

# GUNVOR NELSON'S EDITING CLASS

## EDITING

Before you shoot your film, it is helpful to think through what style of editing would be most appropriate so that you will not leave out necessary liasons, steps and transitions. This is especially true when you are making a narrative film, where, often, more logical or traditional progressions are called for.

The shots can be seen as building blocks, as building material. If you don't have enough material - or the right material - for the structure you have envisaged, you will probably have to make compromises.

However, surprising solutions can be had with the most "deficient" of material if you let it speak to you; if you learn what really is in the film. Patiently, you should familiarize yourself with every frame, overlooking no flaw or detail. At this stage it is essential to look for what is actually there - as opposed to the preconceived, romantic idea of what you would like it to be.

*why not  
sound  
image  
time*

## FUNDAMENTALS

Like music, film often needs to be introduced by a premise or theme, which has to be solidly understood and stated before variations are introduced. A major aspect of editing involves finding the particular world of the film, finding the rules and laws of that world. Anything is possible within those rules.

STRUCTURE: the film sets a tempo and any cut that is outside the logic of that tempo should be there for a reason; otherwise it will seem like a mistake. Major components to be aware of in the overall structure are: TENSION, BALANCE, RELATIONSHIP, PROGRESSION, REPETITIONS and TEMPO.

REPETITION or SIMILARITY is one method of building a memory within the film; of building the world of the film; of building its vocabulary.

THE FIRST CUT made triggers ideas for cutting and lets you see what actually happens between two shots.

## ELEMENTS

In studying the film material here are some elements to look for:

1. Length of each shot, both in real and emotional time. Also study the length of everything conceivable within that shot.



2. Speed of camera movement or action in front of the camera. How fast or slow is the apparent "traveling"? The natural flow of the Western eye is left to right, which makes right to left motions have more power or note.
3. Motion or gesture of camera and all subjects within the frame (as well as when they enter or exit). What is the nature of the motion, what is its proportion and when does it occur? What proportions do they have in relationship to other elements in the frame and to the frame itself? A gesture or idea, any element can be buried inside a shot. It is usually pointed out by ending or starting with that gesture---especially if the preceding or following shot(s) has pointed out a progression or relationship to that gesture.
4. Rhythm of any occurrence, e.g. a repetitive or similar motion like lightflashes.
5. Shape of all subjects within the frame. Study the shape and transformation of all forms, even the negative space, as well as the relative proportions of these shapes and transformations.
6. Composition of each frame. Is it a solid picture? Is it balanced? Is it too cluttered?
7. Distance to the subject. Look at how close-up or wide-angled the shot feels, especially notice the closeness of the main subject.
8. Angle to the subject. Are we <sup>to</sup> on the right or <sup>to</sup> the left (side) of the subject? What are the exact relationships? Are we level with the subject? Is the camera pointing up or down? Is the camera tilted?
9. Color. Pay attention to what kind of colors are present. Are they soft and light or strong and bright? Does that particular blue have the shimmer of other colors within it or is it solid and heavy? In what proportion do the colors exist and play off of each other?
10. How dark or light is the shot? It is important to notice the density of the scene as a whole as well as how bright or dull all the particular details are.
11. Atmosphere of each picture. Notice how sharp or soft it is focused and also how the contrast gives the feeling to the photography. What message does the mood create?
12. Transitions that help bridge potential disunity. Look for shots that contain a transition within (e.g. a shot that goes from dark to light or from



3

light to dark). Color, shape, motion, focus, angle, speed, distance... anything that changes can be used as a natural progression from one shot to another without having to cut too abruptly. Usually a violent cut, without some inner necessity for its existence, is jarring and looks sloppy. However, sharp jumps in the editing can be, at the right places, most exhilarating. Also look for the placement of motion and shape within each shot, that can travel with ease into another shot when cut together. In other words, look for the dance, the choreography, of all the elements as they relate and contrast to each other.

Fades, dissolves and wipes could also be used as transitions or sometimes pauses between separate movements.

### CUTS

In editing one can:

Cut on action. At points of excitement. It is not necessary to cut invisibly, but with heightened action, visibility of the cut might be important.

Cut between actions or so called "parallel editing", which means cutting between action and simultaneously occurring action in another location

Match actions from one shot to another.

Cut on form or shape from scene to scene.

Cut with and on ideas *on the basis of scenes* between images even if form is dissimilar.

Cut on color...color as continuum.

Cut on tonal form...gradual progression of sharp to soft focus...from light to dark.

There are two divergent kinds of editing, and, of course, the whole range of combinations between them.

1. On one hand, where the cotton lays like padding around the structure - where one does not want to show the skeleton - to hide it - and not show how the film is made. The cut is as unnoticeable as possible to create apparent naturalism to the maximum.
2. On the other hand, where the cuts call attention to themselves and are featured, the structure is primary and forms the essential content. Where the structural film insists on its shape and any other content it has is minimal and subsidiary.



4

## OTHER THOUGHTS

Other thoughts at random:

Sometimes an important image might lose power if it is restated. A sensational image might overpower images next to it that are more subtle.

A cut-away shot should be part of the film, not just something to repair it with.

Choose the part of the shot that contains the essence and find suitable entrances and exits.

Continuity is different in different films and scenes within films.

*Simple* Usually the cuts should be made in the most logical and easy steps or order. It is jarring to jump from wide angle...to close up...to wide angle. Though, well-used, this spatial jump can be effective.

The cementive function of sound can create the illusion of continuity and compression of time... to leap forward in time. Sound can be helpful in preparing for a longer jump or jarring cut, (e.g. a woman walking down the street as one hears the telephone ring, cuts to the hand of the woman lifting up the telephone in her apartment).

Sound is especially useful in creating space outside the frame.

In narrative films the shots are often as short as possible for the action...for the mood...for building expectations of the next cut. Is the action going to be complete or not complete?

For traditional movies, we are actively engaged in the film by speculating on its resolution. In viewing the avant-garde film it is most often helpful to suspend questions like---where are we going---how is it going to end---and, instead, perceive the fundamental experience of the film itself.

We get used to our workprint and cannot see our cuts. In order to view, to really see your film, at whatever stage, it is important to step back, to get into a psychological frame of mind that allows for seeing the film as if you have not seen it before---as much as possible.



\* \* \*

There is real joy in finding that the juxtaposition of two shots can create new and unexpected meaning...~~this is~~ beyond the original meaning of each shot taken separately. There are multiple layers of facts to combine and coordinate to make a film succeed as a whole. Not only the elements mentioned above have to be studied for each particular project, but also the integration of ideas, feelings and structure have to be investigated. What is the progression of the film...where should it start...where is the middle and how should it end...and why? When you are really immersed, you, yourself, totally interested in solving the "problems" of the film, then you forget how much work you are giving to it...then the film emerges. Usually the solution seems just right and logical. Why did I not see it before! But it did take all that interest and study and hard work.

This is only a partial list of editing ideas (the possibilities are endless). Please go on and write down your own thoughts and discoveries.



Essentials of A-B rolling

Before you start cutting the original film check with your lab what special instructions they might have for fades, dissolves, or how much leader etc. ( different printers can vary in what length of fades they can make)

Have as many rolls of black leader (double sprocketed) as you plan to cut (3 if cutting A-B-C rolls)

Fresh glue is of utmost importance.

Have splicer that cuts on frame line .

Always..always ... enter black leader from the right side of the splicer. This is done so that the splice always overlaps on the black leader & therefor makes a clean cut and hides the splice.



SIXTEENmm STANDARDS FOR PRINTING

**SINGLE PERF/DOUBLE PERF:**

If film includes ANY single perforated footage, then Head and Tail leaders **MUST** be single perforated. Double perforated leaders may be used only if ALL footage is double perforated.

**LEADERS:**

**Picture rolls:**

Head leaders must be twelve (12) feet long; six (6) feet from end of leader to sync punch (marked DEAD SYNC or PRINTER START), and six (6) feet from punch to Society Leader or first picture if no Society Leader is used. If no Society Leader is used, it is aesthetically desirable to use about a foot of Black Leader before the first picture.

Tail leaders should be about six feet long after last picture. If a Tail Sync mark is used, it should be 3 to 4 feet from last picture.

**Magnetic Sound Tracks (Full Coat)**

As with Picture rolls, the leader should be twelve feet long; six feet to punch, then six feet to start of subject. A sync "beep" should be placed on the mag. track in DEAD SYNC with the "2" on the Society Leader of the picture.

DEAD SYNC (or EDIT SYNC or CUTTERS SYNC) **MUST** be marked and punched on the leader.

If Raw Leader is added to the mag. rolls, either as "slug" or as Head and Tail leader, it **MUST** be Single Perf. The Raw Leaders should be spliced so that the base of the leaders is the side that comes in contact with the magnetic playback head.

**Sync Marks:**

All SYNC MARKS should be clearly marked on the emulsion side of the leaders with an indelible film marker such as a "LDF FILM MARKER".

See the Association of Cinema Laboratories Handbook for the appropriate markings.

**SPLICES:**

Splices should be cemented. Tape splices should not be used. Aside from the visual problems, tape splices will stretch, even in one or two passes through a cleaning machine or a printer. (In a contact printer, it is necessary to use a considerable amount of tension to insure the best registration.) In addition, tape splices are a source of sticky, hard to remove dirt. For the same reason, old-fashioned metallic cueing tabs should be carefully removed from originals.

**ALWAYS:** (1) Make sure that the splicer is perfectly CLEAN.

(2) Scrape film enough to remove the emulsion completely, without actually removing film base.

(3) Apply a meager amount of FRESH film cement to both film surfaces.

(4) Close splicer without delay. Wait the proper amount of time necessary to make a strong splice. This will depend on the temperature of the splicer, usually several seconds.

**FADE (AND DISSOLVE) LENGTHS:**

We offer the following lengths in 16mm fades: 16, 24, 32, 48, 64 & 96 frames. In each case leave two (2) extra frames at the end of each fade. i.e. For a 24 frame dissolve, use a 26 frame overlap, etc. Therefore the length needed to open or close the fader in black leader is 18 frames, (16+2). Leave 18 frames of black leader between the end of a fade out and a "pop on" in the same roll.

**NEVER USE GREASE PENCIL (CHINA MARKERS) ON ORIGINAL PICTURE OR MAG.**

**ALWAYS SUBMIT A CUE SHEET WITH YOUR "A" & "B" ROLLS** (in addition to a workprint; marked on the emulsion side).

LDF 479