homogeneous to a heterogeneous order. This is a development that Travis does not like.

Aesthetics, narration, and expression

[7] Georges Bataille, *Den Hovedløse* (Anis, 1984).

The protagonist and narrator of the film is Travis. We hear him narrate (writing his diary[8]) and only very rarely is the camera in a room where he is not. In fact, this happens only twice[9], in a scene showing Sport (Harvey Keitel) dealing drugs from his doorstep, and in the scene of Sport seducing Iris. And these two sequences could be construed as happening solely in Travis' imagination. The urban inferno is really a personal inferno.

So the camera follows Travis, he and his perceptions are important. An example of this is the first scene in the night cafeteria, when Travis joins the other taxi drivers. The whole room is shown in total, but when Travis sits down on a chair he is followed by the camera, which doesn't zoom in. It merely tilts half a meter downwards, because he is sitting down. He controls the camera. The film shows us his very subjective view of the city, and how he is obsessed and hurt by it. We perceive what he perceives, his experiences become ours. And the music, the colours, and the restless, floating camera join forces to construct an image of the city, seen through him, as hell on earth. This is established right at the beginning, for the film opens with a close-up of Travis' face, right after we have seen the taxi emerge from the smoke. Thereafter there is a point-of-view shot[10] though the windshield,

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[8] Protagonists keeping diaries are known from many movies, e.g. Robert Bresson *Journal d´un Curé de Campagne* (*Diary of a Country Priest*) 1950.

[9] I discount the scenes from the presidential campaign, as Travis during these is sitting in his taxi, looking in.

[10] "Point-of-view (POV) shot: A shot filmed at such a camera angle that an object or an action appears to be seen from a particular actor's viewpoint." Ephraim Katz, *The Macmillian International Film Encyclopedia* (New York 1994), p.1086. The most common way of doing this is by starting with a shot of a person in a medium close-up looking towards something. Then a cut is made to

and we see what he sees. But the city we see is in slow motion, it is unreal and dreamlike. It is not the real city we see, but Travis' experience of the city that is illustrated. The city of the film works expressively as an image of Travis' mounting paranoia.

The aesthetics and narrativity of the film rather resembles a dream. In general the editing is slow, with a lot of dissolves instead of cuts. This dream-like quality is something that Scorsese purposely aims at. He explains:[11]

> Much of Taxi Driver arose from my feeling that movies are really a kind of dream-state, or like taking dope. And the shock of walking out of the theatre into broad daylight can be terrifying. I watch movies all the time and I am also very bad at waking up. The film was like that for me - that state of being almost awake.

In the film this is advanced by its constant blend of the very realistic and the expressive. The film is narrated both with a camera outside of Travis, and a camera within Travis, but both pass on Travis' experiences and feeling to the viewer. About this Kolker writes:[12]

> … the world created by *Taxi Driver* exists only within its own space, a space which is formed by the state of mind of its central actor, in that strange double perception in which the viewer sees the world the way the character sees it and sees the character himself, thereby permitting both proximity and separation.

In a way the film is very realistic, it hasn't been shot in any artificial settings, but in the real world. When you watch it you get the feeling that the city life it depicts is real. But at the same time, the

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what he sees, e.g. a beautiful woman. Finally, to emphasize the point, you can cut back to the person. Now he is perhaps smiling.

[11] Martin Scorsese, *Scorsese on Scorsese* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), p. 54.

[12] Robert Phillip Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman*. (Oxford University Press, 1988; orig. pub. 1980), pp. 186-87.

realistic ingredients, such as the taxi in the first scene of the film, work expressively, as it runs in slow motion. From the presentation of the taxi a cut is made, as mentioned above, to the eyes of Travis watching the street. The eyes are filmed at normal speed. They are looking back and forth, as if they are seeing something. In the next shot we see what Travis has been watching, the street, recorded in slow motion. This could indicate that what Travis sees is what is shown in slow motion, but it is not quite that simple. For the taxi in the first shot was also in slow motion, and often Travis is seen moving at that speed, perhaps to emphasize a contrast to the other people, who move at ordinary speed, as for instance in the night cafeteria scenes, or perhaps merely to lend an ominous feeling of incidents about to happen in the film.

In *Taxi Driver* there is both an outer and an inner expression, both an explicit and an implicit narrator, but the point is that the film as a whole, through the editing, is quietly woven together into Travis' personal experience of the city.

In the editing of *Taxi Driver* a lot of attention is given to P.O.V. The editing is mainly orchestrated through P.O.V. shots with the protagonist Travis as starting point, but a surprising number of P.O.V. shots from the viewpoint of other characters of the film are in evidence. In this film, perception and psyche are bound up with the multitude of the city, connected to modernity's emphasis on the individual's perception and the individual's severance from former social taxonomy. The changing P.O.V.s confuse and enhance the feeling of fragmentation, of paranoia. An example of the changing

viewpoint takes place outside the cafeteria, when Travis is about to talk to Wizard. A black man comes walking down the street and stares at Travis, who stares back. In this scene, Scorsese cuts between two different subjective cameras, and the whole thing is in slow motion. After this "evil stare" exchange, it is easy to understand Travis' hatred of "the scum".

Bernard Herrmann's[13] music underscores the feeling of the city as fragmented and threatening. The music abruptly changes from beautiful, lyrical passages, and deep, ominous tones that keep reappearing. It is difficult to explain with words, but the music perfectly models the different themes and sequences of the film. It supports the action and creates a frightening atmosphere of something threatening about to break through to the surface.

Travis in the City

We do not know much about our protagonist, Travis Bickle. We hear little of his background, who he is and where he is from. Most of the little we hear we are told in the first actual scene of the film, the introductory scene, so to speak, where Travis is looking for work. Here we are told that he is having trouble sleeping at night (an indication of psychological or other problems), that he has been a soldier in Vietnam, that he is prepared to drive anywhere at any time, which gives us the feeling that he has not got much of a social life, something that is confirmed as the action progresses. Later in

[13] Bernard Herrmann (1911–1975) composed the scores of a number of famous films, including *Citizen Kane* (1941), *Vertigo* (1958), and *Psycho* (1960), but the soundtrack of *Taxi Driver* was to be his last. He died on the night of its completion.

the film we learn that he has got a family somewhere, but that he is utterly out of contact with them.

Travis becomes a taxi driver, and we quickly learn that he is the epitome of the isolated city-man, lonely and incapable of communicating with the world around him. This is also why he keeps a diary: to have at least somebody to communicate with, even if that is just himself. There are many examples of this lack of ability to communicate, e.g. the scene when he approaches the father figure Wizard for advice, and trouble arises from the fact that they are talking about two different things. All in all, it is not very strange that Wizard at the end of the conversation says "What do I know, I don't even know what you're talking about."

A part of Travis' problem is purely linguistic; in the majority of the longer conversations in the film some linguistic misunderstandings are present. For example, in the introductory scene. Travis does not know what 'moonlighting' means, and in the scene with Betsy in the cafeteria, neither understands what the other means by 'organize'.

As already shown, Travis is a person with severe modernity problems. His loneliness and ostracism are filmically depicted, for instance in the scene with the other taxi drivers and the dialogue-scene with Betsy, in both of which he is sitting alone, with the thick line of a window frame between him and the people he is talking to. It is no accident, either, that in the dialogue scene with Betsy he is practically always shot alone, while she is filmed over his shoulder, so that when he is in the picture, he is alone, but whenever she is visible, there are two persons.

Modernistic aesthetics

Above I have presented some examples of how the aesthetics of *Taxi Driver* - with a starting point in the portrayal of Travis' personal experience of the world - are built up around the themes of modernity within the film. It is interesting that the aesthetics of the film, on many levels, more or less explicitly communicate modernity problems. Of course, this is done in a more subdued manner than is the case for instance with Godard, but there are also examples of a more explicit modernism in the aesthetics of *Taxi Driver*. In closing I will present three examples of how Travis' modernity trouble is described via the editing of the film. The first example is the series of quick, almost rhythmical shots of flashing lights seen after Travis has been thrown out of the campaign office. To fully understand the examples it is necessary to explore the relation in which they appear.

For Travis the world is divided into two groups, "the scum" and "the people". He hates "the scum": the dirt, the whores, the gays. He wants to be what is commonly associated with decent and normal, he wants to belong to "the people". As he says: "I believe that someone should become a person like other people." He tries to fit in with 'the people' by taking Betsy (Cybill Shepherd) out; she works for the presidential candidate Palentine, whose slogan is "We are the people". Travis tells about how he has seen Betsy, and has fallen for her because she is like an angel in all the dirt. Later we see him spying on her, until he is removed by a male campaign worker. The next shot of the film is of a stoplight. Travis cannot get any

further; it is understood that his life has become tangled up and that he does not know what to do. He drives around, and at a point he sees a couple kissing and observes them with interest. It is as if Travis thinks to himself, Why can they when I can't? Afterwards he drives on, and there are many quick shots of green traffic lights. We are in his head, in the movie, and while it is not explicitly shown, we and he suspect possibilities in connection with Betsy, if he dares. In this scene it is the editing that illustrates his optimism concerning his project with Betsy.

The next example is the strange dolly movement during the telephone conversation in which Betsy rejects Travis. This, too, must be seen in context.

Travis tries to court Betsy. A complete stranger, he walks into the campaign office and asks her out. All over the office are posters with the slogan "We are the people". And they are the people, as opposed to Travis, who in this scene seems strange and out of place compared with the people in the office. He is not one of 'the people'. This is also why his date with Betsy turns into a failure. He does not know what is expected of him, he has to guess. When he invites her to the cinema, everything goes wrong. He takes her to see a porno movie (some Swedish sexual education film) and she leaves the cinema in anger. Travis does not understand this, as there are many couples in the theater for this film. His standards are different from those of the rest of society. The scene in which he calls Betsy to be unequivocally told that their relationship is over, is a central one. Here the modernity problems are brought forth by not cutting to Travis, which traditionally would be done, but by

using the room as a metaphor. The camera shows us his tremendous loneliness. As he speaks on the phone, the camera on a dolly moves sideways and reveals a long, empty hallway. On top of this image we hear Travis' voice as he is being rejected. After a few seconds he hangs up, enters the picture and walks down the hallway. His life is empty, sad, and lonely, like the hallway. It is not because he is very much in love with Betsy that he falls ill and feels even worse after his rejection; rather, it is because he, and the viewer, have realised that he will never become one of 'the people'.

The final example, which is the jump-cut[14] after Travis' job interview at the beginning of the film, is tied to the narrative structure of the film.

Actually the composition of *Taxi Driver* is rather classical, structured in accordance with the "narrator-model"[15]. Through a tight structure with 'set-up' and 'pay-off' elements the film builds up tension towards the violent climax. There are many examples of this throughout the film, e.g. Travis' exit remark when he leaves the brothel for the first time, and the guard says "come back any time" and Travis answers "I will". Yes indeed!

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[14] "Jump cut: A noticeably abrupt movement of a subject on the screen, resulting either from cutting out a section of film from the middle of a shot, and joining the remaining ends together, or from stopping the camera, moving closer to the subject, and beginning to film again without changing the angle." Ephraim Katz, *The Macmillan International Film Encyclopedia*, (New York, 1994), p. 714.

[15] The narrator-model is the structure ordinarily inherent in dramatic tales, which are built up to a climax near the end. In Peter Harms Larsen`s *Faktion* (Amanda 1990) the author writes about the elements that the models consists of: "…the narrator-model is made up of the following phases: preliminary, presentation, elaboration, point-of-no-retun, conflict escalation, climax, and toning out."

The film's initial point is when Travis approaches Betsy at the campaign office and asks her out. This is when Travis passes from being a man who observes and senses to one who acts. From here everything progresses, over the break with Betsy, the inspiring meeting with the jealous husband (played by Scorsese himself), the gun purchase, the encounter with Iris, and the shooting of the Afro-American robber in the store, toward the final shoot-out of the film. Thus, the film is epic, containing a beginning, a middle, and an end, but apart from this I also think the film is cyclical. The protagonist ends up where he started, in a taxi making its way through the city, and any belief in a personal development of Travis is illusory. In the rear view mirror all his enemies and problems still lurk. This is driven home as early as one of the first shots of the film, when Travis is walking down the street after his job interview, and a jump-cut is made via a dissolve. This instance of highly untraditional editing lends a feeling of Travis walking and walking without ever getting anywhere. Something he will do throughout the entire film. After the climactic show-down Travis is seemingly restored and proclaimed a hero, but this can only be construed as irony on the part of Scorsese and Schrader. Travis will explode once more, and the film ends where it took off, with a paranoid Travis stuck in a city which he hates.

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Closing arias: Operatic montage in the closing sequences of the trilogies of Coppola and Leone

Scott MacKenzie

In this essay, I wish to re-address the ways in which one can conceptualize montage and *mise-en-scène* functioning in relation to the creation of textual meaning in the cinema. To this end, I shall address the way in which some combinations of montage and *mise-en-scène* can create a mode of visuality which can only be understood through adherence to a notion of cinematic specificity. More specifically, I shall posit that certain films contain what I shall call "operatic montage," a form of montage which manipulates temporal and spatial relations in film, typically to melodramatic ends. To undertake this analysis, I shall briefly examine the closing sequences of Sergio Leone's *The Man With No Name* or *Dollars* trilogy and Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* trilogy, both of which employ strategies of montage and *mise-en-scène* which both elongate and compress time to an extraordinary degree and, combined with the musical score, produce a visual and temporal experience–based on accentuation and distortion–which can only be found in the cinema. The style of editing employed in these films I call "operatic montage." In the case of both trilogies, the culminating scenes contain stylistic elements which have operatic qualities, reflected in the films formal elements, that cannot be simply explained in terms of the realism of *mise-en-scène* or the 'plasticity' of montage. Instead, it is the synthetic relationship between montage

and *mise-en-scène* which give these scenes their power. The closing sequences of both trilogies engage in a heightened, melodramatic quasi-realism that is typical of opera; further, the instances of "operatic montage" come at the end of films which concern themselves with *leitmotifs*–revenge, greed, fratricide, forbidden love–that can be seen as staples of operatic narrative. But, to a large degree, it is the editing strategies employed at the conclusion of these films that accentuate the operatic qualities of the narrative.

Before turning to the films of Coppola and Leone–and how their films, through a synthesis of montage and *mise-en-scène*, engage in "operatic montage"–it is important to consider the historical tension between the theorists of *mise-en-scène* and montage and the reasons why positing a synthetic relationship between the two concepts benefits us in our understanding of certain kinds of cinema. The debate over the relative importance of montage and *mise-en-scène* was a key issue in the development of classical film theory, criticism and aesthetics. This debate centered on two questions: what was the primary "building block" of the cinema; and what kind of role could the cinema play as an aesthetic object? In essence, some believed that the cinema could transform images derived from the real world in order to create something radically new ("plasticity"), while others argued that the cinema naturally reflected an ontological reality and therefore the cinema's great works should strive toward capturing this reality as truth.

Sergei Eisenstein, and others in favour of intellectual montage, argued that the construction of cinematic meaning, produced through the juxtaposition of shots, and the resulting distillation of a juxtaposition's representation, image and theme, lead from stasis to pathos, and then onto action on the part of the audience. For Eisenstein, film's ability, through dialectical montage, to create mental images was of utmost importance. Film was therefore structured dialectically in order to generate meaning in the spectator; meaning not embedded in image-the text itself, but in the collision of images through montage. Indeed, Eisenstein argued that cinematic images carried no meaning outside of their function to create a more generalized theme extending throughout a cinematic work. He defined this process as follows:

> What is involved in [. . .] an understanding of montage? In such a case, each piece exists no longer as something unrelated, but as a given particular representation of the general theme that in equal measure penetrates all the shot-pieces. The juxtaposition of these partial details in a given montage construction calls to life and forces into light that general quality in which binds together all the details into a whole, namely, into that generalized image, wherein the creator, followed by the spectator, experiences the theme. [1]

Eisenstein's theory of montage posited that the cinematic image itself was of no value as a sign related to a referent in the real world; in his eyes, the cinema could only signify through the juxtaposition of one image in collision with the next.

In contrast to such an approach, realists such as André Bazin saw the films of Charlie Chaplin, D.W. Griffith, French cinema of the 1930s and movements such as neo-realism as forms of

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[1] Sergei Eisenstein, "Word and Image" in Eisenstein, The *Film Sense*. trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, 1947), p. 11.

representation that, in a reflective manner, re-presented the reality of everyday life. If there was a problem with the realist model proposed by Bazin, it was his frequent use of the concept of "realism" as shorthand for "reality." Indeed, Bazin often blurred the distinction between mimesis and ontology: "The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-* presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction."[2] For Bazin, the possibility of the "ontological reality" of cinematic representation, as seen in the films of De Sica, Rossellini and Visconti, 'proved' his theory that a broadly defined notion of humanist progression could be attained through an essentially aesthetic strategy based on realist principles as ascribed to the cinema.

Despite the polemics of Eisenstein and Bazin, and others like Vsevolod Pudovkin and Bela Balázs–and in spite, on the one hand, of *mise-en-scène* experiments such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (US, 1948) and Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx* (UK, 1977) and, on the other, montage-based experimental films such as Bruce Conner's *A Movie* (US, 1958) and Arthur Lipsett's *Free Fall* (Canada, 1964)–the synthesis of *mise-en-scène* and montage are central to any understanding of the cinema, from Classical

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[2] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" in Bazin, *What is Cinema?* vol. 1. trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 13-14.

Hollywood film to the avant-garde. Indeed, some of the most memorable moments in the cinema have foregrounded the relationship between *mise-en-scène* and montage, to create a new representational form of time and space which compresses and distanciates time in order to accentuate certain moments of drama or suspense over others. At times, this process is used to make time come to a standstill; at others, it is used to compress many disparate events into a few key shots. In contrast, this process can also be used to stretch time to an almost unbearable degree, as can be seen in Leone's *corrida*-style shoot-outs. It is the use of montage to create these new representational forms of space and temporality–found in films as diverse as Wim Wenders' *Lightning Over Water* (West Germany/US, 1980), David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (Canada, 1983), Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America* (US, 1984) and Raoul Ruiz's *Shattered Image* (US, 1998)–which give cinema one of the key aspects of its specificity. It is important to note here what I take to be cinematic specificity: in the aforementioned films, a sense of time and place exists–where different temporal locations can exist simultaneously and where their duration can be manipulated vastly–that can only be represented through film. This is not to say that theatre, literature or even tableau paintings cannot represent time and space. Instead, it is to say that the specific forms that the process of denaturalizing time take in the cinema, through the use of *mise-en-scène* and montage, offer narrative and stylistic devices not available in other media (the split-screen would be the earliest stylistic version of this specificity).

It is to the notion of "operatic montage"–which I argue is a specific form of temporal and spatial manipulation in the cinema–that I now

wish to turn. In the films of Leone and Coppola, *mise-en-scène* and montage are combined to intensify suspense, stretch time and foreground the melodramatic conventions of their respective narratives–narratives that would otherwise seem *cliché*. The works of Coppola and Leone have been often called "operatic"–because of their style, narrative concerns, and overt use of melodrama, among other things. Coppola has often used the term himself in regards to his work; Leone, on the other hand, has likened his work more to a concerto than a Baroque opera.[3] It is important to note that Leone and Coppola are not the first directors to adapt operatic conventions to film aesthetics. Throughout the history of the cinema, many films have used the conventions of opera in a wide variety of ways, from Chuck Jones' appropriation of Rossini and Wagner in, respectively, *The Rabbit of Seville* (US, 1950) and *What's Opera, Doc?* (US, 1957) to Sally Potter's use of Puccini (and Bernard Herrmann) in *Thriller* (UK, 1979). Operatic themes and styles have also appeared in films that do not necessarily overtly quote or appropriate an operatic text *in toto*. Leone and Coppola, however, are the two contemporary directors who have self-consciously foregrounded this approach to the greatest degree, both in terms of content and style, but especially in regard to montage.

An anti-realist approach to montage plays an important role in the works of Sergio Leone. Leone's "Dollars" trilogy–*A Fistful of Dollars* (Italy, 1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (Italy, 1965), and *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (Italy, 1966)–in many ways rewrote the aesthetics and narrative of the western. While American films such as Arthur Penn's *The Left-Handed Gun* (1958), Sam Peckinpah's *Ride the High*

[3] Noël Simsolo, *Conversations avec Sergio Leone* (Paris: Stock, 1987), p. 129.

Country (1962) and John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) had begun to redefine the western narrative in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was Leone who transformed the genre, by foregrounding and exaggerating the dual roles of violence and mythology.

A Fistful of Dollars is a case in point. The film appropriates the plot of Akira Kurosawa's Samurai film *Yojimbo* (Japan, 1961); indeed, the concluding scenes of the Leone film seem to be story-boarded from Kurosawa's earlier epic. Nevertheless, in the conclusion of *A Fistful of Dollars*, we can also see the development of Leone's editing strategy; Leone segments the iconographic parts of the western hero's body–the spurs, the gun–into concise shots, cut together rapidly. This process of segmentation allows the viewer to not only see–in a tight close-up–the preparation of the men as they wait to draw, but also allows for Leone to build suspense, in a non-naturalized manner, while at the same time foregrounding the violence that is about to occur. That the style of the scene is anti-realist only adds to the intensity, as the viewer's position jumps from one iconographic image to another. The final showdown only breaks from this approach once, and it is the least effective part of the sequence. At one point, after the villain, Ramone (Gian Maria Volonté) is shot, Leone uses a point-of-view shot which attempts to represent the antagonist's vision as he falls to the ground. This shot is the least successful of the sequence, proving that the cinematic and temporal space created by the combination of *mise-en-scène* and montage is much more effective than the attempt to duplicate the visual field of a character. In his phenomenological account of the

cinema, Maurice Merleau-Ponty made a similar observation when he wrote: "If a movie wants to show us someone who is dizzy, it should not portray the interior landscape of dizziness [. . .]. We will get a much better sense of dizziness if we see it from the outside, if we contemplate that unbalanced body contorted on a rock or that unsteady step trying to adapt itself to who knows what upheaval of space."[4] Inadvertently, Leone proves this point through the strength of his montage and the relative ineffectiveness of his subjective point-of-view shot. In doing so, Leone also foregrounds the way in which, through montage, a different kind of cinematic space–one that heightens the viewer's response leading up to the showdown by creating space as a mental image in the viewer's mind–can bring about a drastically different relationship between the viewer and the actions on the screen.

Therefore, the conclusion of *A Fistful of Dollars* offers us not only the re-telling of the narrative of *Yojimbo*–itself based on a western–but also a redefinition of the aesthetics of the showdown. Here, the showdown is not played for heroism or honour; instead, it becomes a ode to a certain form of violence based on notions of vengeance. Both stylistically and thematically, then, the conclusion of *A Fistful of Dollars* shifts the western from realist narrative to a quasi-surreal melodrama.

Leone develops these concerns further in his next film; indeed, it can be considered his first truly "operatic" film. In *For a Few Dollars*

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[4] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Film and the New Psychology" in Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*. trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 58.

More, time itself plays a key role: both in terms of the narrative and in relation to the final showdown between The Man With No Name (Clint Eastwood), The Colonel (Lee Van Cleef) and El Indio (Gian Maria Volonté). As the final showdown occurs, Indio produces a pocket-watch which both gives the amount of time until the shoot-out can begin ("when the chimes end, pick up your gun and shoot me Colonel. Just try") and as a connotative link to the flashback earlier in the film–where Indio rapes the Colonel's sister, which leads to her suicide–which gives *For a Few Dollars More* its narrative trajectory. The conclusion of the film applies the same principles of montage to the showdown as found in *A Fistful of Dollars*; however, this time the elongation of time and the accentuation on when the showdown will begin–through the use of the chimes–brings together the stylistic and thematic concerns of opera. The operatic themes of the film would not work, however, without the presence of a style on montage which foregrounded the anti-realist aspects of the duel and its basis in the psychological past of the characters.

Leone turns the psychological aspect of his work around in his next film, where each of the characters–through their names in the title of the film–represents fairly arbitrary traits: good, bad and ugly. The conclusion to *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* –the last film in the trilogy–is the clearest example of Leone's use of "operatic montage." Using his by now typical *corrida* image–this time in a circular graveyard–Leone elongates the final showdown to close to three minutes of film time. As in *A Fistful of Dollars*, Leone segments the body of the western gunfighter, but here he extends the process, focusing on the eyes, and building an accelerating and

repetitive pattern of montage which repeats the same shots of The Good (Clint Eastwood), The Bad (Lee Van Cleef) and The Ugly's (Eli Wallach) eyes at greater and greater speeds. Once the draw actually takes place, the viewer feels pulled back from the scene, as Leone returns to medium shots and Ennio Morricone's music fades away. Here, the final showdown becomes Brechtian, as the scene is removed from any other narrative concerns other than the spectacle of the fight itself.

While Leone moved away from causality in his narratives as his films became more operatic, Francis Ford Coppola's films embedded opera firmly within tightly plotted narrative trajectories. Coppola's *The Godfather* trilogy–*The Godfather* (US, 1972), *The Godfather, Part Two* (US, 1974), and *The Godfather, Part Three* (US, 1990)–takes the notion of "operatic montage" further, even to the point of incorporating an opera into the conclusion of the third film in the trilogy. The endings of each of the three installments not only offer us exemplary examples of parallel editing, but also demonstrate the ways in which film can be used to create a temporal space that exists outside of real time. This process of foregrounding and heightening is central to the operatic narrative proper, and Coppola transfers it to the film medium and gives it a specifically cinematic form. As Peter Cowie notes: "If the essence of opera lies in its discreet heightening of suspense, then Coppola, like Hitchcock, knows how to transplant that to the cinema."[5] Coppola's trilogy uses operatic strategies throughout the films and not solely in their conclusions. Indeed, the narrative of the life of the Corleone family

[5] Peter Cowie, *The Godfather Book* (London: Faber, 1997), p. 164.

has a strongly operatic quality to it. As Harlan Lebo notes that: "[. . .] in the film's exploration of the Corleone family, behind the laughter, the bonding, and the dynamic personalities, every human encounter in *The Godfather* was a portrait of treachery."[6]

It is this dualism between family and violence that, on a narrative level, foregrounds the operatic nature of the narrative. Yet, it is the use of montage that changes the trilogy from a series of films which incorporate operatic qualities into narrative to a group of works which, on a formal level, develop an operatic equivalent in the cinema. For instance, the conclusion to *The Godfather, Part One* weaves together two narratives: the baptism of Michael Corleone's (Al Pacino) godson, and the murder of the Corleone family's enemies. The conclusion to the film offers us insight into the ways in which montage and *mise-en-scène* can be used together in order to create both tension and a trans-temporal narrative flow. As William Simon notes: "The most basic notion suggested by this intercutting is that the shooting of rivals and the baptism are happening simultaneously. However, the complexity of the structuring goes far beyond the parallel editing principle."[7] While Coppola's use of parallel editing is far more advanced than most of his Hollywood contemporaries, it is the synthetic relationship between narrative and form that he develops which give the scenes their true power. As Peter Cowie notes:

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[6] Harlan Lebo, *The Godfather Legacy* (New York: Fireside, 1997), p. 38.
[7] William Simon, "An Analysis of the Structure of *The Godfather, Part One*" in R. Barton Palmer, ed. *The Cinematic Text: Methods and Approaches* (New York: AMS Press, 1989), p.113.

> Both betrayals [of Family and Church] are illustrated in cinematic language that has become associated with Coppola's craft and vision. Michael continues to pay lip-service to the traditional ideals while others, like some ominous symphonic bass line, carry out his scheme with vengeance. [...] The editing takes up a heavy, inexorable rhythm, like the tolling of bells. The massacre both chimes with, and defiles, the lofty operations and minute details of the religious ceremonial.[8]

In the concluding scenes of *The Godfather*, Coppola constructs a seemingly realist montage, but one that heightens the ironies of Michael's fall. Here, the process of "operatic montage" presents a multitude of events–baptism and multiple murders–in a concise manner that accentuates their inter-relatedness. In the conclusion of *The Godfather*, Coppola demonstrates how the need to preserve the Family on Michael's part also brings about its demise. This alone would seem operatic in nature, but Coppola does not deliver this information through the use of straightforward narrative; instead, he conveys this information through film style. As the baptism and the murders takes place, with each cut, Michael's voice can be heard affirming the religious pronouncements of the priest while his vengeful deeds are carried out. Similarly, in *The Godfather, Part Two*, Coppola's inter-cutting of Michael and the life of the young Vito (Robert De Niro) brings into relief the dissimilarities between father and son at the same age. Here, Coppola implies both a circularity and discontinuity to the story of the Corleone family, again echoing motifs often found in operatic narratives.

The Godfather, Part Three concludes with the inclusion of an opera itself, Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, in the revenge-filled

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[8] Peter Cowie, *Coppola* (London: Faber, 1990), p. 70.

dénouement of the film. The parallels between the narrative of the opera and of the Corleone family are easily evident. To make these parallels apparent, it is worthwhile to briefly consider the narrative of the opera. The story of *Cavalleria Rusticana* (or "Rustic Chivalry") is fairly straightforward. The first example of *verisimo*, a style of opera which validated the ugly and the vulgar as relevant concerns of art, the opera takes place on Easter Sunday in Sicily. Turiddu, a returning soldier, serenades his mistress Lola. Meanwhile, Santuzza, a village girl asks Mamma Lucia, Turiddu's mother, about her son, as Santuzza and Turiddu are engaged to be married and he has been acting strange. As they talk, Alfio comes by, who is the husband of Lola and is oblivious to the affair. As the villagers arrive for the Easter Mass, Santuzza confronts Turiddu about his affair, but he violently pushes her away after Lola arrives on the scene. After Turiddu leaves, Alfio runs into Santuzza, who tells him all about the affair. He leaves swearing vengeance on Turiddu. After church, a happy Turiddu offers all the townspeople a drink, but Alfio angrily refuses. A challenge is made, and Alfio tells Turiddu to meet him in the orchard. Turiddu pays his respects to his mother and asks her to look after Santuzza. Santuzza then tries to intervene in the duel, but it is too late, as Alfio has already killed Turiddu and won his duel.

We can see the parallels between Mascagni's narrative and that of *The Godfather, Part Three*–the battles over lovers and questions of honour and revenge–are the basic principles of "Family" as embodied by the Corleones and by Michael in particular. Here, Coppola tells the story of Michael's final fall both through

conventional narrative and through the use of montage that he developed throughout the previous two films. Coppola reprises the strategy employed in the conclusion of *The Godfather*, but here the opera itself is edited together with the revenge taken by the Corleone family. Again, the intercutting foregrounds the difference between the respectability of watching the Sicilian opera of revenge and the acts of revenge undertaken by the family. But in this film, the revenge backfires, as Michael's daughter (Sofia Coppola) is shot as they exit the opera house in Sicily. Again, Coppola's use of what I have called "operatic montage" foregrounds the ironies and the melodramatic aspects of the narrative over all else. Indeed, the presence of *Cavalleria Rusticana* highlights the fact that Coppola is not really inserting an opera into his film; instead, he is cutting together two operas: Mascagni's and the Corleone's.

The films of Leone and Coppola offer us a means of conceptualizing film form in a manner different from the ways it is typically theorized. The distanciation and compression that is central to the closing scenes of these films point to the fact that time and space in the cinema is quite dissimilar from time and space in reality; indeed, it is dissimilar from the manner in which time and space are typically represented in realist cinema. In the films of Leone and Coppola, montage offers the viewer a cinema that lies between realism and anti-realism; one which, through montage, highlights moments of tension, suspense and pain to such a degree that these moments on screen seem to hang still in time. Yet, the tension created by these scenes exists as much in the spectator's imagination as it does on the screen and it is this unification of the *mise-en-scène*–which tells the

story–and montage–which creates the tension and the mental images–that reinforce the fact that Coppola and Leone have engaged in creating a new form of "operatic" montage.

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A vast edifice of memories: the cyclical cinema of Terence Davies

Claus Christensen

> "The point is to pick out and join together the bits of sequential fact, knowing, seeing and hearing precisely what lies between them and what kind of chain holds them together. That is cinema." (Andrey Tarkovsky)

When movie director George Sluizer in 1993 did a Hollywood remake of his Dutch thriller *Spoorloos*, he ran into problems. The American test-audience did not like the flash-back structure of the movie. "Kill the writer who thinks backwards, and kill his wife and kids" one member of the audience wrote on the movie company's questionnaire. Sluizer was of course forced to simplify the narrative structure and the movie lost – according to the director – both in basic suspense and thematic depth.

This is by no means an unusual case. In spite of a number of academic papers on the fragmentation caused by modernity and on the death of the great narratives, the linear narrative developed in the *Bildungsroman* of the 19th century lives on. Especially in the mainstream movie, which has turned out to be remarkably immune to the innovative non-narrative forms explored by avantgardists like Alain Resnais (*Hiroshima Mon Amour*, 1959) and Andrei Tarkovsky (*Mirror*, 1974) during the 1960s and 1970s. And as the straightforward American cinematic narrative plays a dominant role globally, the linearity is still an essential part of the expectations held

by the modern movie audience. It is no doubt possible to find spectators who have never seen a real non-personal flash back as they grew up on a diet of soaps and movies like *Bodyguard* and *Die Hard*.

But also among the innovative directors of the last decade, the willingness to break with linearity and explore time as a phenomenon has not been overwhelming. Directors representing the so-called postmodern wave in the 1980s, like Ridley Scott and Jean-Jacques Beineix – both coming from a background in advertising – , were more interested in the visual design of the movie than in the narrative structures, unlike classic modernists like Jean-Luc Godard, Federico Fellini and Alain Resnais. In the 1990s, the development of European cinema has shown a tendency towards a return to the "good story". The straightforward British social realism has become fashionable again, and the Danish *auteur* Lars von Trier has characteristically and with considerable commercial success left the labyrinthine narrative structures (*The Elements of Crime*, 1984, *Epidemic*, 1987) for a more traditional unified narrative structure and a point of view based on the linear perspective (*Breaking the Waves*, 1996). The exception to the rule could be found in Quentin Tarantino's mocking way of playing with the linear narrative and its causal logic in movies such as *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Jackie Brown* (1997). But with Tarantino, the playing lies mostly in an ironic and self-mocking meta-play and it is thus without the philosophical profoundness which characterizes the experiments carried out by Renais and Tarkovsky.

Therapeutic Cinematic Poetry

With this cinematic history as a background, the 53 year old British director Terence Davies stands out as particularly interesting. Without abandoning the narrative qualities of cinema as a medium, Davies works with cyclic rather than linear narrative structures. His choice of narrative structure stems directly from the content of the movie. Davies produces movies of remembrance, of memories, but at the same time he tries to catch our fragmented way of remembering – i.e. he tries to find an audio-visual form capable of expressing the very essence of remembrance. This is done by cutting linear historical "facts" into temporally displaced sequences and – through auditive montage – establishing a plurality of temporal planes inside each shot. The past, the present and the future thus constantly interlock, creating a complex temporal room of experience, corresponding to the shifting character of human remembrance.

Terence Davies' main influence seems to be movies of Alain Resnais, such as *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) and *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961). But contrary to the cool intellectualism of Resnais, exploring the essence of remembrance in an abstract way, Davies' movies are warm and straightforward and driven by a strong personal interest (Davies, p. ix):

> The reason I began making films came from a deep *need* to do so in order to come to terms with my family's history and suffering, to make sense af the past and to explore my own personal terrors, both mental and spiritual, and to examine the destructive nature of Catholicism. Film as an expression af guilt, film as confession (psychotherapy would be much cheaper but a lot less fun).

The important autobiographical element gives an emotional tone to Davies' movies, while at the same time anchoring them in a concrete time and space: the Liverpool of the post-war years.

The trilogy of short-films *Children*, *Madonna and Child* and *Death and Transfiguration* (1976/80/83) and the full-length movies *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) and *The Long Day Closes* (1992) are all based on Terence Davies' and his siblings' memories of growing up in a poor working class family. The memories deal with both fear and oppression (the authoritarian school system, Catholic ascetism, and a tyrannical, violent and unpredictable father), as well as love and heavenly joy (magic moments in the cinema, passionate gatherings with community singing and the close contact with a mother, whose unlimited generosity keeps the family together, and who keeps her dignity in spite of the father's humiliations). The trivial and ordinary melts together with the tragic and sublime moments in a cinematic art which is at the same time private and universal, therapeutic and poetic, experimental and popular.[1]

A Vietnam of the Mind

In mainstream movies, memories typically take the form of clear, linearly organized flash backs, showing the past in a mellow light of nostalgia and romanticism. This can be seen in e.g. Giuseppe Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso* (1988), where the protagonist Salvatore, moved by the death of his childhood friend, recreates

[1] Terence Davies' third and latest full-length movie, *The Neon Bible* (1995), is based on the novel by John Kennedy Toole. Once again, Davies takes up the theme of the joys and problems of childhood and family life, but this time the film is set in the USA, and for the first time Davies tells a linear story without temporal jumps.

the past as a lost Paradise in a way which can only be described as self-mythologizing. Salvatore's happy childhood centered around the village's magical cinema is contrasted to the present, characterized by sadness and the disappearance of one cinema after the other. The temporal planes are clearly kept apart by transitions which clearly mark the movement from present to past and vice versa. His remembrance, which takes up the major part of the movie, is constructed as a series of chronological scenes, which in itself functions as cinematic present with no marked position of either narrator or the narrative construction. It is a transparent cinematic expression, and as a whole these scenes create a neatly made causal and logical narration, which "objectively" leads to and confirms Salvatore's present melancholic state of mind. The past is beautiful and romantic, but far too distant to be reached.

The movies of Terence Davies are very different. Firstly, remembrance does not move in logical or chronological lines. Davies bases his work on a subjective expererience of time and tries to describe the special space of remembrance in cinematic terms. The person remembering is placed in a sort of in-between, being in neither a "here-and-now" nor totally in a "then", but instead in this indeterminate in-between. Secondly, Davies' memories are strikingly alive and complex with no trace whatsoever of the patina of nostalgia and the grown up's understanding which is so characteristic of *Cinema Paradiso*. Thirdly, the person remembering in Davies' movies is not the master of his own memories. Remembrance is not "like a mirror in which one projects a feeling of happiness" (Nielsen, p. 36). Remembrance is a battlefield, on which

the past is constantly waiting to ambush you. As Harlan Kennedy, the movie journalist, puts it:

> For Davies, the past is not a foreign country in the sighing, elegiac sense [...] and transmitted to the recent spate of Empire reveries. For Davies, if the past is a foreign country, it's guerilla territory: not a sedate outpost of our existential empire but a Vietnam of the mind. There, emotions are not languidly picked over with a calf-gloved hand; they come out of the shadows, raw and ungloved, and pick *you* over (Kennedy, p. 14).

This Vietnam of the Mind is nowhere better shown than in *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, which ranks as Davies' most complex and probably best movie, and which I shall be making some comments on in the following. As the title suggests, the film is divided into two parts, and in the first part, *Distant Voices*, Davies clearly breaks with linearity to create "a pattern of timeless moments", as he himself puts it (p. 74).

The Camera Remembering

The beginning of *Distant Voices* works, contrary to what I have just said, as a trademark of classic social realism. The film opens with an establishing shot of a British row of working class houses in rain and thunder, sometime in the 1950s (Fig. 1). A BBC radio announcer is heard giving the traditional weather forecast for sailors: "Fair Isle, Cromarty, Forties...". A middle-aged woman opens the front door, picks up the milk bottles and closes the door (Fig. 2). Cut to the hall and staircase seen from the front door.

The woman stops by the foot of the stairs calling out to her children with an extremely soft voice: "It's seven o'clock, you three!" (Fig. 3). The mother enters the kitchen while the camera

remains, showing the empty hall. The BBC radio announcer is heard again, and the mother calls out again, this time a bit more firmly: "Eileen! Tony! Maisie! You'd better get your skates on!"

It is a morning like every other morning. But just as we expect to see the almost grown-up children Eileen, Tony and Maisie come down the stairs, we only hear the sound of their feet on the empty staircase (Fig. 4).


Fig. 1


Fig. 2


Fig. 3


Fig. 4

The following morning, greetings are also exchanged as voice overs, while the camera holds the shot of the empty hall and staircase. The effect is amazing. The spectator is brutally torn away from the illusion of reality created by the picture, but it is worth noting that this does not happen by blowing apart the identification in a Brechtian *Verfremdung*. On the contrary, the spectator's primary

identification with the camera as the one looking, is expanded into a secondary identification with the camera *as the one who is remembering*.

Where social realism establishes a naturalistic space and a chronological time in which movement unfolds, Terence Davies departs from the "motor" of action meant to lead the spectator from one picture (the hall) to another (the family gathered around the breakfast table). The narrative logic of movement is replaced by the spiritual space of remembrance, above the mechanical causal relations between "before" and "after". The picture detaches itself from the action, moves outside of time and creates a zone of re-membrance in which present and past, real and imaginary are woven together. Past and present coexist, and by contrasting the acoustic presence (footsteps on the staircase) with a visual absence (the empty staircase), Terence Davies opens up the possiblity of reading the film as a mental journey into remembrance. The person remembering is not present in the picture and the concrete past is only visible as fragments. The picture points to itself as a picture – a picture of the time of remembrance and its related thought processes.

Layers of the Past

In his book *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze underlines the possibility of cinema to block the senso-motoric process, extend action in purely optical and acoustic situations, and establish complex temporal structures. The opening

shot in *Distant Voices*, where Terence Davies works with non-coordinated layers of the past, is exemplary in that respect.

The shot of the empty hall is set in motion when the voice-over of the mother starts singing *I Get the Blues When It's Raining*. Slowly the camera moves into the hall, to the staircase where it turns 180 degrees, untill the (now closed) front door is framed (Fig. 5).


Fig. 5


Fig. 6

In a dissolve the front door opens on a sunny summer's day (Fig. 6), and while Jessye Norman sings the death hymn *There's a Man Goin' Round Takin' Names* on the soundtrack, a hearse containing a coffin pulls up to the front door (Fig. 7).


Fig. 7


Fig. 8


Fig. 9


Fig. 10

Dissolve to a tableau in the living room with the mother flanked by Tony, Eileen and Maisie (Fig. 8). All are dressed in black and look straight into the camera. On the wall behind them hangs a photo of a man. They get up and exit from the picture, and the camera starts moving until the photo on the wall is framed in a close-up (Fig. 9).

The man who turns out to be the deceased father smiles and is holding on to a horse. In the following four shots the mother and her three children leave the house and drive away to the funeral, and then Davies brutally cuts to another living room tableau (Fig. 10). Present are the same persons, only this time they are wearing party clothes – Eileen is getting married. "I wish me Dad was here", Eileen says, but immediately the camera travels towards Maisie who anwers her in voice-over: "I don't. He was a bastard and I bleedin' hated him!" In short subjective flash backs Maisie's and Tony's relationship with their deceased father is portrayed.

As is the case with the rest of *Distant Voices*, this opening sequence jumps directly from the triviality of everyday rituals to strongly emotional ceremonies, from pure undated past (the mother fetching the milk, the family greetings in the morning) to specific events in their lives (the father's funeral, Eileen's wedding) which can be

fitted into a chronological line. There are memories inside memories, pictures inside pictures, and as Terence Davies unfolds layer after layer of the past, remembrance becomes more and more complex. Furthermore the director – through highly formalized compositions and a soundtrack which is often distinctly in control of the pictures – marks an ever present narrative distance to the remembered content (the "then" of remembrance) and thus underlines the actuality of the remembered picture (the "here and now" of remembrance) as yet another layer of time in the movie.

Davies' complex montage of both picture and sound reflects the associative, jumpy character of human remembrance: sounds, pictures and situations float through our consciousness as non-coordinated layers of the past. A past which continually co-exists with the present and which at any time might interrupt it. The photograph of the father (yet another layer of time) symbolically remains on the living room wall behind the family, and in the tableau-like arrangements at Eileen's and – later on – Tony's wedding, the father "squeezes" himself in between the persons.

In spite of his death the father still bullies the family. When Eileen at one time breaks down sobbing, missing her father, the camera begins a long tracking shot back in time (from right to left). The camera moves past a row of touching Christmas rituals (Fig. 11, 12) which can be interpreted as Eileen's conscious attempts at remembering the happy moments with her father. But characteristically the sequence ends with a shot of a finely laid Christmas table with the father and the three children at their places (Fig. 13).

Suddenly the father gets up and in a fit of rage tears the table cloth from the table, scattering both food and chinaware (Fig. 14).

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

Fig. 13

Fig. 14

Sculpting in Time

In this context, memories do thus not constitute a nostalgic supermarket in which you can self-consciously go shopping. Memories form an electric field in which wires connect criss-cross, creating unforeseeable and interesting clashes, as can be seen in e.g. *Still Lives*, where Davies cuts from a medium close-up of Maisie and Eileen crying in the cinema (Fig. 15), while watching the tear jerker *Love is a Many-Splendoured Thing*, to a high-angle shot looking straight down on a glass roof (Fig. 16). Then Tony and Maisie's husband fall in slow-motion through the roof to the theme from

Love is a Many-Splendoured Thing (Figures 17 & 18). The sentimental romance of the cinema glides imperceptibly into the sublime horror of reality.


Fig. 15

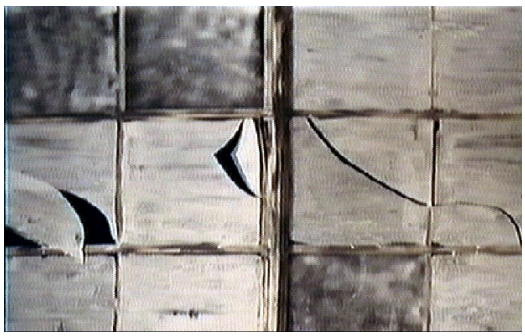
Fig. 16


Fig. 17

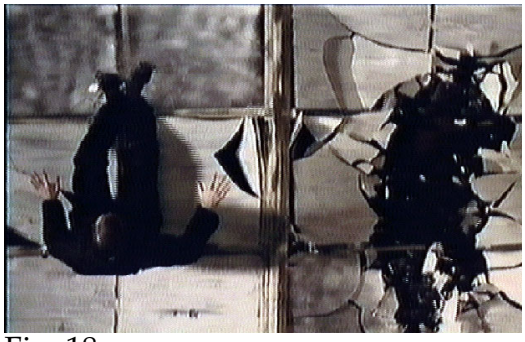
Fig. 18

But Davies' montage of single pictures, relying heavily on the aesthetics of the family album, also aims at influencing the aesthetics of reception by rendering impossible a conventionally narrative decoding of the movie. His "pattern of timeless moments" aims instead at communicating directly with the emotions of the audience. Just as we are touched when turning the pages of others' family albums, even though we do not know the story behind the pictures. We are touched because we are torn from the present and suddenly feel the presence of time – and thus of Death. This is the sort of pictures director Andrey Tarkovsky has termed "authentically cinematic": "The image becomes authentically cinematic

when [...] not only does it live within time, but time also lives within it, even within each separate frame." (Tarkovsky, p. 68).

Like Tarkovsky, Terence Davies erects through his movies "a vast edifice of memories" (Proust). He sculpts time as Tarkovsky would put it. But contrary to the labyrinthine and truly mysterious movies by Tarkovsky and Resnais, in Davies there is always a possibility of retrospectively constructing a *fabula*, even though this *fabula* turns out to be rather jumpy and imperfect. Furthermore, Davies works with cyclic structures (and well-defined thematic pivots) which perhaps to an even larger extent than the linear structures are able to invest a movie with a characteristic form:

> The film constantly turns back on itself, like the ripples in a pool when a stone is thrown into it. The ripples are memory. But above and beyond this are the enduring constancy of my mother, juxtaposed with the enduring, malign influence of my father. These twin themes permeate the entire film (Davies, p. xi).

In *Distant Voices*, Eileen's wedding is one of the huge stones from which the ripples of memory spread. The frequent family gatherings also contribute to the feeling of a cyclical movement. And the door as a motif, perhaps inspired by *The Searchers* and already established in the second shot of the movie, works as a sort of existential leitmotif. Furthermore, there are a number of rhetorical and poetic figures which are repeated with variation, thus making the movie aesthetically coherent. The result is a non-linear montage which in a self-evident way combines the abstract modernist experiments montage with concrete memories of growing up in a British working-class family.

To the director, the film has functioned as an advanced form of self-therapy. To cinema as an art form, Davies' film might show a way out of the schism between cold elitist formalism and popular realism.

Translation: Orla Vigsø.

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Five explanations for the jump cuts in Godard's *Breathless*

Richard Raskin

Since its eruption onto the film scene in 1959, Godard's *Breathless* has given rise to a number of very different hypotheses as to what motivated the director's radical departure from the practices of continuity editing when making this film. In the present article, I will present the spectrum of explanations that have already been offered, without putting any one of them to the test. To my knowledge, no overview of this type has as yet been proposed in the literature on *Breathless*, each commentator having offered a single explanation of his or her own, without evoking alternate approaches to the issue.

Although the present article[1] contains no previously unpublished explanation, it nevertheless represents a departure from earlier treatments of Godard's now famous jump cuts, in the sense that it illustrates the susceptibility of a given innovation to radically different explanatory options. Since this film remains a landmark in the history of world cinema, and is routinely studied as one of the major representatives of *la nouvelle vague*, the present article may be of some use to students of film history and of current trends in

[1] An earlier version of this article appeared on pp. 189-195 in *Michelanea. Humanisme, litteratur og kommunikation* (Aalborg: Alborg Universitetsforlag, 1994), ed. Inge Degn, Jens Høyrup and Jan Scheel. In the present version, I have added some interpretive and explanatory material as well as stills, and have translated all French quotations into English.

editing, as well as to those interested in the styles of explanation applied to problems of film esthetics.

1

Among the least flattering explanations offered, is the one proposed by director Claude Autant-Lara, who was one of the principal targets in Truffaut's provocative essay, "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français" published in the January 1954 issue of *Cahiers du cinéma*. Autant-Lara, who considered his own career to have been blighted by the young newcomers of *la nouvelle vague*,[2] had this to say about Godard's elliptical editing:

> I know the story behind *Breathless* and I can tell you it's a corker! A minor producer had hired a minor director to make a minor crime movie running a maximum of 5,000 meters. But the director filmed 8,000 meters; the producer told him to cut it down, but the director refused. Then he was forced to do so. So in an act of bravado, he made the cuts himself any which way, at random, in order *to make the film unmarketable*.. But curiously enough, once the bits of film were mounted, the producer considered the result to be ingenious, edited with power, astounding... He had wanted to demonstrate the impossibility of cutting his film, but what he did turned out to work. Then Godard understood... and in his subsequent films, he produced more Godard! Senseless ellipses, cuts in the middle of a tracking shot, were taken to be part of a new esthetic. It became a fashion. And France is the country of snobbism in the cinema – a country which gets caught up in everything and especially no matter what! [3]

2

[2] When asked in 1983 about the "new wave" directors, Autant-Lara said: "I established the professional foundations for this metier in which these young gentlemen made themselves at home while throwing us out." For the entire interview conducted by René Prédal, see Claude Autant-Lara, "La nouvelle vague: un préjudice énorme," in *La nouvelle vague 25 ans après*, edited by Jean-Luc Douin (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1983), pp. 203-207.

[3] Ibid., p. 207, emphasis added. The producer in question was Georges de Beauregard.

Somewhat related to Autant-Lara's explanation, and no more flattering, are the comments made by Robert Benayoun. While Autant-Lara claimed that Godard's intention was to *ruin* the film in order to get even with the producer, Benayoun suggested that Godard's jump cuts were made as a devious attempt to *save* a film that would otherwise have been a critical disaster:

> ...in order to save a film not worth showing (*Breathless*), Godard chopped it up any which way, counting on the critics' susceptibility to being astounded, and they didn't let him down in helping him to launch a new fashion, that of the badly made film. Incorrigible waster of film, author of idiotic and abject comments on torture and denunciation, a self-promoter, Godard represents the most painful regression of French cinema towards intellectual illiteracy and plastic bluff. [4]

3

According to an account given by Godard himself, the elliptical editing of *Breathless* resulted from a need to reduce the length of the film, but not under circumstances like those described by Autant-Lara. While Godard refers to a contractual necessity for eliminating up to an hour of the film's running time, he makes no mention in this account of undue pressure on the part of the producer, nor of any wish on his own part to preserve the film in its original length of 135-150 minutes. If anything, he appears to consider the original version of the film to have been too long as a result of his own inexperience, and the requirement to shorten the film as fully justified:

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[4] Robert Benayoun, review of *Breathless* in *Positif* 46 (June 1962), p. 27.

> ...first films are always very long. Since after thirty years [of living], people try to put everything into their first film. So they're always very long. And I was no exception to the rule. I had made a film that lasted two and a quarter or two and a half hours; and it was impossible, the contract specified that the running time not exceed an hour and a half. And I remember very clearly... how I invented this famous way of cutting, that is now used in commercials: we took all the shots and systematically cut out whatever could be cut, while trying to maintain some rhythm. For example, Belmondo and Seberg had a sequence in a car at a certain moment; and there was a shot of one, then a shot of the other, as they spoke their lines. And when we came to this sequence, which had to be shortened like the others, instead of slightly shortening both, the editor and I flipped a coin; we said: 'Instead of slightly shortening one and then slightly shortening the other, and winding up with short little shots of both of them, we're going to cut out four minutes by eliminating one or the other altogether, and then we will simply join the [remaining] shots, like that, as though it were a single shot. Then we drew lots as to whether it should be Belmondo or Seberg and Seberg remained... [5]

The scene described here may be the one in which Belmondo's off-screen lines are:

> Alas! Alas! Alas! I love a girl who has a very pretty neck, very pretty breasts, a very pretty voice, very pretty wrists, a very pretty forehead, very pretty knees... but who is a coward.

As these lines are heard, we see a series of shots of Seberg in the passenger seat of the stolen convertible Belmondo is driving through the street of Paris. Discontinuities from one shot to the next with respect to (a) the position of the actress's head, (b) the degree of direct sunlight or shade, and (c) the streets and parked or moving cars seen in the background, make this one of the best examples in the film of Godard's jump cuts, seven of which turn up here in rapid succession.

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[5] Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Albatros, 1980), p. 34.

Alas! Alas! Alas! I love a girl who has a very pretty neck...

...very pretty breasts...

...a very pretty voice...

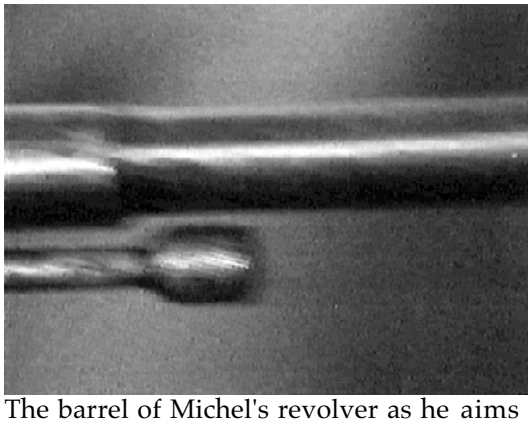
...very pretty wrists...

...a very pretty forehead...

...very pretty knees... ...but who is a coward.

4

Other commentators have seen in the jump cuts a cinematic expression of qualities embodied by the character played by Jean-Paul Belmondo: Michel Poiccard, alias Laszlo Kovacs, who has no pangs of conscience whatsoever when he kills a motorcycle policeman in cold blood or knocks a man unconscious in a public lavatory in order to supply himself with some needed cash.



The barrel of Michel's revolver as he aims and fires at the gendarme.

The gendarme falling as the next shot begins.

Viewed in this perspective, the ellipses are meaningful in the sense that they are expressive of the behaviors enacted in the film. Hence the way in which the film is edited, and the conduct depicted in the film, are seen as structurally homologous.

For example, Luc Mollet wrote: "Because the conduct of the characters reflects a series of moral jump cuts, the film will be a series of jump cuts."[6] And according to Bosley Crowther, the "disconnected cutting" of the film – a "pictorial cacophony" – is appropriate for a film in which "there is subtly conveyed a vastly

[6] Luc Moullet, "Jean-Luc Godard," *Cahiers du cinéma* (April 1960), p. 35.

complex comprehension of an element of youth that is vagrant, *disjointed,* animalistic and doesn't give a damn for anybody or anything, not even itself."[7]

A more elaborate attempt to decode the significance of the jump cuts, can be found in Annie Goldmann's discussion of the film. According to Goldmann, Godard does *not* use elliptical editing in scenes depicting relations between persons. In these scenes, involving Belmondo and Jean Seberg in their roles as Michel and Patricia, she suggests that the relations are fully (i.e. not elliptically) described because of their primordial importance. It is in scenes depicting the social world – such as the killing of the gendarme – that the filmic representation becomes elliptical, "the editing telescoped, with 'holes' between the shots," because in Michel's eyes, incidents involving the representatives of social authority are unimportant:

> The action is shortened, not for the purpose of giving the impression of rapidity, but because the event itself is of no interest to the hero... For him, and for the viewer who sees the world through Michel's mind... everything about these events is of no interest to the degree that everything related to society is of no concern to him. This is why the director represents it almost carelessly and even unintelligibly at times. [8]

Unfortunately, Goldmann does not attempt to demonstrate the validity of her claim by showing systematically that elliptical and

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[7] Bosley Crowther, review of "Breathless" in *The New York Times* (8 February 1961), section 1, p. 26, emphasis added. On a more amusing note, Crowther described Belmondo in this review as "an actor who is the most effective cigarette-mouther and thumb-to-lip rubber since time began."

[8] Annie Goldmann, *Cinéma et société moderne* (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1971/1974), pp. 85-86.

non-elliptical editing are used in scenes depicting what she views as social and personal relations, respectively. The convertible scene cited above – to name only one example of a scene combining personal relations with jump cuts – would be difficult to account for in the context of Goldmann's model.

5

Godard's jump cuts have also been seen as part of a new esthetic, a radical departure from worn-out modes of cinematic discourse, and an attempt to carry out within the film medium revolutionary developments found in other arts.

For an anonymous reviewer in *Time*, Godard brought cubism into the language of film:

> More daringly cubistic is the manner in which Godard has assembled his footage. Every minute or so, sometimes every few seconds, he has chopped a few feet out of the film, patched it together again without transition. The story can still be followed, but at each cut the film jerks ahead with a syncopated impatience that aptly suggests and stresses the compulsive pace of the hero's downward drive. More subtly, the trick also distorts, rearranges, relativizes time – much as Picasso manipulated space in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. All meaningful continuity is bewildered...[9]

For Arlene Croce, Godard's editing is analogous to jazz, and is part of an esthetic which shifts the focus of interest from meaning to the cinematic medium itself:

> *Breathless* is a mannerist fantasy, cinematic jazz. Watching it, one can hardly avoid the feeling that Godard's intention, above all, was to

[9] "Cubistic Crime," *Time* (February 17, 1961), p. 56.

> produce slices of cinema – shots, figments, iconography – what the *Cahiers* critics talk about. His reality is always cinematized; the camera is always "there," as it were, with its short jabs or long looping rambles of celluloid. There are few dissolves and almost no smooth cuts; and the cuts are often so fast that for moments at a time the spectator is thoroughly dislocated. For example, the arrival of Belmondo in Paris is shown thus: a long shot of the city/a car pulling up/Belmondo entering a phone booth, making a call, getting no answer, leaving/Belmondo somewhere buying a paper/Belmondo on the doorstep of a pension, with some dialogue/Belmondo inside at the concierge's desk and stealing a key/Belmondo emerging, toweling, from the bathroom of the apartment. The whole truncated sequence lasts considerably less than a minute; there are no transitions, no "continuity." Often there are cuts made within the same shot. No attempt is made, either through cutting or through the long drunken pans, at academic-style montage, composition, or meaning of any sort. It is merely movie business... [10]

Penelope Houston also characterizes Godard's esthetic as one shifting the focus from story or narrative to a more instantaneous experience, grounded in the very language of the cinematic medium:

> ...the film is edited so that the traditional time sequence is broken, with jump cuts (by which we may see the beginning and the end of an action, but not the bit in the middle), with repeated shifts of place and viewpoint... [such gambits] are not merely stylistic fancy-work. They underline an attitude to film-making. If the director's basic concern is to tell a story to a large audience, he will help the spectator to follow it easily: if a character tells us that he is going to do something, and there is then a cut, we are conditioned to expect that in the next scene he will be doing the thing he talked about. But if the film-maker is concerned not so much with a story as with the immediate instant, with the involvement of the audience less in a narrative than a sensation or an experience, with the kind of chances and hazards that intervene in life, then these wires of convention can be cut and left dangling. The film finds and imposes its own logic.
>
> What we see is what the director chooses to show us: if he finds something boring and decides to skip over it, with an implied 'etc., etc.', then he assumes that we know enough about cinema conventions to keep up with him. In *Breathless*, certainly, the characters themselves have no existence outside the context in which Godard evokes them... The film itself is the thing; and the audience finds at least part of its pleasure in a sharing of the director's own

[10] Arlene Croce, "Breathless," *Film Quarterly* (Spring 1961), pp. 54-55.

> excitement, the sense of glee he transparently feels at the improvised moment that sets the screen alight, the experiments with timing, the investigation of a language. [11]

Godard's violation of the most basic rules of continuity editing would be seen in this context as a breakthrough to a new conception of cinematic art. This would be a constructive characterization of what might otherwise be seen in more destructive terms.

The view Godard himself expressed, at least on one occasion, was far less positive. When asked by Gordon Gow exactly what he had in mind when making *Breathless,* Godard replied

> that he doesn't hold with rules and he was out to destroy accepted conventions of film-making. *Hiroshima, mon amour,* he said, was the start of something new, and *Breathless* was the end of something old. He made it on real locations and in real rooms, having no truck with studios (although more recently he has worked in a studio and found it advantageous). He employed a hand-camera, because he is impatient and when he is ready to shoot he doesn't like waiting about for complicated camera set-ups. And having finished the shooting, he chopped it about as a manifestation of filmic anarchy, technical iconoclasm. [12]

More recently, Agnès Guillemot, who edited or co-edited most of Godard's films during the 1960s, made the following statement about what she saw as the underlying reason for Godard's innovative style of editing:

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[11] Penelope Houston, *The Contemporary Cinema* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969; orig. pub. 1963), pp. 103-104.

[12] Gordon Gow, "Breathless," *Films and Filming* (August 1961), p. 25. Incidentally, in the same interview, Godard stated that he didn't see the editing style of this film as especially "representative of Michel's muddled mentality, although he admitted that he wouldn't have used the same technique if he had been dealing with a level-headed character."

> Godard is not a specialist of the jump cut, he is a specialist of the true respiration of the cinema, which is not at all the same thing. And the so-called correct way of cutting has for a long time been a hindrance to the true respiration of the cinema. Godard is the specialist of audacity and freedom. He did not edit his films against the rest of the cinema but rather for what he thought they ought to be.[13]

Summary and Conclusions

The elliptical editing of *Breathless* has been explained, in the literature on the film, as being motivated by: 1) a deliberate attempt on Godard's part to *ruin* the film in order to get even with a producer who had insisted that the film be shortened despite Godard's protests (Autant-Lara); 2) a devious attempt on Godard's part to *save* a third-rate film by mutilating it in a way French film critics would perceive as astounding (Benayoun); 3) a need to shorten a film that was too long, and a wish to do so in a new way (Godard); 4) a desire to express cinematically the moral and emotional disjointedness of the behaviors portrayed (Moullet, Crowther), or to depict the social world as meaningless in the eyes of Michel Poiccard (Goldmann); 5) the director's quest for a new esthetic – a cinematic equivalent of cubism or jazz – shifting the focus of interest from story or meaning to the film medium itself (Time, Croce, Houston), or by the director's all-out attack on an outmoded cinematic discourse (Godard) or attempt to allow his film to breathe freely (Guillemot).

The "inside dopester" explanations (1 and 2 above) are the most amusing and have the same appeal as a juicy bit of gossip which

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[13] From "Entretien avec Agnès Guillemot," an interview conducted by Thierry Jousse and Frédéric Strauss, in *Cahiers du cinéma* (November 1990), p. 61; cited by Philippe Durand in *Cinéma et montage – un art de l'éllipse* (Paris: Cerf, 1993), p. 231.

casts a celebrity in an unflattering light. They are also as reliable as gossip, and probably tell more about the personal tastes and aversions of the critic than about the defamed subject.

Godard's own account of the jump cuts in relation to the postproduction process (3) clearly deserves a higher status, particularly since it is neither self-promoting nor designed to discredit anyone else. That does not mean, however, that it should be taken entirely at face value as the last word on the jump cuts, even if it is a full and accurate account as to how they came about, since it tells us nothing about the way in which the jump cuts *work* within the film.

The approaches which focus on that are the only ones which enrich our understanding of *Breathless*. In this context, the transmission of anecdotal material becomes secondary, and the primary concern is on discovering the expressive properties of the jump cut, either in relation to the particular story told by the film (4) or as the cornerstone of a new esthetic (5). Here, the *meaning* and *function* of the jump cuts are given full attention, rather than factors which have no relation to the viewer's experience of the film.

This does not mean that certain explanations should be discarded in favor of others. Even explanations which are vicious or misleading are worth knowing and discussing – both because they help to heighten our appreciation of more illuminating approaches, and because it is a value in itself to contemplate as broad a spectrum of explanatory options as possible when dealing with any innovation.

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Unsigned. "Cubistic Crime," *Time* (February 17, 1961), p. 56.

An Alan Alda Filmography

(NB. This list does not include Alan Alda's numerous television credits.)

Director
"The Four Seasons" (1981)
"Sweet Liberty" (1986)
"A New Life" (1988)
"Betsy's Wedding" (1990)

Writer
"The Seduction of Joe Tynan" (1979)
"The Four Seasons" (1981)
"Sweet Liberty" (1986)
"A New Life" (1988)
"Betsy's Wedding" (1990)

Actor
"Gone Are the Days" (1963)
"Paper Lion" (1968)
"The Extraordinary Seaman" (1969)
"Jenny" (1969)
"The Moonshine War" (1970)
"The Mephisto Waltz" (1971)
"The Glass House" (1972)
"Playmates" (1972)
"To Kill a Clown" (1972)
"Isn't It Shocking?" (1973)
"Kill Me If You Can" (1977)
"California Suite" (1978)
"Same Time, Next Year" (1978)
"The Seduction of Joe Tynan" (1979)
"The Four Seasons" (1981)
"Sweet Liberty" (1986)
"A New Life" (1988)
"Crimes and Misdemeanors" (1989)
"Whispers in the Dark" (1992)
"And the Band Played On" (1993)
"Manhattan Murder Mystery" (1993)
"Canadian Bacon" (1994)
"White Mile" (1994)
"Flirting With Disaster" (1996)
"Everyone Says I Love You" (1997)
"Murder at 1600" (1997)
"Mad City" (1997)
"The Object of My Affection" (1998)

An interview with Alan Alda on storytelling in film

Excerpts from two scenes in *A New Life* (1988)
written and directed by Alan Alda

1. The stethoscope scene (discussed on p. 157 below)

Steve (Alan Alda) is having his heart checked by Dr. Hutton (Veronica Hamel). Whenever she puts her hand on his shoulder while listening to his heartbeat, Steve's pulse accelerates dramatically, only to slow down again whenever she removes her hand. She suspects that this is happening, and smiles to herself when her hypothesis is confirmed.

2. Cutting the umbilical cord (discussed on p. 158 below)

Having passed out when amniotic fluid was taken from his wife's uterus, and unable to cope with preparations for giving birth, Steve is asked moments after the birth: "Daddy, would you like to cut the cord?" At this moment of decision, he manages to overcome his fears.

An interview with Alan Alda on storytelling in film

Richard Raskin

One of the most memorable scenes in A New Life *is the stethoscope scene, which might be viewed as a perfect model of storytelling in film with pictures and sounds. Although there is some dialogue, other elements in the scene really carry the story. I'm aware that more than ten years have elapsed since the production of* A New Life, *but do you happen to remember how the idea for that scene came to you?*

I really don't. I do remember though thinking that I was taking a little bit of a risk... It's funny, I was just reading a little bit of that manifesto of that new [Dogma] group, where they say: "I hereby renounce artistic taste." *(Laughter.)* It makes me smile, because I can remember constantly having artistic taste bells going off in my head as I would think of ideas. And that was one in which I wondered if I was being too sketchy. By that I mean writing it too much as if it were a vaudeville sketch rather than a comedy. And the difference to me is that in comedy, the behavior is as plausible as possible. Now in a sketch, you can hear a person's heart race instantaneously when a woman touches a man. But in real life, it might take a little bit longer. And for it to be funny, it had to verge toward the instantaneous. And I worried about that a little bit. And then I thought that it was probably close enough to reality for me to feel comfortable with it.

The odd thing is that in movies, increasingly, audiences are not asked to be able to tell the difference between comedy and sketch-comedy... and don't make any distinction! Long 90 minute sketches are presented as comedies. The sole purpose of sketch-writing is to make you laugh, the same way that a cartoon would, where rules of reality are out the window; it's just the rules of tickling your funny bone that count. And people have lost track of comedy, which is more interesting – it's more interesting to have all those things going at once: reality and funny at the same time.

Anyway, that's all I can remember about that scene.

Another thing that I especially admire in A New Life *is the quality that you give to the women characters in the story. They're independent and competent, and they're the*

ones who set the agenda for the men, to a very large degree. They aren't just parts of a man's story, they shape their own stories. I learned just a few days ago that you've been very active in campaigning for women's rights, [1]*and I assume that there's a connection between that and the roles you give to women in your stories.*

I don't know. I suppose so. I guess that if in my private life, I campaigned as I did for the equal rights amendment, I would see things in that light... But that's as far as I would go with it, because I really don't believe that any of that stuff is there because I was trying to make a propaganda point. In fact, the reason I don't believe it was there is that I am very much against using films for propaganda purposes. I hate it when I see it in films. I just like to poke around in real human experience and let people come to some kind of understanding that doesn't have to do with learning lessons, or the way you should vote. That's all so minor compared to what you can get out of a really good film.

Another wonderful moment in A New Life *is the moment when your character is asked if he would like to cut the umbilical cord, and he does it. This is one of those situations in which you have placed a character before a choice, involving a symbolic gesture that is full of meaning. When you write a screenplay, do you think in terms of confronting characters with choices?*

I know that a lot of people talk about storytelling in terms of choices, especially moral choices, and that all seems really interesting to me. I don't know quite how they do it. *(Laughter.)* I don't do it consciously. I don't think I do, anyway.

I do think it's important to let the character be in a pickle, that the character has to fight his or her way out of. And a really good pickle is where you have to make a choice between two conflicting values. Do you put your family first or do you put your country first? Do you put your love for your wife, who's having a baby, ahead of your need to pass out, or your inability to deal with the mucky part of life and death and birth?

I don't have it down to a formula. And as a matter of fact, I notice that when I write something, and when I act in something, I find

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[1] Alda campaigned extensively for 10 years for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and in 1976, was appointed by President Gerald Ford to serve on the National Commission for the Observance of International Women's Year.

myself inventing a new method, a new systematic approach to it each time, which is born of the piece itself.

I remember wanting to write a long time ago and making notes on the story about a preacher that I thought I might play, I thought it would be fun to play that character. And last night, I saw for the first time the movie that Robert Duvall wrote, directed and acted in, about a preacher. It was called *The Apostle* and was really brilliant. I would never have been able to come anywhere near it, because he spent 12 years I think researching it, meeting those people, living with them. And what I thought was the most interesting thing about it was the way he told the story. He started with a murder. It was manslaughter, it wasn't pre-meditated. But he kills a guy. He's a preacher, and he's running from the law from then on. And yet, while he's running from the law, you see him rededicating himself to what seems to be a sincere service to other people and to the God he believes in. It's a really fascinating contrast, and you can't help but be involved because he seems to be so much of two minds and yet he's completely involved in both of them. He doesn't seem to have any remorse for the killing, and yet he seems to be totally dedicated to this religious life. It's very interesting. But the storytelling element of starting the story off with *that*, rather than some ordinary event in his life, and watching him in action and seeing some kind of conflict that comes out of everyday events... It's not an everyday event to kill somebody. But I think I might have looked for everyday events, at least when I was working on the story. The ways in which he used the people around him, and the ways in which he had power over people. I think that would have interested me. And it wouldn't have occurred to me to have him kill somebody out of a jealous rage. And yet what a great storytelling device that is. I really thought I learned something from that about storytelling.
So rather than tell you about great storytelling that I've done in the past, I think the best thing I can point to is what he did.

I've learned recently that many Danish television people believe that any given story is or should be primarily one character's. They ask: whose story is it. And generally they expect to find that character both in the opening and in the final shot. Is this something

that you think is generally the case? That a story is generally one character's more than any other's? Or do you think that stories can also be shared just about equally?

Well, I tried to share stories in *A New Life*. I don't think I was as successful as I thought I was going to be with that. Although I think I shared the story between the character I played and the character Ann-Margret played, and their paths crossed at the end even though they didn't know it. I think a little more of the emphasis was on his story because I do think I have what you could call an old-fashioned sense of storytelling, or time-tested if you want to be less pejorative about it. That it's probably most satisfying to mostly follow the adventures of one person.

If I have a thing that I do when I write that's consistent, even though I kind of reinvent my method each time, I almost invariably go back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. And I do this when I'm writing, when I'm directing and when I'm acting. The central idea that I think is so valuable in that essay where he analyzes *Oedipus Rex* and tries to figure out what makes it a play, and what is a play, is the notion of dramatic action. And what I take that to mean is that no character can come on stage without wanting something – really desperately, really deeply wanting something. And if everybody wants something, even if it's the delivery boy, then they'll automatically be in conflict; you don't have to concoct conflict for them. I can always tell, I think, when conflict is concocted in a hastily written television drama, like a cop drama, because it looks like the writer has struggled to find ways in which the characters disagree, because that writer's convinced that the essence of it is conflict. But that's missing the point, I think. You automatically get conflict if people in fact want something, and want it so passionately that they believe they deserve to have what they want. Nero deserves to be able to play, even if Rome is burning, because play is that important to him. He doesn't know that he's being foolish or stupid or villainous when he does that. He deserves it. And somebody who tries to stop him because people are dying or hungry wants it for reasons that are just as important to them. And they'll find themselves in conflict.

I learned something very interesting when I was young and was in an improvising workshop. It was Paul Sill's workshop. He ran a company here called Second City. And his mother had invented theater games. We did theater games for six months or so. In one of the exercises, people tried to agree with each other. And what was fascinating about that was, no matter how hard you tried to agree, there was always some little conflict that came up between you which made it difficult to agree.

The fact is, I think, any time you have two conscious humans, they're going to want something just a little bit different from one another, and conflict will be automatic. So you don't have to pursue conflict. What you have to pursue is what they want. And if you pursue what they want, not only will you get conflict, but you get life... because the people die if they don't want anything. You have dead, cartoon characters – just flat, two-dimensional drawings up there unless they want something. And when they *do* want something, the people can't take their eyes off them. The people are drawn into that, because we want what they want. We want to see if they can get it, even if they want something villainous. We want to see if they can get away with it. We have a chance vicariously to get rich at other people's expense, to have sex with this beautiful woman even though she's married, or whatever the story is.

It's interesting to see if they're going to get what they want. I think of that in very concrete terms. You can get a crowd of people on the street to stop and look at you if you just stand and look up at something on the second floor of a building. They want to see what you find so interesting. They want to see what you're involved in. What are you after? There's something active about your just standing there and looking at it... if it's not just a casual glance, if you're really focused on it. And that's tied into wanting things. I think people are drawn to watch people who want things. And my wanting what I want, your wanting what you want, your trying therefore to stop me from getting what I want so you can get what you want, is the protagonist and antagonist from the *Poetics*. And I think you get good writing if you look for that, and you get good

acting and good directing. And if the writer hasn't given the character a strong "want", something that they're endeavoring to accomplish, the actor is lost. You can't make it up with being cute or charming. You have to find some way to bring that to it.

It's especially difficult when the author thinks it doesn't really matter that they give you dialogue to say that's just expository. They're really just giving the audience information, and they're making the actor be the messenger boy, the Western Union delivery person. It shouldn't be permitted. There should be an artistic law against that, because it's boring and it's demeaning to the actor. The actor can bring so much life to to it if the actor has somethng to achieve, something to accomplish, and in the course of accomplishing it, gets the author's exposition across.

To me, one of the best examples of that are the opening lines in *Othello*: It's a fight about something. Roderigo says to Iago:

> Tush, I take it much unkindly that thou, Iago,
> who hast held my pursestrings as thy very own,
> should treat me thus.

Roderigo has been giving him money so that he'll advance his cause with Othello, and he doesn't think Iago is using the money right, and Iago is saying: "No, are you kidding, I'm helping you, I'm helping you!" and tries to show him, tries to convince him he's helping him. So in the first couple of lines of dialogue, you've got a want expressed. He wants his money back or he wants his money's worth. And the other guy is trying to convince him to keep giving him money. And in the course of convincing him, we learn everything we need to know about who Othello is, who Iago is, and what's been happening up until the curtain went up. That's much better than the maid picking up the phone and saying: "Master isn't home now. He drove to Philadelphia. He should be back in two days. And the Mrs. has been drinking too much lately." This bald faced exposition is not only boring, it's an affront. Whereas if you can keep it active, it's fun for everybody. It's fun

for the actors to play, and the audience doesn't even know you're telling them stuff. It's carried on the back of this active animal.

That's what I try to do. *Those* are ways in which I consciously try to tell stories.

What do you see as hardest thing about telling stories in film?

There are a number of things, but one of the first that comes to mind is the tension between the need to tell things visually and the use of words. There is a real pleasure in language that we all experience. And a pure silent movie without language isn't as satisfying as good visual storytelling supported by rich language. But it's difficult to get the right balance. And it depends on the kind of story you're telling and the kind of audience that will probably come and see it.

And there are some films that are delicious and almost completely verbal and hardly visual at all, in the conventional sense anyway, like a couple of Eric Rohmer movies that I can remember, and *My Dinner with André* [Louis Malle, 1981]. One of the most wonderful movies I've ever seen is Wally Shawn's movie that Mike Nichols is in? You have to see it. It's gorgeous. The people sit at a table and talk to the camera. They don't even talk to each other. But it's brilliant! Mike Nichols gives a performance like nothing I've ever seen on the screen. *The Designated Mourner* it's called. It was a play that they did in London and then made a film out of it. It's brilliant and it breaks most of the rules I just told you about. (*Laughter*.)

I think when you're really honest, you keep discovering exceptions to your own rules.

And it's good. And I think it's good to shake things up and try to do things in a way you've never done them before.

I love it, what they say in their [Dogma] manifesto: "From now on, I renounce being an artist and I give up artistic taste and æsthetic considerations." I can't wait to see that movie, *The Celebration*, because it sounds like an interesting movie. I think it's really a good idea to reconsider everything every once in a while.

May I ask what comes easiest to you in the storytelling process?

I love dialogue. And that's why I feel tension between that and the visual. When I was about twelve, I started playing with a movie camera, shooting silent movies in my backyard. So I've always loved telling stories through imagery too. But it was only a few years later as a teenager that I was sitting on trains, when my father was doing a play in Philadelphia – he was trying out *Guys and Dolls* – and I would take the train down to Philadelphia to see him. And on the way, I'd be writing down conversations I was overhearing, trying to learn how people spoke. We all think we know how people speak, but if you actually copy down a real conversation, you find ellipses and repetitions that you're not aware of when you're in a real conversation. And they're fascinating. You can hear the brain working. And you can hear what the people really desire of one another, that they may not even be aware of themselves. So I would copy down those conversations, and I had been reading Hemingway and Gertrude Stein and had, I thought, learned something from the way they listened to the way people talked. Especially Gertrude Stein. And since then, I've given a lot of thought to it and I'm really interested in the way people speak in short bursts, with a lot of repetititon. And each repetition is a burst of its own, with its own energy. It's like little packets of information. People don't speak in paragraphs.

And I think there's a lot I've learned about that from Shakespeare too, because every clause of Shakespeare, and every clause within a clause, is so difficult to parse. That's possibly just another way of writing down the packets of thought that are being communicated. There are probably very believable and recognizable familiar ways to say that, that we think we can't do because we think we have to make it clear in some other way. People are always parsing it vocally instead of saying: what if this had been written down verbatum on a train to Philadelphia? What was the person going through when they said it? Now obviously people didn't speak in iambic pentameter on the train to Philadelphia. But even if they had been, they probably would have spoken in bursts. And I think you have to find out where those little impulses come from.

I am fascinated with dialogue. I wouldn't say it comes easily to me, so much as I just love it. So I have to make sure I don't get buried in it.

What do you see as the worst mistakes a beginning screenwriter can make when telling a story? And is there any advice that you would want to give student filmmakers about their storytelling?

Those are two good questions.

I think a really big pitfall for beginning writers – and this was true of me and I think is true of many other beginning writers whose work I read – is that you really can't write convincingly about something you don't know anything about. I think Robert Duvall's living with those people for twelve years is a great gift that he made to the audience. Because I believe that I'm looking at real lives, something like the way they were really lived.

It's really not worth much to just tell me a bunch of stereotypical impressions that you got from reading a newspaper or that you figured you could just imagine if you sat down and thought about it for five minutes. And stereotypes come easily to us. In a way, we have to think in steoreotypes to get through the day. But stereotypes are the enemy of art, I think. When we're children, and we draw a face – sometimes its because an adult will show us the stereotype – we'll draw a circle for the face and a couple of circles for eyes and maybe a circle for the nose and a line for the mouth. That's not a face! It doesn't look like a face. It isn't a face. We've just all agreed that those stereotypical symbols represent a face. And if you try to actually draw what's really there, what you really see, it's shocking sometimes how much more alive that looks, even if the proportions are all wrong.

So I would say to a beginner: be really on guard against stereotypical impressions. Just because you're writing about a mobster, doesn't mean he necessarily talks tough. He might look like an accountant, he might be effeminate. There might be all kinds of things about him that you would never expect. But don't make them up out of fantasy. See if you can learn what it's really like and when you're looking at the real thing, try to really look at the real thing, and don't filter it through some stereotype and say, "Ah, yes. I see what this is. This is that stereotype..." You have to get to recognize your own stereotypical thinking so you can check it at the door.

Another thing to watch out for is thinking you can impose on the audience and they won't mind. They might not mind, but they'll get tired of you and they'll leave. By impose on them, I mean: give them a whole lot of exposition that's not active and not playable, but just sort of "the daily news" about this character. It's tiresome for an audience.

Those are just a couple of things. There are plenty of other things for beginners to think about. But something that I don't think I've heard anybody else say about what to look for in a beginning film that I've noticed in most beginning films that I've seen, is that there is almost always a moment in the film that's *crucial* to your understanding what the film is about. And very often, that moment isn't clear. The filmmaker knows what it means, and the audience doesn't. And if you say to the filmmaker: "You know, this moment doesn't work. Why don't you just cut it out?", the filmmaker will grab his or her hair and say: "What do you *mean*? That's the whole picture! That's where he decides to give the secrets to the Nazis..." And you say: "But it's not *there*. You haven't *shown* that." He says but that what he's thinking. So I say: "Then make him *do* something that let's me know what he's thinking because I can't tell."

It's amazing how difficult it is, especially in the crucial moments, to make it clear what's happening. I think you have to be able to say to yourself: "Why is this shot here? What do I think is happening in this shot? Is it really happening?" And you need to be able to take it when somebody says to you: "That's not what I see happening." You need then to go back and re-shoot it, and make it happen."

It may also be that you're trying to squeeze too much into it. You need sometimes to be very simple about it and break it down into simple steps so that people get it.

It's tricky because on the one hand, all art is more affecting the more compressed it is. On the other hand, sometimes the more compressed it is, the more confusing and obfuscated it is. So have to just hit that right balance, or come in at the right angle, so that you're not telling them everything, you're not telling them what they already know, and yet you're telling them enough so they know what's going on. They should be able to follow the story.

And we're just talking about following the story. We haven't even gotten into what does the story add up to, what does it mean. Are there levels of meaning in it?

There's a wonderful movie that just came out here called *Smoke Signals* – the first movie written, directed and acted by Native Americans ("Indians"). In that movie, the writer and the director are able to take an image of a father and a son and allow it to mean a half a dozen different things. They mean the actual psychological relationship between the father and the son; they mean the sociological implications of fathers and sons who behave like that toward each other; they mean the religious, spiritual relationship of us to our forefathers; and they mean the relationship between us and the earth as the father or the father-mother... I mean it's just amazing how, by virtue of the images that you see, and the way the images are cut together, with not much dialogue and no stating of the theme, literally, just by the way the images come at you and how they're juxtaposed with one another, you get this layered meaning. And that makes it tremendously satisfying æsthetically, intellectually. And yet it's completely understandable on a base level of storytelling, of what happened to this boy and his father, between him and his father. It's really good storytelling. I hope you get a chance to talk to both of those people: to Duvall, and the guys who made *Smoke Signals*. I think that they're both really good examples of storytelling in film.

New York, 12 October 1998

4th International Short Film Symposium at the University of Aarhus

10-11 March 1999

Three recent prize-winning short fiction films, shown and admired at numerous international festivals, and representing three very different kinds of storytelling, will be the focus of this symposium:

Kom (4 min.30, 1995),
Marianne Olsen Ulrichsen, Norway

Goodbye Mom (8 min., 1997),
Ariel Gordon, Mexico

Possum (14 min., 1997),
Brad McGann, New Zealand

Wednesday, March 10h, 13:15-16:00, 340, Trøjborg

Three Short Fiction Films and Their Directors

After each of the films has been shown, the director will tell about the making of the film and his or her own goals as a filmmaker. The final hour of the program will consist in a panel discussion in which Marianne Olsen Ulrichsen, Ariel Gordon and Brad McGann will discuss storytelling in the short fiction film. The directors will also answer questions from the audience.

Sponsors include the Danish Film Institute, the European Film College in Ebeltoft and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Aarhus.

On the evening of Thursday, March 11th, the directors will appear at the Danish Film Institute and on Saturday March 13th, they will present their films at the European Film College in Ebeltoft.

These events are arranged by the Department of Information and Media Science.

The next issue of **p.o.v.** (number 7, March 1999) will focus on the short films to be presented by their directors at the 4th International Short Film Symposium to be held at the University of Aarhus:

Marianne Olsen Ulrichsen's KOM (Norway, 1995)
Brad McGann's POSSUM (New Zealand, 1997)
and
Ariel Gordon's GOODBYE MOM (Mexico, 1997)

The Contributors

Claus Christensen

Born in 1964. Completing his MA at the Institute of Scandinavian Studies, University of Aarhus, on the representation of evil in mass media in the 1990s. Teaches film at Testrup Højskole. Film reviewer for *Århus Stiftstidende*. Articles in *Kosmorama*, *Dansk Film*, *Levende Billeder* and a number of Danish newspapers.

Edvin Kau

Born in 1947. Ph.D., assoc. prof., Department of Information and Media Science, University of Aarhus. Teaches film and television theory and media analysis. Has written books and a number of articles on literature; multimedia; film history, theory, and analysis. Books include *Filmen i Danmark (Danish film industry from the advent of sound till the 80'ties*, with Niels Jørgen Dinnesen, 1983), and *Dreyer's Film Art* (1989).

Lars Bo Kimergård

Born in 1963. MA in film studies from the University of Copenhagen, 1992. Free-lance film editor, Assistant Lecturer at the Department of Film and Media Studies, University of Copenhagen. Publications on Carl Th. Dreyer, Lars von Trier, documentary and film editing.

Søren Kolstrup

Born in 1936, assoc. prof. Teaches textual analysis at the Department of Information and Media Science, University of Arhus, and visual analysis at Danish School of Journalism. Articles in *Mediekultur*, *Mscope* and *ReCall*.

Mark LeFanu

Born in 1950. M.A. in literature (Cambridge University). Teaches film history at the European Film College in Ebeltoft. Contributor to *Positif* and (in the 1980s) to *Sight and Sound*. Author of The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky (BFI Books, 1987). Currently preparing a book on Kenji Mizoguchi.

Scott MacKenzie.

Born 1967. PhD, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Dept. of Theatre, Film and Television Studies, University of Glasgow. Teaches Canadian and Québécois cinemas, documentary film and video, theories of national cinemas, alternative media and television history. Previously taught at McGill University (Montréal). Most recently published in *Public*, *Cinéaction* and *The Canadian Journal of Film Studies*. Co-editor (with Mette Hjort) of *Cinema and Nation: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Nationalism and National Identity* (Routledge, forthcoming). Presently completing a book-length study of Québécois cinema, discourses of national identity and the alternative public sphere.

Sidsel Mundal

Born 1951. Cand.Mag. At present: staff training consultant and director/ producer at the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation. Worked as film and video editor for many years. Taught editing at the European Film College in Ebeltoft, 1997-98.

Richard Raskin

Born 1941, New York. Dr.phil., assoc. prof. Teaches video production at the Department of Information and Media Studies, University of Aarhus. Articles in such journals as *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte, Folklore,* and *Film History*. Books include: *The Functional Analysis of Art* (1982), *Nuit et Brouillard* (1987), and *Life is Like a Glass of Tea: Studies of Classic Jewish Jokes* (1992). Has served as president of the jury at international short film and video festivals in France and Belgium in 1997 and 1998, as "official observer" at the International Short Film Festival in Clermont-Ferrand (1998) and as member of the international jury at the Odense Film Festival in 1998.

Martin Weinreich

Born 1969. Currently completing an M.A. thesis on Lars von Trier at the Department of Scandinavian Language and Literature at the Department of Information and Media Studies at the University of Aarhus. Has worked for Danish television (DR) as a director and on more than ten short films, often both as director, producer and writer. Participant in Artgenda 98 in Stockholm, the second biennial of young artists around the Baltic Sea.

Vinca Wiedemann.

Born 1959. Educated as film editor at The Danish Film School 1986. Teacher at the film school since 1990. Since 1995 script and editing consultant for among others Susanne Bier, Jesper Jargil and Christian Braad Thomsen, and on theatre for Katrine Wiedemann. Is currently writing a screenplay for a Morten Korch feature film in collaboration with Lars von Trier, and is the producer of Jesper Jargil's documentary trilogy about Lars von Trier's artistic universe.