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Editing

The foundation of film art is editing.
—V. I. PUDOVKIN, FILMMAKER AND FILM CRITIC

*O*verview   Real time versus reel time: the problem of continuity. Cutting to continuity: condensing unobtrusively. D. W. Griffith and the development of a universal cutting style. The invisible manipulation of classical cutting: editing for emphasis and nuance. The problem of time. Subjective editing: thematic montage and the Soviet school. Pudovkin and Eisenstein: two early masters of thematic cutting. The famous Odessa Steps sequence of *Potemkin.* The countertradition: the realism of André Bazin. How editing lies. When not to cut and why. Real time and space and how to preserve them. The realist arsenal: sound, deep focus, sequence shots, widescreen. Alfred Hitchcock, supreme master of editing: storyboard sequence from *North by Northwest.*

So far, we've been concerned with cinematic communication as it relates to the single shot, the basic unit of construction in movies. Except for traveling shots and **lengthy takes,** however, shots in film tend to acquire meaning when they are juxtaposed with other shots and structured into an **edited** sequence. Physically, editing is simply joining one strip of film **(shot)** with another. Shots are joined into scenes. On the most mechanical level, editing eliminates unnecessary time and space. Through the association of ideas, editing connects one shot with another, one scene with another, and so on. Simple as this may now seem, the convention of editing represents what critic Terry Ramsaye referred to as the "syntax" of cinema, its grammatical language. Like linguistic syntax, the syntax of editing must be learned. We don't possess it innately.

CONTINUITY

In the earliest years of cinema, the late 1890s, movies were brief, consisting of short events photographed in **long shots** in a single **take.** The duration of the shot and the event were equal. Soon, filmmakers began to tell stories—simple ones, it's true, but requiring more than a single shot. Scholars have traced the development of narrative to filmmakers in France, Britain, and the United States.

By the early twentieth century, filmmakers had already devised a functional style of editing we now call *cutting to continuity.* This type of cutting is a technique used in most fiction films even today, if only for exposition scenes. Essentially, this style of editing is a kind of shorthand, consisting of time-honored conventions. Continuity cutting tries to preserve the fluidity of an event without literally showing all of it.

For example, a continuous shot of a woman leaving work and going home might take forty-five minutes. Cutting to continuity condenses the action into a few brief shots, each of which leads by association to the next: (1) She enters a corridor as she closes the door to her office. (2) She leaves the office building.

4–1. ***The Deer Hunter*** **(U.S.A., 1978),** *directed by Michael Cimino.*
Editing is an art as well as a craft. Like all art, it often defies mechanical formulations, taking on a life of its own. For example, when sneak preview audiences were asked for their reactions to this three-hour movie, most viewers responded enthusiastically but felt that the hour-long wedding sequence of the opening could have been cut down. In terms of its plot, nothing much "happens" in this sequence. Its purpose is primarily *lyrical*—a loving celebration of the social rituals that bind the community together. The story content of the sequence could be condensed to a few minutes of screen time—which is exactly what its makers did. When the shortened version was shown to audiences, reactions were negative. Cimino and his editor, Peter Zinner, restored the cut footage. The long wedding sequence is necessary not for its story content so much as for its experiential value. It provides the movie with a sense of balance: The community solidarity of the sequence is what the characters fight *for* in the subsequent battle footage of the film. *(Universal Pictures)*

(3) She enters and starts her car. (4) She drives her car along a highway. (5) Her car turns into her driveway at home. The entire forty-five-minute action might take ten seconds of screen time, yet nothing essential is left out. It's an unobtrusive condensation.
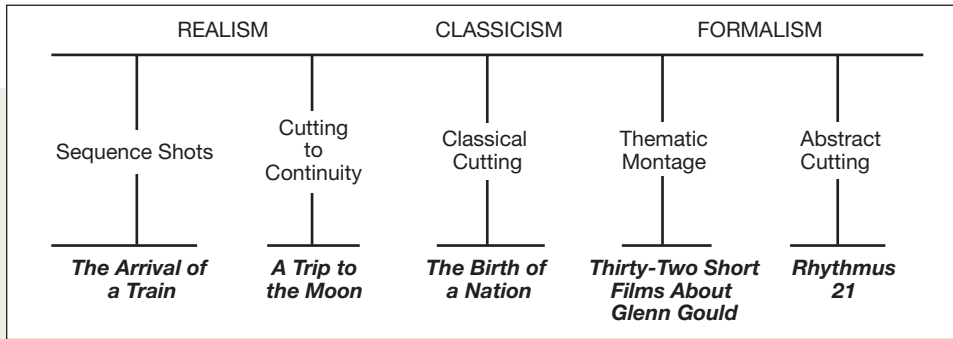
To keep the action logical and continuous, there must be no confusing breaks in an edited sequence of this sort. Often, all the movement is carried out in the same direction on the screen to avoid confusion. For example, if the woman moves from right to left in one shot and her movements are from left to right in the other shots, we might think that she is returning to her office. Cause–effect relationships must be clearly set forth. If the woman slams on her brakes, the director is generally obliged to offer us a shot of what prompted the driver to stop so suddenly.

4–2. ***The Makioka Sisters*** **(Japan, 1985),** *directed by Kon Ichikawa.*
How a scene is edited can be very subjective, depending on who's doing the cutting and what the editor wants to emphasize. In this domestic family quarrel, for example, the scene is slanted toward the wronged wife (Keiko Kishi, lower right) and her bullying husband (Teinosuke Sachiko, center left). Her sisters and brother-in-law observe from the rear of the room. But another editor could focus on any of the other four characters, giving them more prominence in the sequence by cutting to their reactions more often, thus conveying the scene primarily from that character's perspective. In short, six different stories could be told, depending on how the sequence is cut together, and who gets the most shots. *(R5/S8)*

REALISM		CLASSICISM	FORMALISM	
Sequence Shots	Cutting to Continuity	Classical Cutting	Thematic Montage	Abstract Cutting
The Arrival of a Train	*A Trip to the Moon*	*The Birth of a Nation*	*Thirty-Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*	*Rhythmus 21*

4–3. Editing styles can be classified according to how intrusive or interpretive the cutting is. The least manipulative style is found in a sequence shot, which contains no editing at all. Cutting to continuity merely condenses the time and space of a completed action. Classical cutting interprets an action by emphasizing certain details over others. Thematic montage argues a thesis—the shots are connected in a relatively subjective manner. Abstract cutting is a purely formalistic style of editing, totally divorced from any recognizable subject matter.

The continuity of actual space and time is fragmented as smoothly as possible in this type of editing. Unless the audience has a clear sense of a continuous action, an editing transition can be disorienting. Hence the term **jump cut,** which means an editing transition that's confusing in terms of space and time. To make their transitions smooth, filmmakers generally use **establishing shots** at the beginning of their stories or at the beginning of any new scene within the narrative.

Once the location is established, filmmakers then can cut to closer shots of the action. If the events require a considerable number of cuts, the filmmaker might cut back to a **reestablishing shot**—a return to the opening long shot. In this way, the viewer is reminded of the spatial context of the closer shots. "Between" these various shots, time and space can be expanded or contracted with considerable subtlety.

By 1908, when the American D. W. Griffith entered the field of filmmaking, movies had already learned how to tell stories thanks to the technique of cutting to continuity. But the stories were simple and crude compared to those in more sophisticated narrative mediums like literature and drama. Nonetheless, movie storytellers already knew that by breaking up an action into different shots, the event can be contracted or expanded, depending on the number of shots. In other words, the shot, not the scene, was the basic unit of film construction.

Movies before Griffith were usually photographed in stationary long shot—roughly the position of a close observer in the live theater. Because film time doesn't depend on the duration of the literal event, filmmakers of this era introduced a more subjective time, one that's determined by the duration of the shots (and the elapsed time implied between them), not by the actual occurrence.
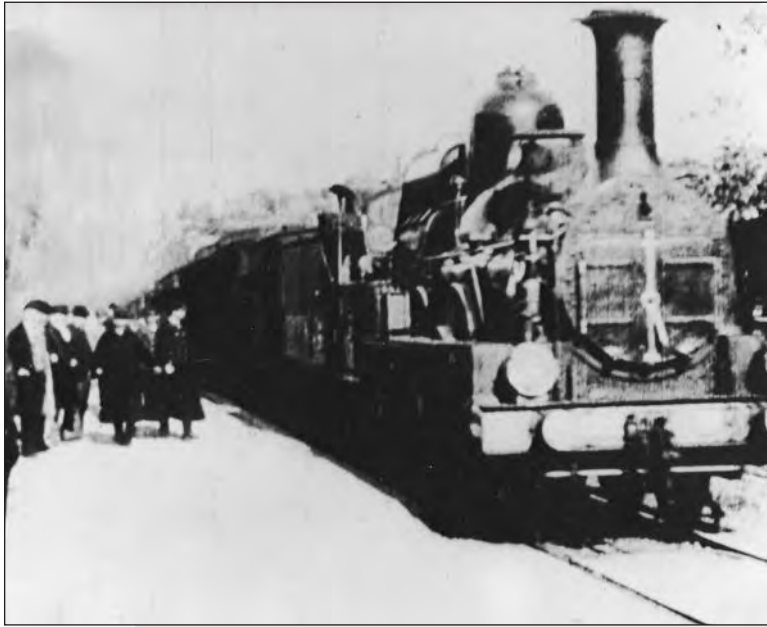
4–4a. *The Arrival of a Train* **(France, 1895),** *directed by Louis and Auguste Lumière.*

The Lumière brothers might be regarded as the godfathers of the documentary movement. Their brief *actualités* (as they called them) are primitive documentaries shot for the most part in single takes. These early newsreels often contained several different sequences, but rarely is there much cutting within a sequence—hence the term *sequence shot* (that is, a complex action photographed in a continuous take, without cuts). Audiences of this era were so astonished by the novelty of a moving picture that this alone was enough to hold their attention. See also Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). *(Museum of Modern Art)*

4–4b. *A Trip to the Moon* **(France, 1902),** *directed by Georges Méliès.*

Around 1900, in America, England, and France, filmmakers began to tell stories. Their narratives were crude, but they required more than just one shot to complete. Méliès was one of the first to devise the style of cutting to continuity. The narrative segments are connected by a fade-out. The next scene then fades in, often in a different location and at a different time, though usually with the same characters. Méliès advertised these films as stories in "arranged scenes." *(Museum of Modern Art)*

D. W. GRIFFITH AND CLASSICAL CUTTING

The basic elements of editing syntax were already in place when Griffith entered the field, but it was he more than any other individual who molded these elements into a language of power and subtlety. Film scholars have called this language **classical cutting.** Griffith has been called the Father of Film because he consolidated and expanded many of the techniques invented by his predecessors and was the first to go beyond gimmickry into the realm of art. By 1915, the year of his famous epic *The Birth of a Nation,* classical cutting was already an editing style of great sophistication and expressiveness. Griffith had seized on the principle of the association of ideas in the concept of editing and expanded it in a variety of ways.

Classical cutting involves editing for dramatic intensity and emotional emphasis rather than for purely physical reasons. Through the use of the **close-up** within the scene, Griffith managed to achieve a dramatic impact that was unprecedented. Close-ups had been used earlier, but Griffith was the first to use them for psychological rather than physical reasons alone. Audiences were

4–5. *The Birth of a Nation* **(U.S.A., 1915),** *directed by D. W. Griffith.*
Griffith's greatest gift to the cinema was classical cutting—a style of editing that still characterizes most of the fiction films around the world. Classical cutting allows filmmakers to inflect their narratives, to add nuances and emphasis. It also subjectivizes time. For example, in this famous last-minute rescue finale, Griffith cross-cuts to four different groups. Despite the sense of speed suggested by the brevity of the shots, the sequence actually expands time. Griffith used 255 separate shots for about twenty minutes of screen time. *(Museum of Modern Art)*

4–6. *Thirty-Two Short Films About Glenn Gould* **(Canada, 1994),** *with Colm Feore, directed by François Girard.*

This movie combines elements from documentary filmmaking, fiction films, and the avant-garde. Its editing style is radically subjective. The movie features documentary footage of the late Glenn Gould, a controversial and eccentric Canadian pianist considered to be one of the great musicians of the twentieth century. There are also many re-created scenes with the brilliant Colm Feore playing the quirky and obsessive artist. The movie's structure is not a straightforward narrative, but a series of fragments, loosely based on the thirty-two-part *Goldberg Variations* of Johann Sebastian Bach—one of Gould's most celebrated virtuoso performances. The film is structured around ideas rather than a linear story, and for this reason, thematic montage is its style of editing.   *(The Samuel Goldwyn Company)*

now permitted to see the smallest details of an actor's face. No longer were performers required to flail their arms and tear their hair. The slightest arch of an eyebrow could convey a multitude of subtleties.

By splitting the action into a series of fragmentary shots, Griffith achieved not only a greater sense of detail, but a far greater degree of control over his audience's reactions. In carefully selecting and juxtaposing long, **medium,** and close shots, he constantly shifted the spectator's point of view within a scene—expanding here, excluding there, emphasizing, consolidating, connecting, contrasting, paralleling, and so on. The possibilities were far ranging. The space and time continuum of the real scene was radically altered. It was replaced by a subjective continuity—the association of ideas implicit in the connected shots.
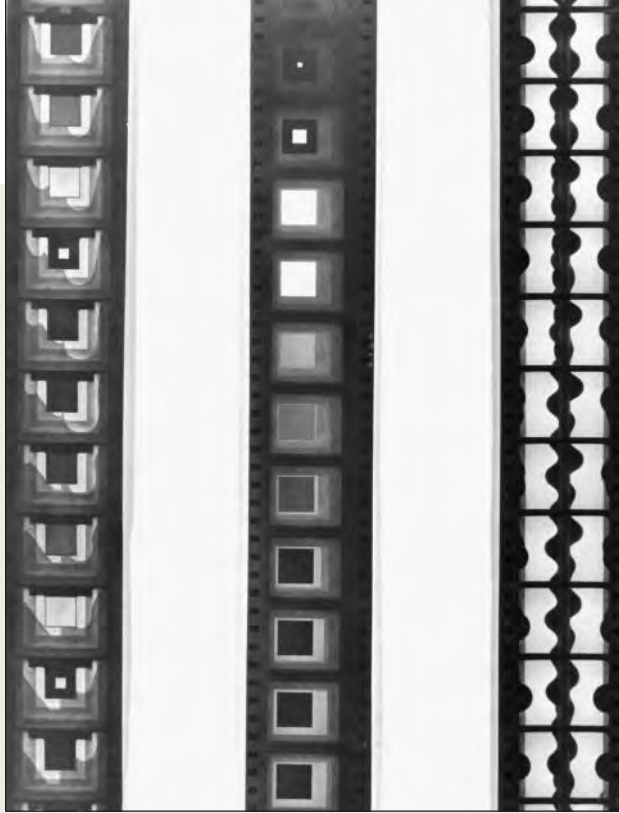
4–7. *Rhythmus 21* **(Germany, 1921),** *directed by Hans Richter.*
In the avant-garde cinema, subject matter is often suppressed or exploited primarily as abstract data. The continuity between shots has nothing to do with a story but is determined by purely subjective or formal considerations. Along with many other European abstract artists of his generation, Richter was a champion of the "absolute film," which consists solely of nonrepresentational forms and designs. They're like abstract paintings that squiggle and dance. *(Museum of Modern Art)*

In its most refined form, classical cutting presents a series of psychologically connected shots—shots that aren't necessarily separated by real time and space **(4–14).** For example, if four characters are seated in a room, a director might cut from one speaker to a second with a dialogue exchange, then cut to a **reaction shot** of one of the listeners, then to a **two-shot** of the original speakers, and finally to a close-up of the fourth person. The sequence of shots represents a kind of psychological cause–effect pattern. In other words, the breakup of shots is justified on the basis of dramatic rather than literal necessity. The scene could be photographed just as functionally in a single shot, with the camera at long-shot range. This type of setup is known as a **master shot** or a **sequence shot.** Classical cutting is more nuanced and more intrusive. It breaks down the unity of space, analyzes its components, and refocuses our attention to a series of details. The action is mental and emotional rather than literal.

During the golden years of the American studio system—roughly the 1930s and 1940s—directors were often urged (or forced) to adopt the master-shot technique of shooting. This method involved shooting an entire scene in long shot without cuts. This take contained all the dramatic variables and hence served as the basic or "master" shot for the scene. The action was then repeated a number of times, with the camera photographing medium shots and close-ups of the principals in the scene. When all this footage was gathered together, the editor had a number of choices in constructing a story continuity. Often, disagreements arose over the proper sequence of shots. Usually, the studio director

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4–8. *Fat City* **(U.S.A., 1972),** *directed by John Huston.*
Classical cutting involves editing for dramatic emphasis, to highlight details that might otherwise be overlooked. In Huston's fight scene, for example, the entire boxing match could have been presented in a single setup **(a).** Such a presentation would probably strike us as underwhelming. Instead, Huston breaks up his shots according to the psychological actions and reactions within the fighter protagonist (Stacy Keach) **(b),** his manager (Nicholas Colosanto) **(c),** and two friends in the auditorium (Candy Clark and Jeff Bridges) **(d).** *(Columbia Pictures)*

was permitted a **first cut**—that is, the sequence of shots representing his or her interpretation of the materials. Under this system, the studios usually had the right to a **final cut.** Many directors disliked master-shot techniques precisely because, with so much footage available, a meddling producer could construct a radically different continuity.

Master shots are still used by many directors. Without a master, editors often complain of inadequate footage—that the available shots won't cut smoothly. In complex battle scenes, most directors are likely to shoot many **cover shots**—that is, general shots that can be used to reestablish a sequence if the other shots won't cut. In *The Birth of a Nation,* Griffith used multiple cameras to photograph many of the battle scenes, a technique also used by Akira Kurosawa in some sequences of *The Seven Samurai.*

Griffith and other classical filmmakers developed a variety of editing con-ventions that they thought made the cutting "invisible," or at least didn't call attention to itself. One of these techniques is the *eyeline match*. We see character A look off frame left. Cut to a shot—from his point of view—of character B. We assume B is to A's left. Cause–effect.

Another convention of classical cutting is *matching action*. Character A is seated but begins to rise. Cut to another shot of the character concluding the rising action and then moving away. The idea is to keep the action fluid, to mask the cut with a smooth linkage that's not noticed because the motion of the char-acter takes precedence. The continuity of the movement conceals the suture.

The so-called *180° rule* is still observed by filmmakers, although even during the big-studio era there was nothing sacred about it. (For example, John Ford loved violating the 180° rule. He loved violating almost any rule.) This conven-tion involves **mise en scène** as well as editing. The purpose is to stabilize the space of the playing area so the spectator isn't confused or disoriented. An imaginary "axis of action" line is drawn through the middle of a scene, viewed from the **bird's-eye** angle **(4–9).** Character A is on the left; character B is on the right. If the director wanted a two-shot, he or she would use camera 1. If we then go to a close-up of A (camera 2), the camera must stay on the same side of the 180° line to keep the same background—a continuity aid for the spectator.

4–9.   Bird's-eye view of the 180° rule.
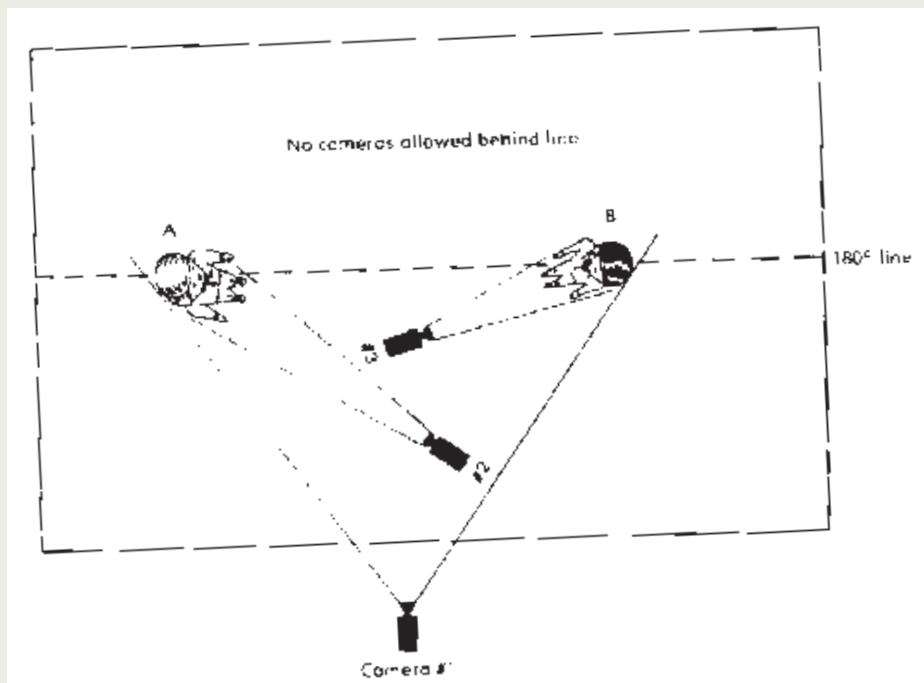
Similarly, a close-up of character B (camera 3) would be shot on the same side of the axis of action.

In **reverse angle shot** exchanges—common for dialogue sequences—the director takes care to fix the placement of the characters from shot to shot. If character A is on the left and character B is on the right in the first shot, they must remain that way in the reverse angle taken from over the shoulder of character B. Usually the reverse angle is not literally 180° opposite, but we agree to accept it as such.

Even today, filmmakers rarely take the camera behind the imaginary axis line, unless their deliberate intention is to confuse the spectator. During fight scenes and other types of chaotic clashes, the filmmaker often wants the specta-

4–10. *It's a Wonderful Life* **(U.S.A., 1946),** *with James Stewart, directed by Frank Capra.* Capra was a master of classical editing. His cutting style was fast, light, seamless. But he never displayed his editing virtuosity for its own sake. Like every other technique, editing is subordinated to the needs of the characters in action—the cardinal commandment of classical cutting. In this and other scenes, Capra included a "reactive character" who guides the viewer's response to the action. This character represents a kind of norm, the way an average person would respond to a given situation. In this scene, for example, Capra's charming fantasy takes a whimsical turn. The forlorn hero (Stewart) listens to his guardian angel (Henry Travers, left) explain why he isn't a very *distinguished* angel (he has yet to earn his wings). The reactive character is a casual bystander (Tom Fadden, center) who happens to overhear and is totally spooked by their conversation. Capra is able to punctuate the comedy of the scene by cutting to this character's response whenever the angel says something weird.   *(RKO)*

tor to feel threatened, disoriented, anxious. This can be accomplished by deliberately violating the 180° rule.

Griffith also perfected the conventions of the chase—still very much with us. Many of his movies ended with a chase and last-minute rescue sequence. Most of them feature **parallel editing**—the switching of shots of one scene with another at a different location. By **cross-cutting** back and forth between the two (or three or four) scenes, Griffith conveyed the idea of simultaneous time. For example, near the end of *The Birth of a Nation,* Griffith cross-cuts between four groups. In juxtaposing shots from these separate scenes, he manages to intensify the suspense by reducing the duration of the shots as the sequence reaches its climax. The sequence itself lasts twenty minutes of film time, but the psychological effect of the cross-cutting (the shots average about five seconds each) suggests speed and tension. Generally speaking, the greater the number of cuts within a scene, the greater its sense of speed. To avoid the risk of monotony during this sequence, Griffith changed his **setups** many times. There are **extreme long,** long, medium, and close shots, varied angles, lighting contrasts, even a moving camera (it was mounted on a truck).

If the continuity of a sequence is reasonably logical, the fragmentation of space presents no great difficulties. But the problem of time is more complex. Its treatment in film is more subjective than the treatment of space. Movies can compress years into two hours of projection time. They can also stretch a split second into many minutes. Most films condense time. There are only a handful that attempt to make screen time conform to real time: Agnès Varda's *Cleo From Five to Seven* and Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* **(4–24)** are perhaps the best-known examples. Both deal with about 90 minutes of time—also the approximate length of the films. Even these movies cheat by compressing time in the expository opening sequences and expanding it in the climactic scenes. In actual practice, time exists in a kind of limbo: As long as the audience is absorbed by the screen action, time is what the film says it is. The problem, then, is to absorb the viewer.

On the most mechanical level, screen time is determined by the physical length of the filmstrip containing the shot. This length is governed generally by the complexity of the image subject matter. Usually, longer shots are more densely saturated with visual information than close-ups and need to be held longer on the screen. Raymond Spottiswoode, an early film theorist, claimed that a cut must be made at the peak of the "content curve"—that is, the point in a shot at which the audience has been able to assimilate most of its information. Cutting after the peak of the content curve produces boredom and a sense of dragging time. Cutting before the peak doesn't give the audience enough time to assimilate the visual action. An image with a complex mise en scène requires more time to assimilate than a simple one. Once an image has been established, however, a return to it during the sequence can be considerably shorter, because it works as a reminder.

But the sensitive treatment of time in editing is largely an instinctive matter that defies mechanical rules **(4–1).** Most great directors have edited their own films, or at least worked in close collaboration with their editors, so crucial is this

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4–11a & b. *Pulp Fiction* **(U.S.A., 1994),** *with John Travolta and Uma Thurman, written and directed by Quentin Tarantino.* *(Miramax Films)*

Why do some movie directors cut while others avoid cutting by including all the variables in a single shot? Still other filmmakers prefer to move their camera along with the action rather than cut between separate shots. The differences may seem unimportant to the average viewer, but serious film artists realize that each of these three techniques suggests different psychological undertones—undertones that even average viewers respond to, though they might not be able to explain their response analytically.

The scene from *Pulp Fiction* takes place in a confined restaurant booth. Logically, Tarantino could have shot the scene with a single set-up, with both characters in profile facing each other. But the dramatic context demands a different strategy. Travolta plays a junkie/hit man whose gangster boss has asked him to take his wife to dinner while the boss is out of town. Wary of her flaky, unpredictable behavior, and fully conscious that a careless slip-up could cost him his life, the Travolta character "keeps his distance" from her—an aloofness that intrigues her. By keeping the two in separate space cubicles with a traditional shot/counter-shot technique, Tarantino stresses their psychological apartness. The editing keeps a distance between them.

4–11c. ***Gladiator*** **(U.S.A., 2000),** *with Russell Crowe (right), directed by Ridley Scott.*
(DreamWorks Pictures)

4–11d. *GoodFellas* **(U.S.A., 1990),** *with Lorraine Bracco and Ray Liotta, directed by Martin Scorsese. (Warner Bros.)*

The shot from *Gladiator* is more realistic in its presentation, with the sympathetic hero (Crowe) trapped in the same arena with a hungry tiger and a hostile giant who's determined to destroy him. In the movie itself, Ridley Scott cuts to all three of these dramatic variables to stretch out the suspense, but the greatest danger is conveyed in shots like this, where all three must fight to the finish in a relatively confined space.

Scorsese, who is a superlative editor, is also a master of the moving camera, and he often prefers to move with the action rather than break it down into a series of separate shots. Why? Mostly because the moving camera is more fluid, more lyrical. (It's also more expensive and time consuming.) In this wedding dance scene from *GoodFellas,* for example, Scorsese conveys the couple's euphoria by swirling the camera along with the dancers. These spontaneous eruptions destabilize the visual materials, infusing the action with a surge of energy, almost a kinetic high. The camera seems enraptured.

4–12a. *Possession* (U.S.A., 2002), *with Gwyneth Paltrow and Aaron Eckhart, and* **4–12b.** *with Jennifer Ehle and Jeremy Northam, directed by Neil LaBute.*

Among Griffith's many achievements was the introduction of thematic editing—connecting shots not to preserve the continuity of time and place, but to connect different time periods and locations on the basis of their thematic relationship. This is a technique that is still very much a part of modern filmmakers's arsenal. In *Possession,* for example, two time periods—the modern era and the Victorian period—are intercut throughout the movie. An American literary academic (Eckhart) and a British scholar (Gwyneth Paltrow) attempt to unravel the mystery of the love affair beteween a famous nineteenth century romantic poet (Northam) and his secret paramour (Ehle). LaBute intercuts the two stories to draw parallels—sometimes ironic—between the two couples and the two time periods. The movie is based on a celebrated British novel by A. S. Byatt. *(Focus Features)*

4–12c. *The Night of the Shooting Stars* (Italy, 1982), *directed by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani.*

Through editing, filmmakers can interrupt the present with fantasy inserts that represent what a character is thinking or imagining. For example, this movie deals with the lives of some Italian villagers during the final days of Fascist rule in World War II, when the American army was about to liberate their community. The tale is told by a woman who was only six at the time. In this scene we see the death of a Fascist thug not as it occurs in reality (he is shot by Partisans), but as it appears in the imagination of a six-year-old: The Partisans are armor-clad gladiators who hurl their spears of wrath at the Fascist, impaling him like a contemptible swine. *(United Artists)*

art to the success of films. The best-edited sequences are determined by mood as well as subject matter. Griffith, for example, generally edited love scenes in long **lyrical** takes, with relatively few setups. His chase and battle scenes were composed of brief shots, jammed together. Paradoxically, the love scenes actually compress real time, whereas the rapidly cut sequences elongate it.

There are no fixed rules concerning rhythm in films. Some editors cut according to musical rhythms **(see 5–12).** The march of soldiers, for example, could be edited to the beat of a military tune, as can be seen in several marching sequences in King Vidor's *The Big Parade.* This technique is also common with American avant-garde filmmakers, who feature rock music soundtracks or cut according to a mathematical or structural formula. In some cases, a director will cut before the peak of the content curve, especially in highly suspenseful sequences. In a number of movies, Hitchcock teases the audience by not providing enough time to assimilate all the meanings of a shot. Violent scenes are conventionally cut in a highly fragmented manner. On the other hand, Antonioni usually cuts long after the content curve has peaked. In *La Notte,* for example, the rhythm is languorous and even monotonous: The director attempts to create a sense of weariness in the audience, paralleling that of the characters. Antonioni's characters are usually tired people—in every sense of the term **(see 4–13).**

Tact is another editing principle that's difficult to generalize about, because it too depends on context. No one likes to have the obvious pointed out to us, whether in real life or while watching a movie. Like personal tact, directorial tact is a matter of restraint, taste, and respect for the intelligence of others. Hack directors often present us with emotionally gratuitous shots, falling over themselves to make sure we haven't missed the point.

Griffith's most radical experiments in editing are found in his 1916 epic, *Intolerance,* the first fiction film to explore the idea of **thematic montage.** Both the film and the technique exerted an enormous influence on movie directors of the 1920s, especially in the Soviet Union. Thematic montage stresses the association of *ideas,* irrespective of the continuity of time and space.

Intolerance is unified by the themes of bigotry and persecution. Rather than tell one story, Griffith intercut four. One takes place in ancient Babylon. The second deals with the crucifixion of Jesus. The third concerns the massacre of the Huguenots by the Catholic royalists in sixteenth-century France. The last story takes place in America in 1916 and deals with a battle between labor and management.

The four stories are developed not separately but in parallel fashion. Scenes of one time period are intercut with scenes of another. At the conclusion of the movie, Griffith features suspenseful chase sequences in the first and last stories, a brutal scene of slaughter in the French story, and a slow, tragic climax in the killing of Jesus. The concluding sequence contains literally hundreds of shots, juxtaposing images that are separated by thousands of years and by as many miles. All these different time periods and locations are unified by the central theme of intolerance. The continuity is no longer physical, or even psychological, but conceptual—that is, thematic.
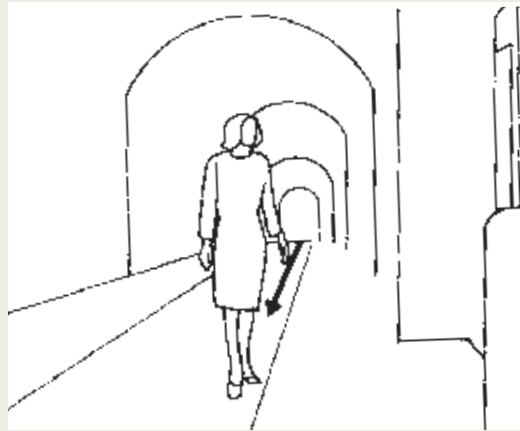
4–13a & b. *L'Avventura* **(Italy, 1960),** *with Monica Vitti, directed by Michelangelo Antonioni.* Psychological films often use movements in and out of the depth of an image, especially to create a sense of tediousness and exhaustion. Shots of this sort require **anticipatory setups** that reinforce these qualities, for we see the destination of a character's movement long before it's completed. Here, the heroine's search for her lover in the corridors of a hotel suggests the futility of her love affair. The endless succession of doors, fixtures, and hallways implies, among other things, the repetition of the frustration she is now experiencing. Much of the meaning of shots such as these lies in their duration: Space is used to suggest time. Needless to say, Antonioni's movies are among the slowest paced in the history of cinema: Long after the viewer has had time to absorb the visual information of a shot, it continues on the screen. When this film was originally shown at the Cannes Film Festival, an audience of hostile critics kept shouting "Cut! Cut!" at the screen. The shots were so lengthy and the pace so slow that viewers assumed the director was inept at editing. But like many of Antonioni's works, *L'Avventura* is about spiritual erosion, and the movie's slow rhythm is organically related to this theme. *(Janus Films)*

Intolerance was not a commercial success, but its influence was immense. The filmmakers of the Soviet Union were dazzled by Griffith's movie and based their own theories of montage on his practices in this film. A great many directors have profited from Griffith's experiments in the subjective treatment of time. In The Pawnbroker, for example, Sidney Lumet exploits the art of editing to produce a series of parallels that are thematically rather than chronologically related. He uses a kind of subliminal editing, in which some shots are held on the screen for only a fraction of a second. The central character is a middle-aged Jew who survived a Nazi concentration camp twenty-five years earlier. All his loved ones were killed there. He tries to repress the memories of these earlier experiences, but they force their way into his consciousness. Lumet suggests this psychological process by intercutting a few frames of the memory

4–14.   The Last Picture Show (U.S.A., 1971), with Cybill Shepherd and Ellen Burstyn, directed by Peter Bogdanovich.

In its subtlest form, classical cutting can break up even a confined action into smaller units of meaning. François Truffaut once observed that movies in which people tell lies require more shots than those in which they tell the truth. For example, if a young daughter tells her mother that she thinks she is in love with a boy, and the mother responds by warning the girl of some of the emotional dangers involved, there's no reason why the scene shouldn't be photographed in a single setup with both females in the same frame. Essentially, this is how Bogdanovich presents a similar scene **(a).** However, if the mother were a lying hypocrite, and the daughter suspected that the older woman might be in love with the boy herself, a director would be forced to break the scene down into five or six shots **(b–g)** to give viewers emotional information they wouldn't receive from the characters themselves.   *(Columbia Pictures)*

a

b

c

d

e

f

g

4–15a. *The 4th Man* **(Holland, 1984),** *with Jeroen Krabbé, directed by Paul Verhoeven.*

Editing can shift the action from reality to fantasy in an instant. Often, such shifts are accompanied by a cue—eerie music, for example, or a rippling image that suggests a different level of consciousness. At other times, the shift is undetectable, a deliberate attempt to disorient the viewer. The novelist hero of this movie often intermingles reality with fantasy. In this scene, he is trying to shave while suffering from a colossal hangover. His roommate is practicing his music, making the shaky hero even shakier. In exasperation, he walks over to the roommate and strangles him. A moment later, we see the hero shaving again and the roommate still practicing his music. The strangulation took place only in the hero's vivid imagination. Because it is presented with no transitional cue, we too confuse reality with fantasy— the theme of the film, and the entry point of the creative process for the writer.   *(International Spectra-film Distribution)*

4–15b. *Syriana* **(U.S.A., 2005),** *with George Clooney (center), written and directed by Stephen Gaghan.*

A favorite technique used by contemporary filmmakers is to provide multiple narratives rather than a single plotline. In this way, a film artist can tell many stories featuring a wide variety of characters rather than just one story with only a few major characters. But there are also dangers in this technique. For example, many viewers were confused by the complex interweaving of narratives in *Syriana*. The motives of the characters are often unclear and hard to understand, notwithstanding the excellence of most of the scenes, and many first-rate performances, such as Clooney's Academy Award–winning role as a conscientious CIA agent who's being shafted by his own organization.   *(Warner Bros.)*

4–16.   *Royal Wedding* (U.S.A., 1951), *with Fred Astaire, directed by Stanley Donen.*
Even in the heyday of the Hollywood studio system, when the dominance of classical cut-
ting was virtually unchallenged, there were instances when you couldn't interrupt the
action with a cut. For example, in this famous dance sequence, Astaire begins to tap dance
on the floor of his hotel room and then—without a cut—he taps up the wall, then onto the
ceiling, seemingly defying gravity. How was it done? A revolving set and camera were syn-
chronized so that whenever the hotel room slowly began to turn, the camera turned with it
as Astaire tapped his way onto the new "floor" unobtrusively in one continuous motion.
Had director Donen cut to separate shots, the sequence would have lost much of its magi-
cal whimsy.   *(MGM)*

4–17. *Flashdance* **(U.S.A., 1983),** *with Jennifer Beals, directed by Adrian Lyne.*
Editing is often used to deceive—to conceal rather than reveal. For example, the dance numbers in this film were performed by a double, a professional dancer whose identity is cunningly concealed by the artful lighting and the discreetly distanced camera. These dance shots were intercut with closer shots of Jennifer Beals, wearing the same costume and moving to the same music. With the musical number providing the continuity, these intercut shots create the illusion of a continuous movement, with Beals featured throughout. These editing techniques are also commonly used in such scenes as sword fights, dangerous stunts, and many other activities requiring specialized skills.   *(Paramount Pictures)*

shots during a scene that is occurring in the present. A present-tense event detonates the protagonist's memory of something similar from his past. As past contends with present, the flickering memory shots endure longer, until a **flashback** sequence eventually becomes dominant, and the present is momentarily suspended. With only a few exceptions, however, it was not until the 1960s that such unorthodox editing practices became widespread.

Filmmakers can interrupt the present with shots not only of the past but of the future as well. In Sydney Pollack's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?,* short **flash-forwards** of a courtroom scene are interspersed throughout the present-tense story. The flash-forwards suggest predestination: Like the dance contest of the story proper, the future is rigged, and personal effort is equated with self-deception.

Griffith also restructured time and place through the use of fantasy inserts. In *Intolerance,* for example, a young woman on the verge of murdering her unfaithful boyfriend imagines a scene where she is apprehended by the police. Flashbacks, flash-forwards, and cutaways to fantasies allow filmmakers to develop ideas thematically rather than chronologically, freeing them to explore the subjective nature of time and the human mind. The very flexibility of time in movies makes the theme of temporality an ideal subject for the medium.

4–18a. *West Side Story* **(U.S.A., 1961),** *directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins.*

Musicals are often edited in a radically formalist style, without having to observe the cutting conventions of ordinary dramatic movies. The editing of *West Side Story* is very abstract. The music, by Leonard Bernstein, and the dance numbers, choreographed by Jerome Robbins, are edited together for maximum aesthetic impact, rather than to forward the story. Nor are the shots linked by some principle of thematic association. Rather, the shots are juxtaposed primarily for their lyrical and kinetic beauty, somewhat like a music video.   *(United Artists)*

4–18b. *The Phantom of the Opera* **(U.S.A., 2004),** *with Emmy Rossum and Gerard Butler, directed by Joel Schumacher.*

Andrew Lloyd Webber's famous stage musical was directed by the great Harold Prince, the winner of many Broadway Tony Awards. The stage version featured a variety of poetic and thrilling scenes, made possible precisely because of the physical limitations of the stage: Space is often symbolic rather than literal. Schumacher uses many edits in the film version, but the movie is not circumscribed by a single stage space, and hence, the film musical offers us a seamless, fluid staging of the action—like a mesmerizing dream that's both scary and seductive.   *(Warner Bros.)*

Like Faulkner, Proust, and other novelists, filmmakers have succeeded in cracking the tyranny of mechanically measured time. One of the most complex instances of the restructuring of time is found in Stanley Donen's *Two for the Road.* The story deals with the development and gradual disintegration of a love relationship. It unfolds in a series of mixed flashbacks. That is, the flashbacks are not in chronological sequence, nor are they completed in any one scene. Rather, they are jumbled and fragmented, somewhat in the manner of a Faulkner novel. To complicate matters, most of the flashbacks take place on the road, during various trips the couple has taken in the past. If each of the time periods of the film is designated with the letters A, B, C, D, and E, its temporal structure might be charted as follows: E (present), A (most distant past), B, C, D, B, A, E, C, D, B . . . ending with E. The audience gradually learns to identify each time period through various continuity clues: the woman's hairstyles, the modes of transportation, the particular crisis during each trip, and so on.

From its crude beginnings, Griffith expanded the art of editing to include a wide variety of functions: locale changes, time lapses, shot variety, emphasis of psychological and physical details, overviews, symbolic inserts, parallels and contrasts, associations, point-of-view shifts, simultaneity, and repetition of **motifs.**

Griffith's method of editing was also more economical. Related shots could be bunched together in the shooting schedule, regardless of their positions (or "time" and "place") in the finished film. Especially in later years, in the era of high-salaried stars, directors could shoot all the star sequences in a brief period and out of cinematic continuity. Less expensive details (extreme long shots, minor actors, close-ups of objects, etc.) could be shot at a more convenient time. Later, the shots would be arranged in their proper sequence on the editor's cutting bench.

SOVIET MONTAGE AND THE FORMALIST TRADITION

Griffith was a practical artist, concerned with communicating ideas and emotions in the most effective manner possible. In the 1920s, the Soviet filmmakers expanded his associational principles and established the theoretical premises for thematic editing, or **montage** as they called it (from the French, *monter,* to assemble). V. I. Pudovkin wrote the first important theoretical treatises on what he called constructive editing. Most of his statements are explanations of Griffith's practices, but he differed with the American (whom he praises lavishly) on several points. Griffith's use of the close-up, Pudovkin claimed, is too limited. It's used simply as a clarification of the long shot, which carries most of the meaning. The close-up, in effect, is merely an interruption, offering no meanings of its own. Pudovkin insisted that each shot should make a new point. Through the juxtaposition of shots, new meanings can be created. The meanings, then, are in the juxtapositions, not in one shot alone.

Filmmakers in the Soviet Union were strongly influenced by the psychological theories of Pavlov, whose experiments in the association of ideas served

as a basis for the editing experiments of Lev Kuleshov, Pudovkin's mentor. Kuleshov believed that ideas in cinema are created by linking together fragmentary details to produce a unified action. These details can be totally unrelated in real life. For example, he linked together a shot of Moscow's Red Square with a shot of the American White House, close-ups of two men climbing stairs with another close-up of two hands shaking. Projected as a continuous scene, the linked shots suggest that the two men are in the same place at the same time.

Kuleshov conducted another famous experiment that provided a theoretical foundation for the use of nonprofessional actors in movies. Kuleshov and many of his colleagues believed that traditional acting skills were quite unnecessary in the cinema. First, he shot a close-up of an actor with a neutral expression. He juxtaposed this with a close-up of a bowl of soup. Then he joined the close-up of the actor with a shot of a coffin containing a female corpse. Finally, he linked the actor's neutral expression with a shot of a little girl playing. When these combinations were shown to audiences, they exclaimed at the actor's

4–19.   *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* (U.S.A., 1982), *with Steve Martin and Carl Reiner (bald pate), directed by Reiner.*
Editing as Comedy. Reiner's comic parody of Nazi films and other noir genres of the 1940s is a tour de force of editing. A silly spy plot involving Martin is intercut with footage from such vintage 1940s movies as *Double Indemnity, Suspicion, The Bribe, Out of the Past,* and *Sorry, Wrong Number.* Pudovkin and Kuleshov would have understood perfectly.   *(Universal City Studios)*

expressiveness in portraying hunger, deep sorrow, and paternal pride. In each case, the meaning was conveyed by juxtaposing two shots, not by one alone. Actors can be used as raw material, as objects juxtaposed with other objects. The emotion is produced not by the actor's performance, but by associations brought about by the juxtapositions. In a sense, the *viewer* creates the emotional meanings, once the appropriate objects have been linked together by the filmmaker (see **4–22**).

For Kuleshov and Pudovkin, a sequence was not filmed; it was constructed. Using far more close-ups than Griffith, Pudovkin built a scene from many separate shots, all juxtaposed for a unified effect. The environment of the scene is the source of the images. Long shots are rare. Instead, a barrage of close-ups (often of objects) provides the audience with the necessary associations to link together the meaning. These juxtapositions can suggest emotional and psychological states, even abstract ideas.

The Soviet theorists of this generation were criticized on several counts. This technique detracts from a scene's sense of realism, some critics complained, for the continuity of actual time and place is totally restructured. But

4–20. *Lifeboat* **(U.S.A., 1944),** *with Tullulah Bankhead (center), directed by Alfred Hitchcock.* Hitchcock was one of Pudovkin's most articulate champions. "Cinema is form," Hitchcock insisted. "The screen ought to speak its own language, freshly coined, and it can't do that unless it treats an acted scene as a piece of raw material which must be broken up, taken to bits, before it can be woven into an expressive visual pattern." He referred to the piecing together of fragmentary shots as "pure cinema," like individual notes of music that combine to produce a melody. In this movie, he confined himself entirely to nine characters adrift at sea in a small boat. In other words, this photo contains the raw material for every shot in the film. Formalists insist that the artistry lies not in the materials per se, but in the way they are taken apart and reconstructed expressively.   *(Twentieth Century Fox)*

4–21a.   *Moulin Rouge* **(U. S. A., 2001),** *with Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor, directed by Baz Luhrman.*

The musical numbers of this period film are edited in volcanic explosions of split-second shots. In a sense, Baz Luhrman's editing style is a throwback to the kaleidoscopic choreographies of Busby Berkley **(1-1b)** in the big studio era. Both directors make the musical numbers as much about themselves as about the performers or the music. Not everybody likes this kind of creative fast cutting, derived mainly from music videos and advertising. Film critic and director Peter Bogdanovich is less than enthusiastic about most montage styles of editing: "If the actors are good and the scene is good, and you can see them and hear them, why the hell cut? For what? Unless there is a reason to cut. Every cut is an interruption. Today, every scene is interrupted seven zillion times. It's cut, cut, cut, cut, cut."   *(Twentieth Century Fox)*

4–21b.   *The Bourne Supremacy* **(U. S. A., 2004),** *with Matt Damon and Franka Potente, directed by Paul Greengrass.*

On the other hand, there are times when a jittery editing style is perfectly appropriate to the subject matter. In *The Bourne Supremacy,* for example, the Damon character is suffering from amnesia. Even though he's very proficient with weapons and self-defense skills, he's never sure who his friends are, or, more importantly, who his enemies are. The fluttery editing style is meant to externalize his fragmentary memories, which flash intermittently in his consciousness, thereby intensifying his paranoia, since he's unable to make coherent sense of these fragments.   *(Universal Pictures)*
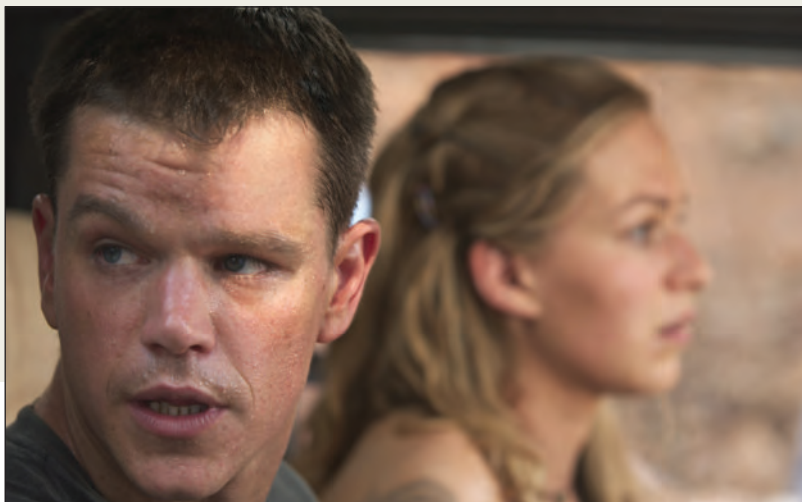
Pudovkin and the other Soviet formalists claimed that realism captured in long shot is *too* near reality: It's theatrical rather than cinematic. Movies must capture the essence, not merely the surface, of reality, which is filled with irrelevancies. Only by juxtaposing close-ups of objects, textures, symbols, and other selected details can a filmmaker convey *expressively* the idea underlying the undifferentiated jumble of real life.

Some critics also believe that this manipulative style of editing guides the spectator too much—the choices are already made. The audience must sit back passively and accept the inevitable linking of associations presented on the screen. Political considerations are involved here, for the Soviets tended to link film with propaganda. Propaganda, no matter how artistic, doesn't usually involve free and balanced evaluations.

Like many Soviet formalists, Sergei Eisenstein was interested in exploring general principles that could be applied to a variety of apparently different forms of creative activity. He believed that these artistic principles were organically related to the basic nature of all human activity and, ultimately, to the nature of the universe itself. Like the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, Eisenstein believed that the essence of existence is constant change. He believed that nature's eternal fluctuation is **dialectical**—the result of the conflict and synthesis of opposites. What appears to be stationary or unified in nature is only temporary, for all phenomena are in various states of becoming. Only energy is permanent, and energy is constantly in a state of transition to other forms. Every opposite contains the seed of its own destruction in time, Eisenstein believed, and this conflict of opposites is the mother of motion and change.

The function of all artists is to capture this dynamic collision of opposites, to incorporate dialectical conflicts not only in the subject matter of art but in its techniques and forms as well. Conflict is universal in all the arts, according to Eisenstein, and therefore all art aspires to motion. Potentially, at least, the cinema is the most comprehensive of the arts because it can incorporate the visual conflicts of painting and photography, the kinetic conflicts of dance, the tonal conflicts of music, the verbal conflicts of language, and the character and action conflicts of fiction and drama.

Eisenstein placed special emphasis on the art of editing. Like Kuleshov and Pudovkin, he believed that montage was the foundation of film art. He agreed with them that each shot of a sequence ought to be incomplete, contributory rather than self-contained. However, Eisenstein criticized the concept of linked shots for being mechanical and inorganic. He believed that editing ought to be dialectical: The conflict of two shots (thesis and antithesis) produces a wholly new idea (synthesis). Thus, in film terms, the conflict between shot A and shot B is not AB (Kuleshov and Pudovkin), but a qualitatively new factor—C (Eisenstein). Transitions between shots should not be smooth, as Pudovkin suggested, but sharp, jolting, even violent. For Eisenstein, editing produces harsh collisions, not subtle linkages. A smooth transition, he claimed, was an opportunity lost.
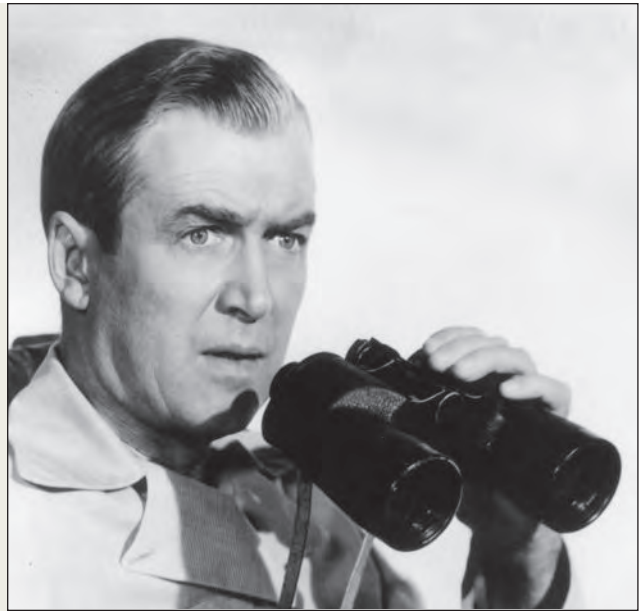
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4–22a, b, c, d.   An "edited sequence" from *Rear Window* (U.S.A., 1954), *directed by Alfred Hitchcock.*

Hitchcock's thriller centers on a photographic journalist (James Stewart, **4–22b**) who is confined to his apartment because of a broken leg. Out of boredom, he begins to observe the lives of his neighbors, who live in the apartment building just behind his own. His high-society girlfriend (Grace Kelly, **4–22a**) wants to get married and sees no reason why marriage should interfere with his work. But he puts her off, filling in his idle hours by speculating on the various problems of his neighbors. Each neighbor's window symbolizes a fragment of Stewart's own problems: They are projections of his own anxieties and desires, which center on love, career, and marriage. Each window suggests a different option for the hero. One neighbor is a desperately lonely woman. Another apartment is occupied by lusty newlyweds. A friendless bachelor musician occupies a third apartment. A shallow and promiscuous dancer lives in another. In still another is a childless married couple, who fawn pathetically over their dog to fill in the vacuum

Editing for Eisenstein was an almost mystical process. He likened it to the growth of organic cells. If each shot represents a developing cell, the cinematic cut is like the rupturing of the cell when it splits into two. Editing is done at the point that a shot "bursts"—that is, when its tensions have reached their maximum expansion. The rhythm of editing in a movie should be like the explosions of an internal combustion engine, Eisenstein claimed. A master of dynamic rhythms, his films are almost mesmerizing in this respect: Shots of contrasting volumes, durations, shapes, designs, and lighting intensities collide against each other like objects in a torrential river plunging toward their inevitable destination.

c

d

of their lives. In the most sinister apartment is a tormented middle-aged man (Raymond Burr, **4–22c**), who is so harassed by his wife that he eventually murders her. By cutting from shots of the spying hero to shots of the neighbors' windows, Hitchcock dramatizes the thoughts going through Stewart's mind. The audience is moved by the editing style rather than by the material per se or even by the actors' performances. Somewhat like the early experiments of Pudovkin and Kuleshov, who edited together unrelated bits of film to create a new concept, this phony "edited sequence" is composed of totally random publicity photos, and might be viewed as a kind of guilt by associational montage. Such editing techniques represent a form of characterization. Actors sometimes complained that Hitchcock didn't allow them to *act*. But he believed that people don't always express what they're thinking or feeling, and hence the director must communicate these ideas through the editing. The actor, in short, provides only a part of the characterization. The rest is provided by Hitchcock's thematically linked shots: *We* create the meaning.   *(Paramount Pictures)*

The differences between Pudovkin and Eisenstein may seem academic. In actual practice, however, the two approaches produced sharply contrasting results. Pudovkin's movies are essentially in the classical mold. The shots tend to be additive and are directed toward an overall emotional effect, which is guided by the story. In Eisenstein's movies, the jolting images represent a series of essentially intellectual thrusts and parries, directed toward an ideological argument. The directors' narrative structures also differed. Pudovkin's stories didn't differ much from the kind Griffith used. On the other hand, Eisenstein's stories were much more loosely structured, usually a series of documentarylike episodes used as convenient vehicles for exploring ideas.

When Pudovkin wanted to express an emotion, he conveyed it in terms of physical images—objective correlatives—taken from the actual locale. Thus, the sense of anguished drudgery is conveyed through a series of shots showing details of a cart mired in the mud: close-ups of the wheel, the mud, hands coaxing the wheel, straining faces, the muscles of an arm pulling the wheel, and so on. Eisenstein, on the other hand, wanted film to be totally free of literal continuity and context. Pudovkin's correlatives, he felt, were too restricted by realism.

Eisenstein wanted movies to be as flexible as literature, especially to make figurative comparisons without respect to time and place. Movies should include images that are thematically or metaphorically relevant, Eisenstein claimed, regardless of whether they can be found in the locale or not. Even in his first feature, *Strike* (1925), Eisenstein intercut shots of workmen being machine-gunned with images of oxen being slaughtered. The oxen are not literally on location, but are intercut purely for metaphorical purposes. A famous sequence from *Potemkin* links three shots of stone lions: one asleep, a second aroused and on the verge of rising, and a third on its feet and ready to pounce. Eisenstein considered the sequence an embodiment of a metaphor: "The very stones roar."

Ingenious as these metaphorical comparisons can be, the major problem with this kind of editing is its tendency to be obvious—or impenetrably obscure. Eisenstein saw no difficulty in overcoming the space and time differences between film and literature. But the two mediums use metaphors in

4–23.   A portion of the Odessa Steps sequence from *Potemkin* (Soviet Union, 1925), *directed by Sergei Eisenstein.*
Perhaps the most celebrated instance of editing virtuosity in the silent cinema, the Odessa Steps sequence is an illustration of Eisenstein's theory of collision montage in practice. This scene deals with the slaughter of civilians by Cossack troops in Czarist Russia. The director juxtaposed lights with darks, vertical lines with horizontals, lengthy shots with brief ones, close-ups with long shots, static setups with traveling shots, and so on. See also David Mayer, *Eisenstein's Potemkin: A Shot-by-Shot Presentation* (New York: Grossman, 1972).   *(Audio-Brandon Films)*

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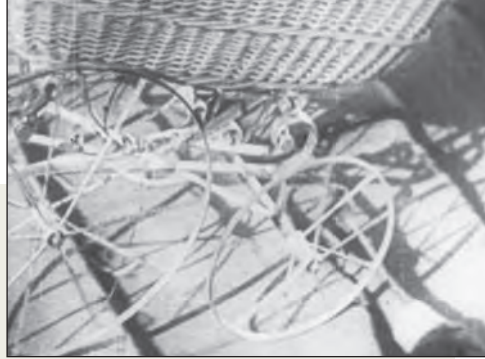20

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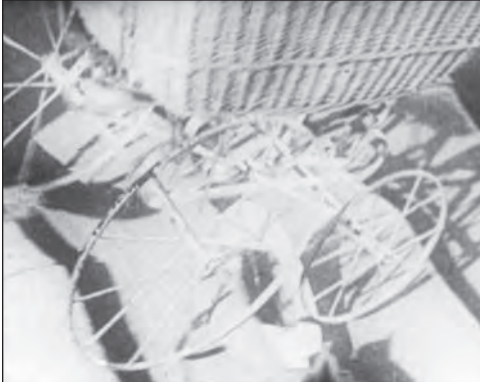
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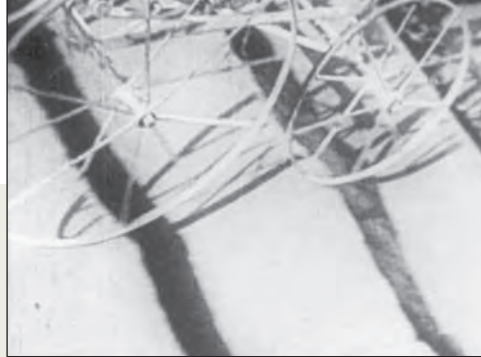35

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different ways. We have no difficulty in understanding what's meant by the comparison "he's timid as a sheep," or even the more abstract metaphor, "whorish time undoes us all." Both statements exist outside of time and place. The simile isn't set in a pasture, nor is the metaphor set in a brothel. Such comparisons are not meant to be understood literally, of course. In movies, figurative devices of this kind are more difficult. Editing can produce a number of figurative comparisons, but they don't work in quite the same way that they do in literature. Eisenstein's theories of collision montage have been explored primarily in the avant-garde cinema, music videos, and TV commercials. Most fiction filmmakers have found them too intrusive and heavy-handed.

ANDRÉ BAZIN AND THE TRADITION OF REALISM

André Bazin was not a filmmaker, but solely a critic and theorist. For a number of years, he was the editor of the influential French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma,* in which he set forth an aesthetic of film that was in sharp opposition to such formalists as Pudovkin and Eisenstein. Bazin was untainted by dogmatism. Although he emphasized the realistic nature of the cinema, he was generous in his praise of movies that exploited editing effectively. Throughout his writings, however, Bazin maintained that montage was merely one of many techniques a director could use in making movies. Furthermore, he believed that in many cases editing could actually destroy the effectiveness of a scene (**4–26** and **4–28**).

Bazin's realist aesthetic was based on his belief that photography, TV, and cinema, unlike the traditional arts, produce images of reality automatically, with a minimum of human interference. This technological objectivity connects the moving image with the observable physical world. A novelist or a painter must represent reality by re-presenting it in another medium—through language and color pigments. The filmmaker's image, on the other hand, is essentially an objective recording of what actually exists. No other art, Bazin

felt, can be as comprehensive in the presentation of the physical world. No other art can be as realistic, in the most elementary sense of that word.

Bazin believed that in the cinema there are many ways of portraying the real. The essence of reality, he believed, lies in its ambiguity. Reality can even be interpreted in opposing, and equally valid, ways, depending on the sensitivities of the artist. To capture this ambiguity, the filmmaker must be modest and self-effacing, a patient observer willing to follow where reality leads. The film artists that Bazin admired most—Renoir and De Sica, for example—are those whose movies reflect a sense of wonder before the mysteries of reality.

Bazin believed that the distortions involved in using formalist techniques—especially thematic editing—often violate the complexities of reality. Montage superimposes a simplistic ideology over the infinite variability of actual life. Formalists tend to be too egocentric and manipulative, he felt. They are concerned with imposing their narrow view of reality, rather than allowing reality to exist in its awesome complexity. He was one of the first to point out that such great filmmakers as Chaplin, Mizoguchi, and Murnau preserved the ambiguities of reality by minimizing editing.

Bazin even viewed classical cutting as potentially corrupting. Classical cutting breaks down a unified scene into a certain number of closer shots that correspond implicitly to a mental process. But the technique encourages us to follow the shot sequence without our being conscious of its arbitrariness. "The editor who cuts for us makes in our stead the choice which we would make in real life,"

4–24.   *High Noon* (U.S.A., 1952), *with Gary Cooper and Lloyd Bridges, directed by Fred Zinnemann.*
Almost all movies compress time, condensing many months or even years into a running time of roughly two hours, the average length of most films. Zinnemann's movie is a rare example of a literal adherence to the unities of time, place, and action, for the entire story takes place in a breathless 84 minutes—the film's running time.   *(United Artists)*

4–25. *Dog Day Afternoon* **(U.S.A., 1975),** *with Al Pacino, directed by Sidney Lumet.*
Not all realists use an unobtrusive style of editing. Most of Lumet's gritty New York City dramas like *The Pawnbroker, Serpico, Prince of the City,* and *Dog Day Afternoon* are based on actual events and were shot mostly in the streets of the city. All are considered masterpieces of realism, yet all of them are edited in a nervous, jumpy style that connects a wide assortment of characters and explosive events. *(Warner Bros.)*

Bazin pointed out. "Without thinking, we accept his analysis because it conforms to the laws of attention, but we are deprived of a privilege." He believed that classical cutting subjectivizes an event because each shot represents what the filmmaker thinks is important, not necessarily what we would think.

One of Bazin's favorite directors, the American William Wyler, reduced editing to a minimum in many of his films, substituting the use of **deep-focus** photography and lengthy takes. "His perfect clarity contributes enormously to the spectator's reassurance and leaves to him the means to observe, to choose, and form an opinion," Bazin said of Wyler's austere cutting style. In such movies as *The Little Foxes, The Best Years of Our Lives* **(1–20b),** and *The Heiress,* Wyler achieved an unparalleled neutrality and transparency. It would be naive to confuse this neutrality with an absence of art, Bazin insisted, for all of Wyler's effort tends to hide itself.

Unlike some of his followers, Bazin did not advocate a simpleminded theory of realism. He was perfectly aware, for example, that cinema—like all art— involves a certain amount of selectivity, organization, and interpretation. In short, a certain amount of distortion. He also recognized that the values of the filmmaker will inevitably influence the manner in which reality is perceived. These distortions are not only inevitable, but in most cases desirable. For Bazin, the best films were those in which the artist's personal vision is held in delicate balance with the objective nature of the medium. Certain aspects of reality must be sacrificed for the sake of artistic coherence, then, but Bazin felt that abstraction and artifice ought to be kept to a minimum. The materials should be allowed to speak for themselves. Bazinian realism is not mere newsreel objectivity—even if there were such a thing. He believed that reality must be

4–26. *The Edge* **(U.S.A., 1997),** *with Anthony Hopkins and a killer Kodiak bear, directed by Lee Tamahori.*
Cheap science-fiction films and low-budget adventure movies often combine realistic elements with the supernatural or the very dangerous, but seldom in the same frame. It's cheaper and easier to keep the terrified people in one shot, then cut to the object of their terror (or fascination) in another shot. Kuleshov would have applauded such a solution. But André Bazin claimed that a realistic presentation—that is, *not* cutting, but keeping them both in the same frame—is far more effective because audiences instinctively sense when a scene of this type is being faked with manipulative editing techniques. This powerful scene is all the more scary because the hero and the ferocious bear are combined in the same frame. Bazin would have applauded.
(Twentieth Century Fox)

heightened somewhat in the cinema, that the director must reveal the poetic implications of ordinary people, events, and places. By poeticizing the commonplace, the cinema is neither a totally objective recording of the physical world nor a symbolic abstraction of it. Rather, the cinema occupies a unique middle position between the sprawl of raw life and the artificially re-created worlds of the traditional arts.

Bazin wrote many articles overtly or implicitly criticizing the art of editing, or at least pointing out its limitations. If the essence of a scene is based on the idea of division, separation, or isolation, editing can be an effective technique in conveying these ideas. But if the essence of a scene demands the simultaneous presence of two or more related elements, the filmmaker ought to preserve the continuity of real time and space **(4–28).** He or she can do this by including all the dramatic variables within the same mise en scène—that is, by exploiting the resources of the long shot, the lengthy take, deep focus, and **widescreen.** The filmmaker can also preserve actual time and space by **panning, craning, tilting,** or **tracking** rather than cutting to individual shots.

John Huston's *The African Queen* contains a shot illustrating Bazin's principle. In attempting to take their boat down river to a large lake, the two protagonists

4–27a. *The Sorrow and the Pity* **(France/Switzerland/W. Germany, 1970),** *directed by Marcel Ophüls.*
Even in the world of documentary films, editing styles can range from ultrarealistic to ultraformalistic. Like most **cinéma-vérité** documentarists, Marcel Ophüls keeps editing to an absolute minimum. Implicit in the art of editing is artifice—that is, the manipulation of formal elements to produce a seductive aesthetic effect. Many documentarists believe that an edited analysis of a scene shapes and aestheticizes it—compromising its authenticity. A selected sequence of shots, even if factually based, extrapolates one person's truth from an event and, in so doing, infuses it with an ideology. An unedited presentation, on the other hand, preserves a multiplicity of truths. *(Cinema 5)*

4–27b. *Looking for Richard* **(U.S.A., 1996),** *with Al Pacino, directed by Pacino.*
The editing style of this documentary is subjective and personal. The movie itself is almost like an intimate diary by a famous actor exploring one of his most celebrated stage roles, Shakespeare's fascinating disciple of evil, Richard III. Pacino's **voice-over** connects many of the shots, which include interviews with other actors, historical artifacts, views of Shakespeare's Old Globe Theatre, and snippets of scenes from the play in rehearsal and performance. The movie is like a dazzling lecture/presentation by someone who is both an artist and a cool teacher. *(Twentieth Century Fox)*

Most documentaries fall between these two extremes, as Albert Maysles has pointed out: "We can see two kinds of truth here. One is the raw material, which is the footage, the kind of truth that you get in literature in the diary form—it's immediate, no one has tampered with it. Then there's the other kind of truth that comes in extracting and juxtaposing the raw material into a more meaningful and coherent storytelling form which finally can be said to be more than just raw data. In a way, the interests of the people in shooting and the people in editing (even if it's the same individual) are in conflict with one another, because the raw material doesn't want to be shaped. It wants to maintain its truthfulness. One discipline says that if you begin to put it into another form, you're going to lose some of the veracity. The other discipline says if you don't let me put this into a form, no one is going to see it and the elements of truth in the raw material will never reach the audience with any impact, with any artistry, or whatever. So there are these things which are in conflict with one another and the thing is to put it all together, deriving the best from both. It comes almost to an argument of content and form, and you can't do one without the other."

(Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn) get sidetracked on a tributary of the main river. The tributary dwindles down to a stream and finally trickles into a tangle of reeds and mud, where the dilapidated boat gets hopelessly mired. The exhausted travelers resign themselves to a slow death in the suffocating reeds, and eventually fall asleep on the floor of the boat. The camera then moves upward, over the reeds, where—just a few hundred yards away—is the lake. The bitter irony of the scene is conveyed by the continuous movement of the camera, which preserves the physical proximity of the boat, the intervening reeds, and the lake. If Huston had cut to three separate shots, we wouldn't understand these spatial interrelationships, and therefore the irony would be lost.

Bazin pointed out that in the evolution of movies, virtually every technical innovation pushed the medium closer to a realistic ideal: in the late 1920s, sound; in the 1930s and 1940s, color and deep-focus photography; in the 1950s, widescreen. In short, technology, not critics and theorists, usually alters technique. For example, when *The Jazz Singer* ushered in the talkie revolution in 1927, sound eclipsed virtually every advance made in the art of editing since Griffith's day. With the coming of sound, films *had* to be more realistically edited, whether their directors wished them so or not. Microphones were placed on the set itself, and sound had to be recorded while the scene was being photographed. Usually the microphones were hidden—in a vase of flowers, a wall sconce, etc. Thus, in the earliest sound movies, not only was the camera restricted, but the actors were as well. If they strayed too far from the microphone, the dialogue couldn't be recorded properly.

4–28.   *Safety Last* (U.S.A., 1923), *with Harold Lloyd, directed by Fred Newmeyer and Sam Taylor.*

In direct opposition to Pudovkin, André Bazin believed that when the essence of a scene lies in the simultaneous presence of two or more elements, editing is ruled out. Such scenes gain their emotional impact through the unity of space, not through the juxtaposition of separate shots. In this famous sequence, for example, Lloyd's comedy of thrills is made more comic and more thrilling by the scene's realistic presentation: The dangling hero and the street below are kept in the same frame. Actually, the distance between the two is exaggerated by the cunning placement of the camera, and there was always at least a platform about three stories below him—"but who wants to fall three stories?" Lloyd asked. *(Museum of Modern Art)*

The effects on editing of these early talkies were disastrous. **Synchronized sound** anchored the images, so whole scenes were played with no cuts—a return to the "primitive" **sequence shot.** Most of the dramatic values were aural. Even commonplace sequences held a fascination for audiences. If someone entered a room, the camera recorded the fact, whether it was dramatically important or not, and millions of spectators thrilled to the sound of the door opening and slamming shut. Critics and filmmakers despaired: The days of the recorded stage play had apparently returned. Later these problems were solved by the invention of the **blimp,** a soundproof camera housing that permits the camera to move with relative ease, and by the practice of **dubbing** sound after the shooting is completed (see Chapter 5).

But sound also provided some distinct advantages. In fact, Bazin believed that it represented a giant leap in the evolution toward a totally realistic medium. Spoken dialogue and sound effects heightened the sense of reality. Acting styles became more sophisticated as a result of sound. No longer did performers have to exaggerate visually to compensate for the absence of voices. Talkies also permitted filmmakers to tell their stories more economically, without the intrusive titles that interspersed the visuals of silent movies. Tedious expository scenes could also be dispensed with. A few lines of dialogue easily conveyed what an audience needed to know about the premise of the story.

The use of deep-focus photography also exerted a modifying influence on editing practices. Prior to the 1930s, most cameras photographed interiors on one focal plane at a time. These cameras could capture a sharp image of an object from virtually any distance, but unless an enormous number of extra lights were set up, other elements of the picture that weren't at the same dis-

4–29.   *Utamaro and His Five Women* (Japan, 1955), *directed by Kenji Mizoguchi.*
Bazin and his disciples were enthusiastic champions of the films of Mizoguchi. The Japanese master favored the use of lengthy takes rather than editing. He generally cut within a continuous take only when there was a sharp psychological shift within the scene. Used sparingly in this way, the cut acquires a greater dramatic impact than can be found in most conventionally edited movies.   *(New Yorker Films)*

tance from the camera remained blurred, out of focus. One justification for editing, then, was purely technical: clarity of image.

The aesthetic qualities of deep-focus photography permitted composition in depth: Whole scenes could be shot in one setup, with no sacrifice of detail, for every distance appeared with equal clarity on the screen. Deep focus tends to be most effective when it adheres to the real time–space continuum. For this reason, the technique is sometimes thought to be more theatrical than cinematic, for the effects are achieved primarily through a spatially unified mise en scène rather than a fragmented juxtaposition of shots.

Bazin liked the objectivity and tact of deep focus. Details within a shot can be presented more democratically, as it were, without the special attention that a close-up inevitably confers. Thus, realist critics like Bazin felt that audiences would be more creative—less passive—in understanding the relationships

4–30. *Clerks* (U.S.A., 1994), *with Jeff Anderson and Brian O'Halloran; written, edited, and directed by Kevin Smith.*

Sometimes economics dictates style, as with this witty low-budget feature. Everyone worked for free. Smith shot the movie in the same convenience store he worked at (for $5 an hour) during the day. He also used lengthy takes in a number of scenes. The actors were required to memorize pages of dialogue (often very funny) so that the entire sequence could be shot without a cut. Why? Because Smith didn't need to worry about such costly decisions as where to put the camera with each new cut or how to light each new shot or whether he could afford to rent editing equipment to cut the sequence properly. Lengthy takes require one setup: The lights and camera usually remain stationary for the duration of the scene. The movie's final cost: a piddling $27,575. He charged it. It went on to win awards at the Sundance and Cannes Film Festivals.   *(Miramax Films)*

4–31. *Amélie* **(France, 2001),** *with Audrey Tautou, directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet.* The more cutting a film contains, the faster the tempo will seem, which in turn produces more energy and excitement. *Amélie* is like a whimsical fairy tale that whizzes past us breathlessly, its editing style sparkling with effervescence. The main character (Tautou) is a shy Parisian waitress who lives in the picturesque—and digitally enhanced—neighborhood of Montmartre. The exuberant tone of the movie is mostly due to Jeunet's playful editing, but the special effects also contribute. For example, when Amélie first sees the love of her life, her heart visibly glows beneath her blouse. When her heart is broken, she digitally melts into a puddle on the ground. Crazy metaphors. *(Miramax Films)*

between people and things. Unified space also preserves the ambiguity of life. Audiences aren't led to an inevitable conclusion but are forced to evaluate, sort out, and eliminate "irrelevancies" on their own.

In 1945, immediately following World War II, a movement called **neorealism** sprang up in Italy and gradually influenced directors all over the world. Spearheaded by Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica, two of Bazin's favorite filmmakers, neorealism deemphasized editing. The directors favored deep-focus photography, long shots, lengthy takes, and an austere restraint in the use of close-ups.

When asked why he deemphasized editing, Rossellini replied: "Things are there, why manipulate them?" This statement might well serve as Bazin's theoretical credo. He deeply admired Rossellini's openness to multiple interpretations, his refusal to diminish reality by making it serve an ideological thesis. "Neorealism by definition rejects analysis, whether political, moral, psychological, logical, or social, of the characters and their actions," Bazin pointed out. "It looks on reality as a whole, not incomprehensible, certainly, but inescapably one."

Sequence shots tend to produce (often unconsciously) a sense of mounting anxiety in the viewer. We expect setups to change during a scene. When they don't, we often grow restless, hardly conscious of what's producing our uneasiness. Jim Jarmusch's bizarre comedy, *Stranger Than Paradise,* uses sequence shots throughout **(4–32).** The camera inexorably waits at a predetermined location. The young characters enter the scene and play out their tawdry, comic lives, complete with boring stretches of silence, glazed expres-

sions of torpor, and random tics. Finally, they leave. Or they just sit there. The camera sits with them. Fade out. Very weird.

Similarly, in Rodrigo Garcia's *Nine Lives,* the director explores the situations of various women who are all floundering in important relationships. Each story is shot in a single take, with no cuts. Why use such a difficult technique, when editing to different shots would be faster, cheaper, and easier? Garcia is saying that each of these nine women is trapped, unable to break out of a constricting situation, often of their own making. By confining them in a continuous take, we subconsciously sense their frustration, their inability to break out of the impasse of their lives. A series of separate cuts would dissipate much of this tension.

Like many technological innovations, widescreen provoked a wail of protest from many critics and directors. The new screen shape would destroy the close-up, many feared, especially of the human face. There simply was too much space to fill, even in long shots, others complained. Audiences would never be able to

4–32.   *Stranger Than Paradise* (U.S.A., 1984), *directed by Jim Jarmusch.*
Each scene in this movie is a sequence shot—a lengthy take without cuts. Far from being "primitive," the sequence-shot technique produces a sophisticated, wry effect, bizarre and funny. In this scene, the two protagonists (John Lurie and Richard Edson) eat yet another goulash dinner while Lurie berates his stout, outspoken aunt (Cecillia Stark) for still speaking Hungarian after years of living in America. The scene's comic rhythms are accented by the staging: The bickering relatives must bend forward to see each other, while the visitor, caught in the crossfire, tries unsuccessfully to stay neutral.   *(Samuel Goldwyn)*

4–33. ***The Straight Story*** **(U.S.A., 1999),** *with Richard Farnsworth, directed by David Lynch.* American movies are usually edited at a fast pace without any slackness or "dead spots" between the shots. *The Straight Story* is a conspicuous exception. Based on true-life events, the movie is a road picture, but instead of the usual vroom-vrooming vehicles racing down streets and screeching 'round corners, the vehicle of choice is a '66 John Deere tractor that the elderly hero (Farnsworth) drives from Iowa to Wisconsin, where his estranged and ailing brother lives. The movie is cut at a very, very slow pace—to approximate the chugging progress of his antiquated transport.   *(The Straight Story, Inc. and Disney Enterprises, Inc.)*

assimilate all the action, for they wouldn't know where to look. It was suitable only for horizontal compositions, some argued, useful for epic films, but too spacious for interior scenes and small subjects. It was appropriate only for funeral processions and snakes, sniffed one old timer. Editing would be further minimized, the formalists complained, for there would be no need to cut to something if everything was already there, arranged in a long horizontal series.

At first, the most effective widescreen films were, in fact, westerns and historical extravaganzas **(4–34).** But before long, directors began to use the new screen with more sensitivity. Like deep-focus photography, scope meant that they had to be more conscious of their mise en scène. More relevant details had to be included within the frame, even at its edges. Films could be more densely saturated and—potentially, at least—more effective artistically. Filmmakers discovered that the most expressive parts of a person's face were the eyes and mouth, and consequently close-ups that chopped off the tops and bottoms of actors' faces weren't as disastrous as had been predicted.

Not surprisingly, the realist critics were the first to reconsider the advantages of widescreen. Bazin liked its authenticity and objectivity. Here was yet another step away from the distorting effects of editing, he pointed out. As with deep focus, widescreen helped to preserve continuity of time and space. Close shots containing two or more people could now be photographed in one setup

without suggesting inequality, as deep focus often did in its variety of depth planes. Nor were the relations between people and things fragmented as they were with edited sequences. Scope was also more realistic because the widescreen enveloped the viewer in the breadth of an experience, even with its edges—a cinematic counterpart to the eye's peripheral vision. All the same advantages that had been applied to sound and deep focus were now applied to widescreen: its greater fidelity to real time and space; its detail, complexity, and density; its more objective presentation; its more coherent continuity; its greater ambiguity; and its encouragement of creative audience participation.

Interestingly, several of Bazin's protégés were responsible for a return to more flamboyant editing techniques in the following decades. Throughout the 1950s, Godard, Truffaut, and Chabrol wrote criticism for *Cahiers du Cinéma.* By the end of the decade, they turned to making their own movies. The *nouvelle vague,* or **New Wave** as this movement was called in English, was eclectic in its theory and practice. The members of this group, who were not very tightly knit, were unified by an almost obsessional enthusiasm for film culture, especially American film culture. Although rather dogmatic in their personal tastes, the New Wave critics tended to avoid theoretical dogmatism. They believed that

4–34.   *A Very Long Engagement* (France, 2004), *directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet.*
Most filmmakers bemoaned the advent of widescreen in the 1950s almost as much as they bemoaned sound in the late 1920s. Bazin and other realists embraced the innovation as yet another step away from the distorting effects of montage. Widescreen tends to deemphasize depth in favor of breadth, but Bazin believed that a horizontal presentation of the visual materials could be more democratic—less distorting even than deep focus, which tends to emphasize visual importance in terms of an object's closeness to the camera's lens. The widescreen is especially effective in portraying epic events, like this thrilling recreation of a World War I battle.   *(Warner Bros. Entertainment)*

4–35.   *The Innocents* (Britain, 1961), *with Deborah Kerr, directed by Jack Clayton.*
Throughout most of this psychological thriller (which is based on Henry James's novelette *The Turn of the Screw*), we are not sure if the ghost is "real" or simply the hysterical projection of a repressed governess (Kerr), because we usually see the apparition through her eyes. That is, the camera represents her point of view, which may or may not be reliable. But when an objective camera is used, as in this photo, both the governess and the ghost are included in the same space, with no cutting between separate shots. Hence, we conclude that the spirit figure has an independent existence outside of the governess's imagination. He's real.   *(Twentieth Century Fox)*

technique was meaningful only in terms of subject matter. In fact, it was the New Wave that popularized the idea that *what* a movie says is inextricably bound up with *how* it's said. They insisted that editing styles ought to be determined not by fashion, the limitations of technology, or dogmatic pronouncements, but by the essence of the subject matter itself.

HITCHCOCK'S *NORTH BY NORTHWEST:* STORYBOARD VERSION

Alfred Hitchcock is widely regarded as the greatest editor in the history of the cinema. His precut scripts were legendary. No other director worked from such precisely detailed plans. He often provided frame drawings of his shots (a technique

4–36. *Annie Hall* **(U.S.A., 1977),** *with Diane Keaton and Woody Allen, edited by Ralph Rosenblum, written and directed by Allen.*

It's very hard to judge a movie's editing. You have to know what was available before the cutting even began—whether the footage was excellent to begin with (which an incompetent editor can still screw up), or whether the editor had a pile of junk to sort through before managing to sculpt at least a moderately respectable movie out of the shards he or she was presented with. "A feature-length film generates anywhere from twenty to forty hours of raw footage," says editor Ralph Rosenblum. "When the shooting stops, that unfinished film becomes the movie's raw material, just as the script had been the raw material before. It now must be selected, tightened, paced, embellished, and in some scenes given artificial respiration." *Annie Hall* was originally conceived by Woody Allen as a story about his own character, Alvy Singer, and his various romantic and professional relationships. The character of Annie Hall (Keaton) was merely one of several plot lines. But both Allen and Rosenblum agreed that the original concept didn't work on the cutting bench. The editor suggested cutting away most of the footage and focusing on a central love story, between Alvy and Annie Hall. The resultant romantic comedy went on to win a number of Oscars, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay, and Best Actress for Keaton. Ironically, no award for its editor. See Ralph Rosenblum (and Robert Karen), *When the Shooting Stops . . . The Cutting Begins* (New York: Viking, 1979). *(United Artists)*

called **storyboarding**), especially for those sequences involving complex editing. Some of his scripts contained as many as 600 setup sketches. Every shot was calculated for a precise effect. Nothing was superfluous, nothing left to chance. "I would prefer to write all this down, however tiny and however short the pieces of film are—they should be written down in just the same way a composer writes down those little black dots from which we get beautiful sound," he explained.

The following excerpt is not Hitchcock's shooting script of *North by Northwest,* but perhaps the next best thing: a reconstruction of a sequence taken directly from the movie by Albert J. LaValley, which appears in his volume, *Focus on Hitchcock.* Ernest Lehman's "literary" version of this scene is reprinted in Chapter 9.

Each number represents a separate shot; drawings identified with a letter as well represent a continuation of the previous shot, though with enough new action to warrant an additional sketch. The numbers in parentheses indicate the approximate length of the shots in seconds. The following abbreviations are used: E.L.S., extreme long shot; L.S., long shot; M.S., medium shot; C.U., close-up; P.O.V., a shot taken from Thornhill's point of view.

The premise: Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) is a fugitive from the law. To prove his innocence, he must talk with a man named Kaplan. Roger is told to come to the scene's location, where he expects to meet Kaplan.