

# TSL570

# Literature and The Media

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## Part 4 of 6: Editing

### Section 1 - Devices

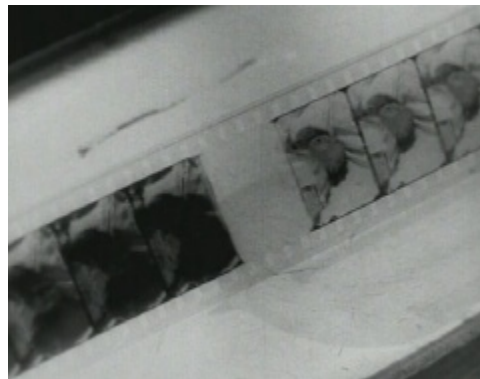
#### a) TRANSITIONS

The shot is defined by editing but editing also works to join shots together. There are many ways of effecting that transition, some more evident than others.

In the analytical tradition, editing serves to establish space and lead the viewer to the most salient aspects of a scene.

In the classical continuity style, editing techniques avoid drawing attention to themselves.

In a constructivist tradition such as Soviet Montage cinema, there is no such false modesty. Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kinoapparatom*, USSR, 1929) celebrates the power of the cinema to create a new reality out of disparate fragments.



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#### CHEAT CUT

Cheat cut. In the *continuity editing* system, a cut which purports to show continuous time and space from shot to shot but which actually mismatches the position of figures or objects in the scene.

In this sequence from *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minelli, 1944) the editing sacrifices actual physical space for dramatic space. As we can see in the first shot, there is a wall behind the telephone.



However, that wall magically disappears in the third shot in order to show both the telephone and the family seated around the dining table (an important element in the film) from an angle that would have been impossible in an actual room. Cheat cuts were also often used to disguise the relatively short stature of leading men in relation to their statuesque female co-stars.

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## CROSSCUTTING, aka PARALLEL EDITING

Editing that alternates shots of two or more lines of action occurring in different places, usually simultaneously. The two actions are therefore linked, associating the characters from both lines of action.

In this extended clip from Edward Yang's *Yi Yi* (Taiwan, 2000), father and daughter go out on dates at presumably the same time, and go through the same motions, even if the father is in Japan and the daughter in Taipei.





To further stress the similarities, the father is actually reliving his first date with his first girlfriend (whom he has just met again after 20 years), while his daughter is actually on her first date!

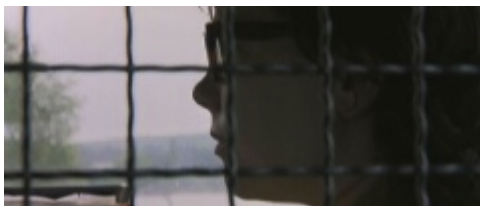
Yang uses parallel editing across space and time to suggest that history repeats itself, generation after generation.

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## CUT-IN, CUT AWAY

An instantaneous shift from a distant framing to a closer view of some portion of the same space, and vice versa.

In Lars Von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (Denmark, 2000) Selma and Bill have a dramatic conversation in Bill's car that is framed by a cut-in and a cut-away.



The two cuts neatly bracket Bill's anguished confession as a separate moment, private and isolated, that only Selma knows about. This editing-constructed secrecy will ultimately have drastic consequences for Selma.

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## DISSOLVE

A transition between two shots during which the first image gradually disappears while the second image gradually appears; for a moment the two images blend in *superimposition*.

Dissolves can be used as a fairly straightforward editing device to link any two scenes, or in more creative ways, for instance to suggest hallucinatory states.

In this series of shots from *The Stendhal Syndrome* (*La Sindrome di Stendhal*, Dario Argento, 1996), a young woman becomes so absorbed by Brueghel's *The Fall of Icarus* that she actually dives into the painting's sea! (at least in her imagination, in "real life" she faints).



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## IRIS

A round, moving *mask* that can close down to end a scene (iris-out) or emphasize a detail, or it can open to begin a scene (iris-in) or to reveal more space around a detail.

For instance, in this scene from *Neighbors* (Buster Keaton, 1920), the iris is used with the comic effect of gradually revealing that the female protagonist is 1) ready for her wedding and 2) ready for her not-too-luxurious wedding.



Iris is a common device of early films (at a time when some techniques like zooming were not feasible), so much so that when it is used after 1930 it is often perceived as charmingly anachronistic or nostalgic, as in Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960).

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## JUMP CUT

An elliptical cut that appears to be an interruption of a single shot. Either the figures seem to change instantly against a constant background, or the background changes instantly while the figures remain constant. See also elliptical editing, Steadicam.

Jump cuts are anathema to Classical Hollywood continuity editing, but feature prominently in avant-garde and radical filmmaking. When the French Nouvelle Vague films of the 1960s made jump cuts an essential part of their playful, modern outlook, many directors from around the globe started to use jump cuts --either creatively or in a last ditch attempt to become "hip".

More recently, jump cuts are more commonly associated with music videos, video or alternative filmmaking, like Lars Von Trier's Dogma films. Here is an example from *Dancer in the Dark* (Denmark, 2000).



Jump cuts are used expressively, to suggest the ruminations or ambivalences of a character, or of his/her everyday life, but they are also a clear signifier of rupture with mainstream film storytelling.

Rather than presenting a film as a perfectly self-contained story that seamlessly unfolds in front of us, jump cuts are like utterances that evidenciate both the artificiality and the difficulties of telling such a story.

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## ESTABLISHING SHOT/RE-ESTABLISHING SHOT

A shot, usually involving a distant framing, that shows the spatial relations among the important figures, objects, and setting in a scene. Usually, the first few shots in a scene are establishing shots, as they introduce us to a location and the space relationships inside it.

In the initial sequence from *Peking Opera Blues* (*Do Ma Daan*, Hong Kong, 1986), director Tsui Hark uses three shots to establish the locale. In the first one, three musicians are shown against a fireplace in what looks like a luxurious room.

Our suspicions are confirmed by the second establishing shot, which shows us the other half of the ample room (shot/ reverse shot) and reveals a party going on.



After this introduction, the camera moves forward with several close-ups of both the musicians and the spectators. At the end of the sequence, Hark shows us the entire room in a larger shot.

This final establishing shot is called a *reestablishing shot*, for it shows us once again the spatial relationships introduced with the establishing shots.



## SHOT/REVERSE SHOT

Two or more shots edited together that alternate characters, typically in a conversation situation. In *continuity editing*, characters in one framing usually look left, in the other framing, right. Over-the-shoulder framings are common in shot/reverse-shot editing. Shot / reverse shots are one of the most firmly established conventions in cinema, and they are usually linked through the equally persuasive eye line matches.

These conventions have become so strong that they can be exploited to make improbable meanings convincing, as in this sequence from *The Stendhal Syndrome* (*La Sindrome di Stendhal*, Italy, 1996). Director Dario Argento has his protagonist Anna looking at Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (c1485)...





...but with the use of successive shot/ reverse shots, eye line matches and matching framings, it soon begins to look as if Venus herself is looking at Anna!

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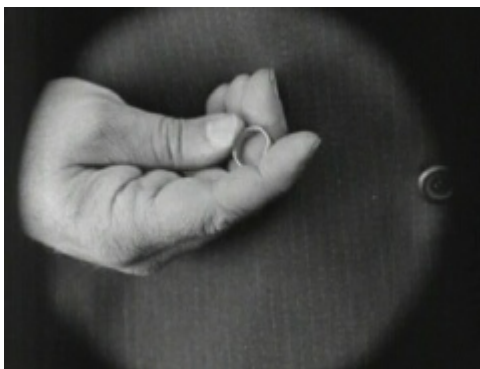
## SUPERIMPOSITION

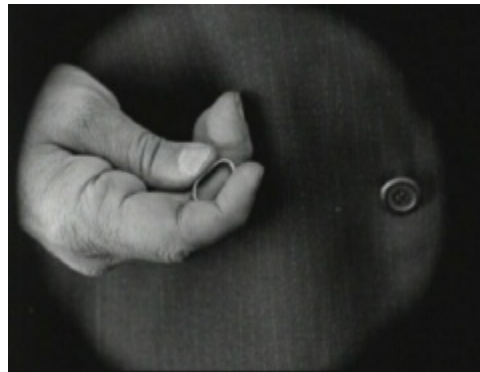
The exposure of more than one image on the same film strip. Unlike a dissolve, a superimposition does not signify a transition from one scene to another.

The technique was often used to allow the same performer to appear simultaneously as two characters on the screen (for example *Son of the Sheik*), to express subjective or intoxicated vision (*The Last Laugh*), or simply to introduce a narrative element from another part of the diegetic world into the scene.

In this clip from *Neighbors* (Buster Keaton, 1920), the resentful father of the bride looks at the wedding ring and immediately associates in his mind with a five and dime store.

The subjective shot gives us a clear indication of his opinion of his soon to be son-in-law.





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## WIPE

A transition between shots in which a line passes across the screen, eliminating the first shot as it goes and replacing it with the next one. A very dynamic and noticeable transition, it is usually employed in action or adventure films. It often suggest a brief temporal ellipsis and a direct connection between the two images. In this example from Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (*Sichinin No Samurai*, Japan, 1954), the old man's words are immediately corroborated by the wandering, destitute samurai coming into town.





As other transitions devices, like the whip pan, wipes became fashionable at an specific historical time (the 1950s and 1960s), so much so as to became stylistic markers of the film of the period.

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## b) MATCHES

Editing matches refer to those techniques that join as well as divide two shots by making some form of connection between them. That connection can be inferred from the situation portrayed in the scene (for example, eye line match) or can be of a purely optical nature (graphic match).

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### EYE LINE MATCH

A cut obeying the *axis of action* principle, in which the first shot shows a person off in one direction and the second shows a nearby space containing what he or she sees. If the person looks left, the following shot should imply that the looker is off-screen right.

The following shots from Dario Argento's *The Stendhal Syndrome (La Sindrome di Stendhal)*, Italy, 1996), depict Anna looking at a painting, Brueghel's *The Fall of Icarus*. The scene takes place inside Firenze's most famous museum, the Uffizi Gallery.

First we see her looking... then we see what she looks at.



As her interest grows, the eye line match (that is the connection between looker and looked) is stressed with matching close-ups of Anna's face and Icarus's falling into the ocean in the painting. Again, this implies that Anna is looking directly at Icarus's body.



Ironically, even if Argento managed to film inside the real Uffizi gallery, the painting he wanted to use, *The Fall of Icarus*, is not part of the museum's collection!

The painting that we see is probably a reproduction, shot in the studio, and edited together with Anna's shots in the Uffizi to make us believe that they are both in the same room. As this example demonstrates, eye line matches can be a very persuasive tool to construct space in a film, real or imagined!

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## GRAPHIC MATCH

Two successive shots joined so as to create a strong similarity of compositional elements (e.g., color, shape).

Used in transparent continuity styles to smooth the transition between two shots, as in this clip from *Women On The Verge Of A Nervous Breakdown* (*Mujeres al Borde de un Ataque de Nervios*, Almodóvar, 1988).





Graphic matches can also be used to make metaphorical associations, as in Soviet Montage style. Furthermore, some directors like Ozu Yasujiro use graphic matches as an integral part of their film style.

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## MATCH ON ACTION

A cut which splices two different views of the same action together at the same moment in the movement, making it seem to continue uninterrupted. Quite logically, these characteristics make it one of the most common transitions in the continuity style. Here is an example from *Traffic* (Steven Soderbergh, 2000)



A match on action adds variety and dynamism to a scene, since it conveys two movements: the one that actually takes place on screen, and an implied one by the viewer, since her/his position is shifted.

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## c) DURATION

Only since the introduction of editing to the cinema at the turn of the 20th century has not-editing become an option. The decision to extend a shot can be as significant as the decision to cut it.

Editing can affect the experience of time in the cinema by creating a gap between screen time and diegetic time (Montage and overlapping editing) or by establishing a fast or slow rhythm for the scene.

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## LONG TAKE, a.k.a. PLAN-SEQUENCE

A shot that continues for an unusually lengthy time before the transition to the next shot. The average length per shot differs greatly for different times and places, but most contemporary films tend to have faster editing rates. In general lines, any shot above one minute can be considered a long take.

Here is an excerpt from the initial shot of Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992) which not only runs for more than eight minutes, but it is in itself an homage to another famous long take, the first shot of Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958).



Unless shot at a fixed angle, with a fixed camera and no movement, long takes are extremely hard to shoot. They have to be choreographed and rehearsed to the last detail, since any error would make it necessary to start all over again from scratch. Sophisticated long takes such as this one from *The Player*, which includes all kinds of camera movements and zooms, are often seen as auteuristic marks of virtuosity.

Aside from the challenge of shooting in real time, long takes decisively influence a film's rhythm. Depending on how much movement is included, a long take can make a film tense, stagnant and spell-binding, or daring, flowing and carefree. Indeed, directors like Altman, Welles, Renoir, Angelopoulos, Tarkovski or Mizoguchi have made long takes (usually in combination with deep focus and deep space) an essential part of their styles.

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## OVERLAPPING EDITING

Cuts that repeat part or all of an action, thus expanding its viewing time and plot duration.

Most commonly associated with experimental filmmaking, due to its temporally disconcerting and purely graphic nature, it is also featured in films in which action and movement take precedence over plot and dialogue: sports documentaries, musicals, martial arts, etc.

Overlapping editing is a common characteristic of the frenzied Hong Kong action films of the 80s and 90s. When director John Woo moved to Hollywood, he tried to incorporate some of that style into mainstream action films, such as *Mission: Impossible 2* (2000).



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## RHYTHM

The perceived rate and regularity of sounds, series of shots, and movements within the shots. Rhythmic factors include beat (or pulse), accent (or stress), and tempo (or pace). Rhythm is one of the essential features of a film, for it decisively contributes to its mood and overall impression on the spectator. It is also one of the most complex to analyze, since it is achieved through the combination of mise-en-scene, cinematography, sound and editing. Indeed, rhythm can be understood as the final balance all of the elements of a film.

Let us compare how rhythm can radically alter the treatment of a similar scene. These two clips from *Deconstructing Harry* (Woody Allen, 1997) and *Cries and Whispers* (*Viskingar Och Rop*, Ingmar Bergman, Sweden 1972) feature a couple at a table, and both clips feature a moment of fracture between the two characters. Still, they could not be more dissimilar.

Allen employs fast cuts (even jump cuts), pans, quick dialogue and gesturing, as he concentrates exclusively on the two characters, shot from a variety of angles but always in medium close-up and close-up.





Even if both characters overtly disagree with each other, there is an overall feeling of warmth and immediacy between them, suggested by their proximity (established in short pans and close-ups) and in the tone of their speech. The quick camera movements and different camera placements suggest the uneasiness of both characters, as they budge on their seats.

*Cries and Whispers*, on the other hand, present us with a scene of horrifying stillness. Bergman accentuates the separation between man and woman by shooting them frontally and almost eliminating dialogue. In this context, even the smallest sounds of forks and knives sound ominous; a glass shattering resonates like a shot.



Furthermore, the mise-en-scene becomes as equally, if not more, important than the characters, reducing everything to dour red, black and whites. The feeling of claustrophobia is enhanced by the use of shallow space, having the characters become one with the austere backgrounds.

Pace is deliberately slow, and it only quickens when the glass breaks and both characters lift up their heads, only to immediately return to normal. Bergman accelerates the rhythm for a second, punctuating the moment of the glass breaking so that a trivial incident is magnified into a clear signal of disaster.

Lastly, rhythm is, almost by definition, intrinsically related to music and sound. Some of the most striking examples of the use of music as a film's driving force occur in the (endlessly imitated) spaghetti westerns of Sergio Leone, which were written in close collaboration with composer Ennio Morricone. In fact, sometimes the music would be composed first and then a scene that fitted that rhythm would be shot, thus reversing the customary order.







The prelude to the final showdown of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (*Il Buono, il Brutto, il Cattivo*, Italy, 1966) runs for several minutes (of which we only see the last minute here), as three men face each other in a triangle, waiting to see who will take the first step.

One of the film's theme songs is played in its entirety, from a slow, elegiac beginning to a frenzy crescendo that is abruptly cut off by the first gunshot. The slow mounting crescendo is paralleled by an increase in the editing rate, and an intensified framing (the sequence actually begins on a long shot similar to the previous one).

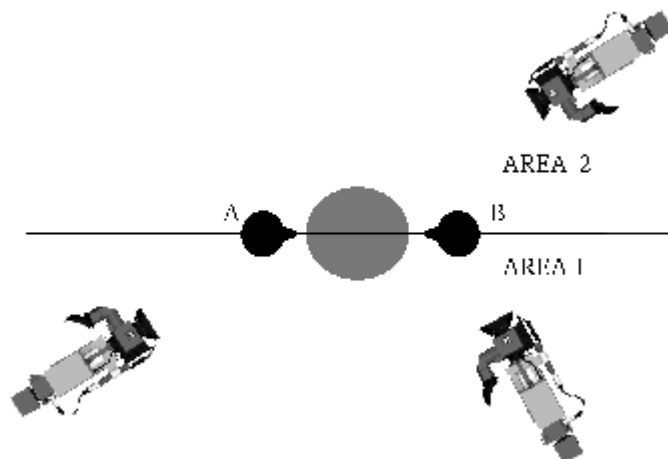
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## Section 2 - Styles

The patterned use of transitions, matches and duration can be identified as a cinematic style. Editing styles are usually associated with historical moments, technological developments, or national schools.

### CONTINUITY EDITING

A system of cutting to maintain continuous and clear narrative action. Continuity editing relies upon matching screen direction, position, and temporal relations from shot to shot. The film supports the viewer's assumption that space and time are contiguous between successive shots. Also, the diegesis is more readily understood when directions on the screen match directions in the world of the film. The "180° rule," shown in the diagram below, dictates that the camera should stay in one of the areas on either side of the *axis of action* (an imaginary line drawn between the two major dramatic elements A and B in a scene, usually two characters).



By following this rule the filmmaker ensures that each character occupies a consistent area of the frame, helping the audience to understand the layout of the scene. This sense of a consistent space is reinforced by the use of techniques such as the eyeline match or match on action.

In this sequence from *Neighbors* (Buster Keaton, 1920), continuity is maintained by the spatial and temporal contiguity of the shots and the preservation of direction between world and screen. More importantly, the shots are matched on Keaton's actions as he shuttles across the courtyard from stairwell to stairwell.



In the Hollywood continuity editing system the angle of the camera axis to the axis of action usually changes by more than 30 ° between two shots, for example in a conversation scene rendered as a series of shot/reverse shots. The 180° line is not usually crossed unless the transition is smoothed by a POV shot or a reestablishing shot.

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## MONTAGE

1. A synonym for *editing*. 2. An approach to editing developed by the Soviet filmmakers of the 1920s such as Pudovkin, Vertov and Eisenstein; it emphasizes dynamic, often discontinuous, relationships between shots and the juxtaposition of images to create ideas not present in either shot by itself.

Sergei Eisenstein, in particular, developed a complex theory of montage that included montage within the shot, between sound and image, multiple levels of overtones, as well as in the conflict between two shots. This sequence from *October (Oktyabr)*, USSR, 1927) is an example of Eisenstein's *intellectual montage*.

The increasingly primitive icons from various world religions are linked by patterns of duration, screen direction and shot scale to produce the concept of religion as a degenerate practice used to legitimate corrupt states.



Soviet Montage proved to be influential around the world for commercial as well as avant-garde filmmakers. We can see echoes of Pudovkin in *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Ford, USA, 1939), *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, India, 1957), and *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, USA, 1973). In a famous sequence from the latter film, shots of Michael attending his son's baptism are intercut with the brutal killings of his rivals.

Rather than stressing the temporal simultaneity of the events (it is highly unlikely that all of the New York Mafia heads can be caught off guard at exactly the same time!), the montage suggests Michael's dual nature and commitment to both his "families", as well as his ability to gain acceptance into both on their own terms -- through religion and violence.



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## ELLIPTICAL EDITING

Shot transitions that omit parts of an event, causing an *ellipses* in plot and story duration.

In this clip from *Traffic* (Steven Soderbergh, 2000), a drug party is rendered through elliptical editing (achieved with a plentiful use of dissolves and jump cuts) in order to both shorten the time and suggest the character's rambling mental states.



Elliptical editing need not be confined to a same place and time. A seven-minute song sequence from *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (Sooraj Bartjatya, India 1994) dances us through several months in the life of a family, from a cricket match to a ritual welcoming a new wife.



from scenes of the newlyweds' daily life... to the announcement of Pooja's pregnancy,



from a gift shower for the upcoming baby... to multiple scenes of celebrations, as Pooja's approaches her ninth month.

