CHAPTER

# 6

# The Relation of Shot to Shot: Editing

Since the 1920s, when film theorists began to realize what **editing** can achieve, it has been the most widely discussed film technique. This hasn't been all to the good. Some writers have mistakenly found in editing the key to good cinema (or even *all* cinema). Yet many film scenes don't use editing extensively. As we saw in the last chapter, some films consist of very few shots. Some major films from the 1910s, such as Victor Sjöström's *Ingeborg Holm,* consist largely of single-take scenes; these shape our experience by subtle manipulations of mise-en-scene. Other films, such as *Touch of Evil,* use long takes with camera movements to guide our moment-by-moment understanding of the action. Films relying on long takes aren't necessarily less "cinematic" than films that break down scenes into many shots.

Still, we can see why editing has exercised such an enormous fascination. It's very powerful. The ride of the Klan in *The Birth of a Nation,* the Odessa Steps sequence in *Potemkin,* the hunt sequence in *The Rules of the Game,* the shower murder in *Psycho,* Clarice Starling's discovery of the killer's lair in *The Silence of the Lambs,* the reconstruction of the Dallas assassination in *JFK,* the quickfire shifts among dream layers in *Inception*—these and many other screen moments derive their impact from editing. No wonder that cutting plays a huge role in mass-market filmmaking. Today's Hollywood movie typically contains between 1,000 and 2,000 shots; an action movie can have 3,000 or more.

Editing decisions can also build the film's overall form. The nested segments we found in *Citizen Kane* (pp. 101–102) are defined by editing transitions. In long-take films, shot changes usually mark out scenes or sequences. Warhol's *My Hustler* contains only three cuts, but they give the film four large-scale parts. By tying shot to shot and segment to segment, editing can shape our responses to individual scenes and the entire movie.

This powerful, pervasive technique confronts the filmmaker with a huge number of choices. Cut here or there? Put this shot before or after that one? Does this string of shots make sense? The options are multiplied in digital filmmaking, with its power to redo shots in postproduction. James Cameron comments:

> You can almost get buried by possibilities. In a normal editing situation, depending on the material, you might end up just selecting the performance that has the least number of deficits to it. But with what we've created, anything can be in focus, anything can be out of focus, or lit differently at any time. You can do virtual camera work on a performance that was shot six months earlier. . . . There's always the risk of getting bogged down. You find yourself asking, "Why?" a whole lot more than you normally might. "Why am I on this angle? Why am I on a close-up on this actor when a wide shot might work better?" In a way, it puts you back to basics as an editor.





Even without the CGI resources of *Avatar,* a filmmaker must think constantly about editing.

## What Is Editing?

You already know something about editing. As a viewer, you notice when the cutting is very fast, during a chase scene or a fight. If you've made some videos, you've probably done some editing, assembling various shots in your preferred order and trimming them until they seem the right length. You're aware that editing lets the filmmaker decide what shots to include and how they will be arranged.

These sorts of decisions are multiplied vastly in professional filmmaking. Just the matter of selection can be daunting. An editor on the typical feature-length film is faced with a mountain of footage. *The Social Network* in finished form ran two hours, but 286 hours of material were shot—not an unusual amount for such a project.

To ease the task, most fiction filmmakers plan for the editing phase during the preparation and shooting phases. Scripts, storyboards, and previsualizations allow shots to be imagined in advance. Documentary filmmakers often shoot extra footage of settings, documents, or significant objects. These can be useful in cutting together material caught on the fly. For *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills,* the directors filmed aerial shots of the neighborhood that was central to the crime. These serve as transitions linking sections of the film that follows.

Once the material is selected, the editor joins the shots, the end of one to the beginning of another. The most common join is the **cut.** A cut provides an instantaneous change from one shot to another. Other methods of joining shots produce more gradual changes. A **fade-out** gradually darkens the end of a shot to black, and a **fade-in** lightens a shot from black. A **dissolve** briefly superimposes the end of shot A and the beginning of shot B **(6.1–6.3).** In a **wipe,** shot B replaces shot A by means of a boundary line moving across the screen **(6.4).** Here both images are briefly on the screen at the same time, but they do not blend, as in a dissolve. Before the rise of digital editing in the 1990s, a cut was usually made by splicing two shots together with film cement or tape. Fades, dissolves, and wipes were executed with optical printers or in the laboratory. In computer editing, all types of edits are created with the software.

Although everyone is somewhat aware of editing, we can understand the filmmaker's creative choices more fully if we look at the technique systematically. In this chapter, we show how editing allows the filmmaker to manipulate time, space, and pictorial qualities in ways that shape the viewer's experience of the film.

> "Editing is the basic creative force, by power of which the soulless photographs (the separate shots) are engineered into living, cinematographic form."
> —V. I. Pudovkin, director

> "You can definitely help performances in the cutting room, by intercutting reaction, maybe re-recording lines, adding lines over reaction shots. And you can help a film's structure by moving sequences about and dropping scenes that hold up pacing. And sometimes you can use bits and pieces from different takes, which also helps a lot. What you can do in the editing room to help a film is amazing!"
> —Jodie Foster, actor and director

6.1

6.2

6.3

6.4

**6.1–6.4 Linking shots with optical devices.** The first shot of *The Maltese Falcon* (6.1) ends with a dissolve (6.2) to the second shot (6.3). In *Seven Samurai,* a wipe joins the last shot of one scene with the first of the next.

6.5 Shot 1

6.6 Shot 2

6.7 Shot 3

6.8 Shot 4

**6.5–6.8** Editing for timing and impact: Four shots from *The Birds*.

## CREATIVE DECISIONS

### *Why Cut? Four Shots from* The Birds

Here's a portion of the attack on the Bodega Bay waterfront in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* **(6.5–6.8).**

1. *Medium shot, straight-on angle.* Melanie, Mitch, and the fisherman are standing by the restaurant window talking. Melanie is on the extreme right, the bartender is in the background (6.5).
2. *Medium close-up.* Melanie is standing by the fisherman's shoulder. She looks to right (out offscreen window) and up, as if following with her eyes. Pan right with her as she turns to window and looks out (6.6).
3. *Extreme long shot.* Melanie's point of view: The gas station across street, with the phone booth in the left foreground. Birds dive-bomb the attendant, swooping right to left (6.7).
4. *Medium close-up.* Melanie, in profile. The fisherman moves right into the frame, blocking out the bartender. Mitch moves right into the extreme foreground. All three in profile look out the window (6.8).

Each of these four shots presents a different bit of time and space and a different array of graphic qualities. The first shot shows the characters talking (6.5). A cut shifts us to a medium close-up shot of Melanie. Here space has changed (Melanie is isolated and larger in the frame), time is continuous, and the graphic configurations have changed (the arrangements of the shapes and colors vary). Another cut takes us instantly to what she sees (6.6). The gas station shot (6.7) presents a different space, another bit of time, and a different graphic configuration. Another cut returns us to Melanie (6.8), and again we are shifted instantly to another space, the next slice of time, and a different graphic configuration. The four shots are joined by three cuts.

Hitchcock could have presented the *Birds* scene without editing. Using deep-space staging, he might have created a deep-focus composition like those in Figures 5.48 and 5.49. He could have placed Mitch and the fisherman in the foreground, Melanie and the window in the middle ground, and the gull attack in the distance, visible through the window. The scene could now be played in one shot, for we would have no abrupt change of time or space or graphics.

But editing gives Hitchcock control of timing and impact. At a certain moment he can fasten our attention on Melanie alone, not the men: shot 2 demands that we notice her response. Similarly, shot 3 obliges us to watch the bird attack as she sees it, with nothing else in the frame to distract us. Editing allows Hitchcock to march us in step with the action, locking our reaction to the pace of the images.

We've seen that through mise-en-scene and cinematography the filmmaker can create a shot containing many points of interest. Tim Smith's experiment in eye-tracking (4.120–4.121) shows that a director can subtly guide our attention to a single area of a shot. Why didn't Hitchcock take that option? Because his cuts do more than simply isolate parts of the action: they *emphasize* them. The cut-in to Melanie enlarges her suddenly, creating a little punch. The same thing happens with the bird attack. If we watched it through a window in the distance, it would be a tiny part of the image. As an enlarged view of the gas station, it gains in significance.

In addition, if Hitchcock had presented all the action in a single shot, he wouldn't have engaged our minds in quite the same way. When he cuts from shot 2, of Melanie looking, to shot 3, the gull's swooping, we have to think a little. We have to infer that shot 3 is what Melanie sees. We've known this convention for most of our lives, but it still calls on us to use our imagination to connect the shots.

So a deep-space, deep-focus shot would have a rather different effect. But there was another option, you might say. What if Hitchcock used a continuous shot but moved his camera? Imagine that the camera frames the people talking, tracks in and rightward to Melanie as she turns, pans right to the window to show the dive-bombing gull, and pans back left to catch the group's expressions. This would constitute one complicated shot, somewhat like the *Grand Illusion* example we considered in the previous chapter (5.194–5.200). The varied framing would provide emphasis, picking out some parts of the scene while leaving out others. But camera movements, no matter how fast, would not present the *sudden* breaks that the cuts produce. Again, it's a matter of timing and heightened impact. In the *Grand Illusion* scene, the panning and tracking movements gradually reveal the reaction of the German officers to the prisoners' show. Cutting enables Hitchcock to make the bird attack more abrupt and startling—a quality that suits the story action at that point.

In all, editing allows Hitchcock to isolate and magnify each bit of action and to control the pace of our uptake. We must surrender to the swift, sharp flow of shots, but we also devote a bit of mental energy to figuring out how they fit together. When filmmakers want to pattern our experience so precisely, editing becomes an attractive stylistic option.



## Dimensions of Film Editing

Editing offers the filmmaker four basic areas of choice and control:

1. Graphic relations between shot A and shot B
2. Rhythmic relations between shot A and shot B
3. Spatial relations between shot A and shot B
4. Temporal relations between shot A and shot B

Let's trace the range of choice and control in each area.

### Graphic Relations between Shot A and Shot B

The four shots from *The Birds* show the time and space of the scene, but we can see them purely as graphic configurations as well. They display patterns of light and dark, line and shape, volumes and depths, movement and stasis. And we can compare these qualities across shots.

For instance, Hitchcock didn't drastically alter the overall brightness from shot to shot, because the scene takes place during the day. If the scene had been set at night, he could have cut from the fairly bright second shot in the bar (6.6, Melanie turning to the window) to a shot of the gas station swathed in darkness. That would have created a stronger contrast. Moreover, Hitchcock usually keeps the most important part of the composition roughly in the center of the frame. (Compare Melanie's position in the frame with that of the gas station in 6.7.) He could, however, have cut from a shot in which Melanie was in, say, upper frame left to a shot locating the gas station in the lower right of the frame. Again, there would have been a sense of less graphic continuity.

We've already seen that pictorial contrasts can be powerful in guiding our attention (p. 148), and Hitchcock's editing does work a bit on them. Melanie's hair and outfit make her a predominantly yellow and green figure, but the shot of the gas station is dominated by drab grays set off by touches of red in the gas pumps. Alternatively, Hitchcock could have chosen to cut from Melanie to another figure composed of similar colors. Furthermore, the action in Melanie's shot—her turning to the window—doesn't blend into the movements of either the attendant or the gull in the next shot. But Hitchcock could have echoed Melanie's movement by some motion in the shot that followed.

The implication is simple but powerful. If you put any two shots together, you'll create some interaction between the *purely pictorial* qualities of those two shots.

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We discuss graphic matching in more detail in "Graphic content ahead."

6.9

6.10

6.11

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6.13

**6.9–6.13 Graphic matching, static and dynamic.** A shot from *True Stories* showing the Texas horizon midway up the frame (6.9) is graphically matched with a shot showing the waterline of ancient seas in the same position (6.10). *Seven Samurai*: The first three (6.11–6.13) of six shots of running samurai. Kurosawa matches the shots through composition, lighting, setting, figure movement, and the panning camera movement.

The four aspects of mise-en-scene (lighting, setting, costume, and the movement of the figures) and most cinematographic qualities (photography, framing, and camera mobility) all furnish graphic elements. Every shot provides possibilities for purely graphic editing, and every cut creates some sort of graphic relationship between two shots.

### Graphic Editing: Matches and Clashes

Graphics may be edited to achieve smooth continuity or abrupt contrast. The filmmaker may link shots by close graphic similarities, thus making a **graphic match.** Shapes, colors, overall composition, or movement in shot A may be picked up in the composition of shot B. A minimal instance is the cut that joins the first two shots of David Byrne's *True Stories* **(6.9, 6.10).** More dynamic graphic matches appear in Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*. After the samurai have first arrived at the village, an alarm sounds and they race to discover its source. Kurosawa cuts together six shots of different running samurai, all very brief and graphically matched **(6.11–6.13).** Filmmakers sometimes call attention to graphic matches at transitional moments **(6.14–6.16).**

6.14

6.15

6.16

**6.14–6.16 Graphic matching in a transition.** In *Aliens*, the curved outline of Ripley's sleeping face (6.15) is graphically matched by means of a dissolve (6.16) to the outline of the earth (6.16).



6.17

6.18

**6.17–6.18 Graphic matching: A matter of degree.** The woman and her friend, the cowboy truck driver (6.17), confront the enraged cook and his assistants. (6.18) Although the shots aren't precisely matched graphically, the key characters are placed in the same area of each shot.

Such precise graphic matching is rare. A looser graphic continuity from shot A to shot B is typical of most narrative cinema, as in the *Birds* shots. The director will usually strive to keep the main point of interest roughly constant across the cut, to maintain the overall lighting level, and to avoid strong color clashes from shot to shot. In Juzo Itami's *Tampopo*, an aspiring cook is trying to learn the secret of good noodles, and she questions a successful cook. Alternating shots keep each main character's face in the right center of each frame **(6.17, 6.18).**

Editing need not be graphically continuous. Filmmakers working in a wide-screen format often create mild graphic discontinuities when they frame characters facing one another. A scene from *Pulp Fiction* places the two hit men opposite each other in a restaurant booth, each framed distinctly off-center **(6.19, 6.20).** Compared to the *Tampopo* example, the cut here creates greater graphic discontinuity. Yet the overall effect is one of symmetry and balance, with each man filling the space left empty in the other shot.

Graphically discontinuous editing can be more noticeable. Orson Welles frequently sought a clash from shot to shot. In *Citizen Kane* a direct cut from the dark long shot of Kane's bedroom gives way to the bright opening title of "News on the March." Welles does something similar during a transition in *Touch of Evil* **(6.21, 6.22).** Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* created a convention by utilizing an extreme graphic conflict between past and present. Resnais cut together color footage of an abandoned concentration camp today with black-and-white newsreel shots of the camps in the period 1942–1945.

6.19

6.20

**6.19–6.20 Graphic discontinuity yields editing symmetry.** *Pulp Fiction:* Vincent (6.20) and Jules (6.21) are at opposite ends of the screen in each shot, but the cutting creates an overall balance. It also offers our attention a predictable, left-right trajectory to follow.

6.21

6.22

**6.21–6.22 Graphic discontinuity in a transition.** In *Touch of Evil*, Welles dissolves from a shot of Menzies looking out a window on frame right (6.21) to a shot of Susan Vargas looking out a different window on frame left (6.22). The clash is emphasized by the contrasting screen positions of the window reflections.

### Graphic Contrast in *The Birds*

Later in the *Birds* sequence, Hitchcock exploits a stronger conflict of graphic qualities. Gasoline spurting from the pump has flowed across the street to a parking lot. Melanie, along with several other people at the restaurant window, has seen a man accidentally set the gasoline alight. His car ignites, and an explosion of flame engulfs him. Melanie must watch helplessly as the flame races along the trail of gas toward the station. Hitchcock cuts the shots as shown in **6.23–6.33**:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shot 30 | (Long shot) | High angle. Melanie's POV. Flaming car, spreading flames (6.23). | 73 frames |
| Shot 31 | (Medium close-up) | Straight-on angle. Melanie, immobile, looking off left, mouth open (6.24). | 20 frames |
| Shot 32 | (Medium shot) | High angle. Melanie's POV. Pan with flames moving from lower right to upper left of trail of gasoline (6.25). | 18 frames |
| Shot 33 | (Medium close-up) | As 31. Melanie, immobile, staring down left center (6.26). | 16 frames |
| Shot 34 | (Medium shot) | High angle. Melanie's POV. Pan with flames moving from lower right to upper left (6.27). | 14 frames |
| Shot 35 | (Medium close-up) | As 31. Melanie, immobile, looking off right, staring aghast (6.28). | 12 frames |
| Shot 36 | (Long shot) | Melanie's POV. Gas station. Flames rush in from right. Mitch, sheriff, and attendant run out left (6.29). | 10 frames |
| Shot 37 | (Medium close-up) | As 31. Melanie, immobile, stares off extreme right (6.30). | 8 frames |
| Shot 38 | (Long shot) | As 36. Melanie's POV. Cars at station explode (6.31). | 34 frames |
| Shot 39 | (Medium close-up) | As 31. Melanie covers her face with her hands (6.32). | 33 frames |
| Shot 40 | (Extreme long shot) | Extreme high angle on city, flaming trail in center. Gulls fly into shot (6.33). | |



6.23 Shot 30

6.24 Shot 31

6.25 Shot 32

6.26 Shot 33

6.27 Shot 34

6.28 Shot 35.


6.29 Shot 36

6.30 Shot 37


6.31 Shot 38

6.32 Shot 39

6.33 Shot 40

**6.23–6.33 Editing for graphic contrast in *The Birds*.** Hitchcock employs two types of contrast. First, his cutting contrasts the movement of Melanie's head with the trail of flames. A second contrast is between movement and stillness. The shots of the flames show movement of both the subject and the camera, while the shots of Melanie's head are completely static.

In graphic terms, Hitchcock has exploited two types of contrast. First, although each shot's composition centers the action (Melanie's head, the flaming trail), the movements thrust in different directions. In shot 31, Melanie looks to the lower left, but in shot 32, the fire moves to the upper left. In shot 33, Melanie is looking down center, but in shot 34, the flames still move to the upper left, and so on.

More important—and what makes the sequence impossible to recapture on the printed page—is the bold contrast between motion and stasis. The shots of the flames present plenty of movement: the flames rush along the trail of gasoline, and the camera pans to follow them. But the shots of Melanie could be still photographs, since each one is absolutely static. She doesn't turn her head in any shot,

and the camera doesn't track in or away from her. Instead we get snapshots of her changing attention. By making movement conflict with counter-movement and with stillness, Hitchcock has powerfully exploited the graphic possibilities of editing.

## Rhythmic Relations between Shot A and Shot B

Every shot is of a certain length, with its series of frames consuming a certain amount of time onscreen. Modern film, as we've seen (p. 10) typically runs 24 or 25 frames per second. Modern video formats run at approximately 24, 25, 30 or 48 frames per second. A shot can be as short as a single frame, or it may be thousands of frames long, running for many minutes when projected. The filmmaker can adjust the lengths of any shot in relation to the shots around it. That choice taps into the *rhythmic* potential of editing. Other film techniques, notably the soundtrack, contribute to the overall rhythm of the film, as you'd expect. But the patterning of shot lengths contributes considerably to what we intuitively recognize as a film's rhythm.

**Flash Frames** Sometimes the filmmaker will use shot duration to stress a single moment. In one sequence of *The Road Warrior,* a ferocious gang member head-butts his victim. At the instant of contact, director George Miller cuts in a few frames of pure white. The result is a sudden flash that suggests violent impact. Such *flash-frames* have become conventions of action films. In any genre, flash-frames may mark transitions between segments or signal flashbacks or subjective sequences.

Flash-frames usually provide one-off accents. More commonly, the rhythmic possibilities of editing emerge when several shots in a series form a pattern. By making all the shots more or less the same length, the filmmaker can create a steady beat. Gradually lengthening shots can slow the rhythm, while shorter and shorter shots can accelerate it.

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On the problems of frame-counting video versions, see "My name is David, and I'm a frame-counter."

**Rhythmic Cutting in *The Birds*** Hitchcock's editing builds a distinct rhythm during the gas-station attack we examined earlier. Since *The Birds* was shot on film, our chart provides frame counts based on a 35mm print.

The first shot, the medium shot of Melanie and the men talking (6.5), consumes almost a thousand frames, or about 41 seconds. But the second shot (6.6), which shows Melanie looking out the window, is much shorter—309 frames (about 13 seconds). Even shorter is shot 3 (6.7), which lasts only 55 frames (about 2⅓ seconds). The fourth shot (6.8), showing Melanie joined by Mitch and the fisherman, lasts only 35 frames (about 1½ seconds). Clearly, Hitchcock is accelerating the pace at the beginning of what will be a tense sequence. This arc of excitement could probably not have been achieved if Hitchcock had handled the action in a single shot.

In what follows, Hitchcock makes the shots fairly short but subordinates the length of the shot to the rhythm of the dialogue and the movement in the images. As a result, shots 5–29 (not shown here) have no fixed pattern of lengths. But once the essential components of the scene have been established, Hitchcock returns to strongly accelerating cutting.

> "I noticed a softening in American cinema over the last twenty years, and I think it's a direct influence of TV. I would even say that if you want to make movies today, you'd be better off studying television than film because that's the market. Television has diminished the audience's attention span. It's hard to make a slow, quiet film today. Not that I would want to make a slow, quiet film anyway!"
> —Oliver Stone, director

In presenting Melanie's horrified realization of the flames racing from the parking lot to the gas station, shots 30–40 (6.23–6.33) climax the rhythmic intensification of the sequence. As the description on page 228 shows, after the shot of the spreading flames (shot 30, 6.23), each shot decreases in length by 2 frames, from 20 frames (5/6 of a second) to 8 frames—just one-third of a second! Two shots, 38 and 39, then punctuate the sequence with almost identical durations (a little less than 1½ seconds apiece). Shot 40 (6.33), an extreme long shot that lasts over 600 frames, functions as both a pause and a suspenseful preparation for the new attack. The scene's variations in rhythm alternate between rendering the savagery of the attack and generating suspense as we await the next onslaught.

We've had the luxury of counting frames on the actual strip of film. In the movie theater, we can't do this, but as viewers we do feel the shifting tempo that's created by the changing shot durations. In general, by controlling editing rhythm, the filmmaker controls the amount of time we have to grasp and reflect on what we see. A series of rapid shots leaves us little time to think about what we're watching. In the *Birds* sequence, Hitchcock's editing impels the viewer's perception to move at a faster and faster pace. Very quickly we have to grasp the progress of the fire and Melanie's changes in position, and the acceleration builds rising excitement in the scene. Whipping up the spectator through rhythmic editing remains central to action scenes in movies today.



> "[In editing *The Dark Knight* for both Imax and 35mm presentation], we needed to extensively test to ensure that the cuts were not so quick that the audience would get disoriented, looking at that Imax screen, and at the same time not interfere with the pace of the standard cinema version."
> —Lee Smith, editor

## Spatial Relations between Shot A and Shot B

Editing can control graphics and rhythm, but it can also construct film space. When early filmmakers discovered this, they seemed giddy with their godlike power. "I am builder," wrote Soviet documentarist Dziga Vertov. "I have placed you . . . in an extraordinary room which did not exist until just now when I also created it. In this room there are twelve walls, shot by me in various parts of the world. In bringing together shots of walls and details, I've managed to arrange them in an order that is pleasing."

We can understand why Vertov was elated. Editing permits the filmmaker to juxtapose *any* two points in space and suggest some kind of relationship between them.

**Establishing and Manipulating Space** If you're the director, you might start with a shot that establishes a spatial whole and follow this with a shot of a part of this space. This is what Hitchcock does in shot 1 and shot 2 of the *Birds* sequence (6.5, 6.6): a medium shot of the group of people followed by a medium close-up shot of only one, Melanie. Such analytical breakdown is a very common editing pattern.

Alternatively, you could construct a whole space out of component parts. Hitchcock does this in the *Birds* sequence, too. Note that in 6.5–6.8 and in shots 30–39 (6.23–6.32), we don't see an establishing shot including Melanie *and* the gas station. In production, the restaurant window need not have been across from the station at all; they could have been filmed in different towns or even countries. Yet the cutting, along with hints in the staging and on the soundtrack, compels us to believe that Melanie is across the street from the gas station.

Spatial manipulation of this sort is fairly common. In documentaries compiled from newsreel footage, for example, one shot might show a cannon firing, and another shot might show a shell hitting its target. We infer that the cannon fired the shell, though the shots may show entirely different battles. If a shot of a speaker is followed by a shot of a cheering crowd, we assume that they're in the same locale.

Today's editors can also alter space through *intra-frame editing.* Digital filmmaking makes it easy to combine parts of different shots into a single shot. In 35mm film-based production, this effect was accomplished during filming or during laboratory work, as with traveling mattes (p. 176). Now elements from different shots may be blended in editing. A character can be extracted from one shot and seamlessly pasted into another one. Vertov, who was fond of layering his images, would have found this software irresistible for creating tricks and lyrical effects (pp. 430–431), but most mainstream filmmakers use intra-frame editing to generate shots that look like normally photographed ones.

**Constructive Editing: The Kuleshov Effect** Practicing filmmakers sometimes reflect on their tools and their craft. Take Lev Kuleshov, a master of silent cinema. As a teenager, he had worked as an actor and set designer for one of Russia's greatest directors, Yevgenii Bauer. Bauer relied on skillful staging and long takes (pp. 125–128), but when Kuleshov directed his first film at age 21, he modeled it on the faster-cut American films he admired. At the same time, Kuleshov wanted to study filmmaking scientifically, so in 1921 he conducted some informal experiments. His findings decisively demonstrated editing's power over the viewer's sense of space.

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For more on the Kuleshov effect in both older and more recent films, see "What happens between shots happens between your ears."

In one experiment Kuleshov intercut neutral shots of an actor's face with other shots. When the face was intercut with a bowl of soup, viewers reportedly said the man looked hungry. When the same facial shot was intercut with a dead woman, he was taken to look mournful. Kuleshov claimed that the editing made viewers assume that the actor's expression changed, so that the cutting actually created the performance. In addition, the editing pattern strongly suggested the man was reacting to nearby things that he could see. Similarly, Kuleshov cut together shots of actors "looking at each other" but on Moscow streets miles apart, then meeting and strolling together—and turning to look at the White House in Washington.

Although filmmakers had already discovered this editing tactic, film historians called the idea behind it the *Kuleshov effect.* In general, that term refers to cutting together portions of a space in a way that prompts the spectator to assume a spatial whole that isn't shown onscreen. Most often, this happens because the filmmaker has decided to withhold an establishing shot.

The Kuleshov effect has both practical and artistic advantages. For a hospital scene in *Contagion,* Steven Soderbergh did not have to spend time and money shooting an entire emergency room. He suggests the locale with simple close shots of the husband staring as his wife goes into convulsions **(6.34–6.35).** We never see the faces of the medical staff, and we don't even see the actors together in the frame. The artistic benefit of Soderbergh's creative choice is that he carries us quickly to the heart of the crisis facing the couple.

Once you start to watch for the Kuleshov effect, you'll find that it's quite common. Sometimes it's used to create almost impossible feats. In Corey Yuen Kwai's *Legend of Fong Sai-Yuk,* a martial-arts bout between the hero and an adept woman begins on a platform but then bursts into their audience. The two warriors fight while balancing on the heads and shoulders of people in the crowd. Most of the shots are rapidly edited and rely on the Kuleshov effect **(6.36– 6.37).**

More radically, the editing can present spatial relations as being ambiguous and uncertain. In Carl Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc,* for instance, we know only that Jeanne and the priests are in the same room. Because the neutral white backgrounds and the numerous close-ups provide no orientation to the entire space, we can seldom tell how far apart the characters are or precisely who is beside whom. We'll see later how films can create even more extreme spatial discontinuities.

The viewer doesn't normally notice the Kuleshov effect, but a few films call attention to it. Carl Reiner's *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* mixes shots filmed in the present with shots from Hollywood movies of the 1940s. Thanks to the Kuleshov effect, *Dead Men* creates unified scenes in which Steve Martin converses with characters from other films. In *A Movie,* experimentalist Bruce Conner turns the Kuleshov effect into a visual joke by linking shots scavenged from very different sources **(6.38–6.39).**

## Temporal Relations between Shot A and Shot B

Like other film techniques, editing can control the time of the action presented in the film. In a narrative film especially, editing usually contributes to the plot's manipulation of story time. Back in Chapter 3 we pointed out three areas in which plot time can cue the spectator to construct the story time: order, duration, and frequency. Our *Birds* example (6.5–6.8) shows how editing reinforces all three areas of control.

**Editing Shapes Chronology** First, there is the *order* of presentation of events. The men talk, then Melanie turns away, then she sees the gull swoop, then she responds. Hitchcock's editing presents these story events in the 1-2-3-4 order of his shots. But he could have shuffled the shots into any order at all, even reverse (4-3-2-1). This is to say that the filmmaker may control story chronology through the editing.

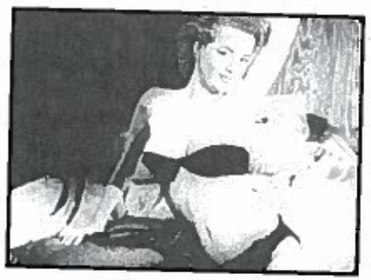
6.34

6.35

6.36

6.37

6.38



6.39

**6.34–6.39 The Kuleshov effect enhances drama, stunts, and jokes.** In *Contagion,* a husband (6.34) watches his wife dying (6.35), with no wide view establishing the ER. In *The Legend of Fong Sai-Yuk,* a shot of the woman's upper body (6.36) is followed by a shot of her legs and feet, supported by unwilling bystanders (6.37). In production, shots of the feet were made while the combatants were suspended above the crowd. The upper-body shots were filmed while the actors stood on some support below the frameline. In the found-footage film *A Movie,* one sequence cuts from a submarine captain peering through a periscope (6.38) to a woman gazing at the camera, as if they could see each other (6.39).

Controlling chronology can affect story–plot relations. We are most familiar with such manipulations in *flashbacks,* which present one or more shots out of their presumed story order. In *Hiroshima mon amour,* Resnais uses the protagonist's memory to motivate a violation of 1-2-3 order. Three shots **(6.40–6.42)** suggest visually that the position of her current lover's hand triggers a recollection of another lover's death years before. In contemporary cinema, brief flashbacks to key events may brutally interrupt present-time action. *The Fugitive* uses this technique to return obsessively to the murder of Dr. Kimble's wife, the event that initiated the story's action.

A much rarer option for reordering story events is the **flashforward.** Here the editing moves from the present to a future event and then returns to the present. A small-scale instance occurs in *The Godfather.* Don Vito Corleone talks with his sons Tom and Sonny about their upcoming meeting with Sollozzo, the gangster

6.40

6.41

6.42

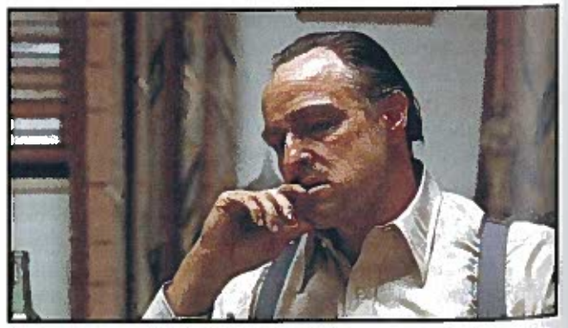
**6.40–6.42 Editing creates a flashback.** In *Hiroshima mon amour,* an optical point-of-view shot shows the protagonist's Japanese lover asleep (6.40). This is followed by a shot of her looking at him (6.41) and then a jump back into her past: a similar view of the hand of her dead German lover (6.42).

who is asking them to finance his narcotics traffic. As the Corleones talk, shots of their conversation in the present are interspersed with shots of Sollozzo going to the meeting in the future **(6.43–6.45).** The editing is used to provide exposition about Sollozzo while also moving quickly to the Don's announcement, at the gangsters' meeting, that he will not involve the family in the drug trade.

Filmmakers may use flashforwards to tease the viewer with glimpses of the eventual outcome of the story action. The end of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* is hinted at in brief shots that periodically interrupt scenes in the present. Such flashforwards create a sense of a narration with a powerful range of story knowledge.

6.43

6.44



6.45

**6.43–6.45 Editing creates a flashforward.** In *The Godfather,* the Corleones discuss their upcoming meeting with Sollozzo (6.43). Jump ahead in time: Sollozzo arrives at the meeting, greeted by Sonny (6.44). The next few shots return us to the family conversation, where Don Vito ponders what he will tell Sollozzo (6.45). As they talk, more flashforwards to the meeting are inserted.



**Editing Condenses or Expands Duration** Filmmakers overwhelmingly present their shots in chronological order, but they are more likely to use editing to alter the *duration* of story events. **Elliptical editing** presents an action in such a way that it consumes less time on the screen than it does in the story. The filmmaker can create an *ellipsis* in three principal ways.

Suppose you want to show a man climbing a flight of stairs but you don't want to show every second of his climb. You could simply cut from a shot of him starting up the stairs to a shot of him reaching the top. If you feel that's a little too bumpy for your viewer, you could use a dissolve or some other punctuation that signals that some time has been omitted. This was a common option in world cinema before the 1960s. Devices like dissolves, fades, and wipes conventionally signaled an ellipsis in the action.

Alternatively, you could show the man at the bottom of the staircase, let him walk up out of the frame, hold briefly on the empty frame, then cut to an empty frame of the top of the stairs and let the man enter the frame. The *empty frames* on either side of the cut cover the elided time.

As a third option, you could create an ellipsis by means of a *cutaway* or *insert.* This is a shot of another event elsewhere that will not last as long as the elided action. In our example, you might start with the man climbing but then cut away to a woman in her apartment. You could then cut back to the man much farther along in his climb.

If you start to watch for them, you'll see that ellipses are fairly common in editing. Less common are shot-changes that *expand* story time. If the action from the end of one shot is partly repeated at the beginning of the next, we have **overlapping editing.** This prolongs the action, stretching it out past its story duration. The Russian filmmakers of the 1920s made frequent use of temporal expansion through overlapping editing, and no one mastered it more thoroughly than Sergei Eisenstein. In *Strike,* when factory workers bowl over a foreman with a large wheel hanging from a crane, two shots expand the action **(6.46–6.48).** In *October,* Eisenstein overlaps several shots of rising bridges in order to stress the significance of the moment.

> "I saw *Toto the Hero,* the first film of the Belgian ex-circus clown Jaco van Dormael. What a brilliant debut. He tells the story with the camera. His compression and ellipses and clever visual transitions make it one of the most cinematic movies in a long time. The story spans a lifetime and kaleidoscopic events with such a lightness and grace that you want to get up and cheer."
> —John Boorman, director

> "[In editing James Bond films], we also evolved a technique that jumped continuity by simple editing devices. Bond would take a half-step towards a door and you would pick him up stepping into the next scene. We also used inserts cleverly to speed up a scene."
> —John Glen, editor and director

**Editing Can Repeat Story Actions** We're accustomed to seeing a scene present action only once. Occasionally, however, a filmmaker may go beyond expanding an action to repeat it in its entirety. The very rarity of this technique may make it a powerful editing resource. In Bruce Conner's *Report,* there is a newsreel shot of John and Jacqueline Kennedy riding a limousine down a Dallas street. The shot is systematically repeated, in part or in whole, over and over, building up tension as the event seems to move by tiny increments closer to the inevitable

6.46

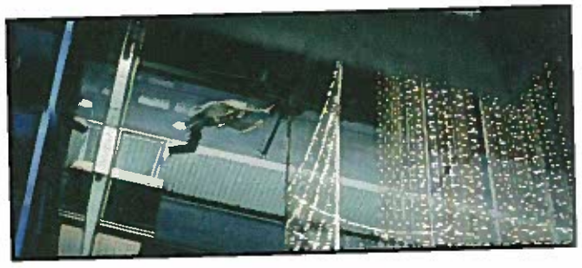
6.47

6.48

**6.46–6.48 Expanding duration through cutting.** In *Strike,* a wheel swings toward the foreman (6.46). From another angle we see it swing toward him again (6.47), and then again before striking him (6.48).

6.49

6.50



6.51

**6.49–6.51 Editing and the replay.** In *Police Story,* chasing the gangsters through a shopping mall, Jackie Chan leaps onto a pole several stories above them (6.49). He slides down in a shower of exploding lights (6.50). Cut to a new angle: Jackie leaps again, leading to an instant replay of the risky stunt (6.51). While the *Strike* sequence (6.46–6.48) briefly repeats bits of an action to extend a moment, this sequence from *Police Story* plays out an entire action several times.

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Sit in on an editing session for Johnnie To's *The Mad Detective* and see why certain cuts were chosen in "Truly madly cinematically."

assassination. Occasionally in *Do The Right Thing,* Spike Lee cuts together two takes of the same action, as when we twice see a garbage can fly through the air and break the pizzeria window at the start of the riot. Jackie Chan often shows his most virtuoso stunts three or four times in a row from different angles to allow the audience to marvel at his daring **(6.49–6.51).**

Graphics, rhythm, space, and time are at the service of the filmmaker through the technique of editing. They offer potentially unlimited creative possibilities, which is to say they offer a vast menu of choices. Yet most films we see make use of a particular set of editing possibilities. This menu of choices is called **continuity editing,** and it has dominated film history for nearly a hundred years. We look at that next. Still, the most familiar way to edit a film isn't the only way to edit a film, and so we'll go on to consider some alternatives to this tradition.

## Continuity Editing

Around 1900–1910, as filmmakers started to explore editing, they tried to arrange their shots so as to tell a story clearly. They developed an approach to editing, supported by specific strategies of cinematography and mise-en-scene, that was based on *narrative continuity.* Their explorations coalesced into a consistent style at the end of the 1910s, and it was embraced by filmmakers around the world. If you were to become a director, a cinematographer, a performer, or an editor, you'd need an intimate understanding of continuity editing.

We've seen that when a film technique is chosen and patterned to fulfill certain functions, a style emerges. Continuity editing offers a good example. It's a patterned use of a technique, based on filmmakers' decisions, that's designed to have particular effects on viewers. As its name implies, the continuity style aims to transmit narrative information smoothly and clearly over a series of shots. This makes the editing play a role in narration, the moment-by-moment flow of story information. All the dimensions of editing play a role in the continuity style. First, filmmakers usually keep graphic qualities roughly continuous from shot to shot. The figures are balanced and symmetrically deployed in the frame; the overall lighting tonality remains constant; the action occupies the central zones of the screen.

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We discuss the emergence of continuity editing in many entries, particularly "John Ford, Silent Man," "Back to the vaults, and over the edge," "Looking different today?" A young filmmaker's multi-screen study of early editing is discussed in "A variation on a sunbeam: Exploring a Griffith Biograph film."



Second, filmmakers usually adjust the rhythm of the cutting to the scale of the shots. Long shots are left on the screen longer than medium shots, and medium shots are left on longer than close-ups. This gives the spectator more time to take in the broader views, which contain more details. By contrast, scenes of accelerated editing like the fire in *The Birds* favor closer views that can be absorbed quickly.

Above all, since the continuity style seeks to present a story clearly and forcefully, the filmmakers' editing choices shape space and time in particular ways.

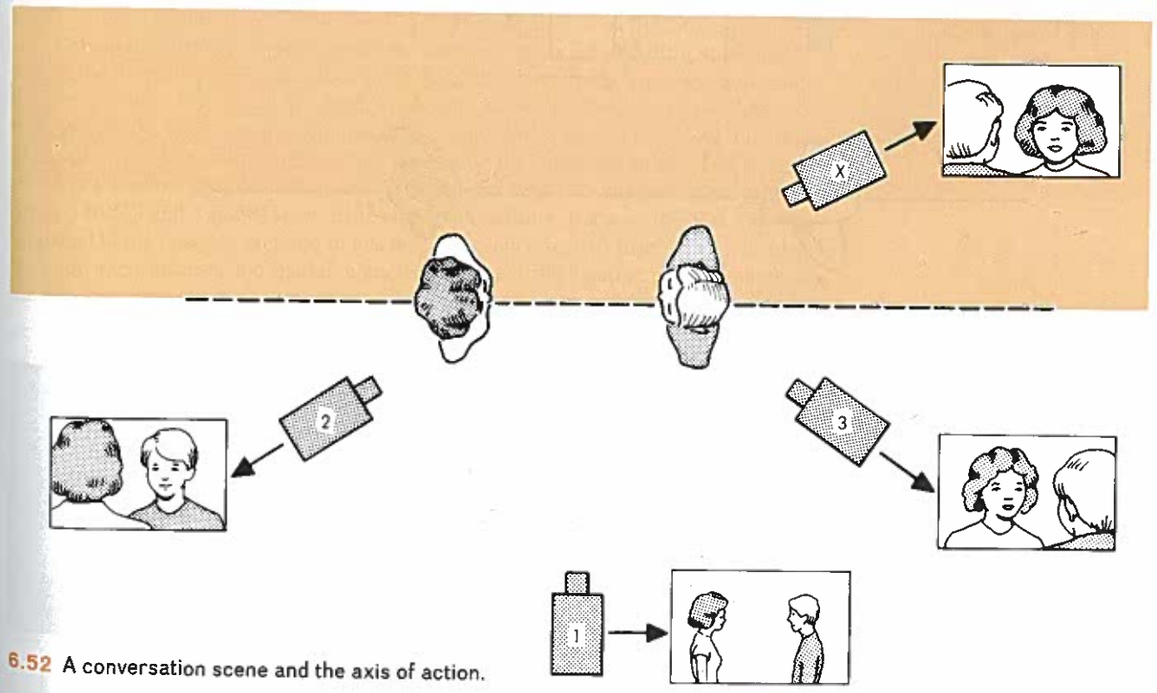
## Spatial Continuity: The 180° System

When working in the continuity style, the filmmaker builds the scene's space around what is called the **axis of action,** the *center line,* or the *180° line.* Any action—a person walking, two people conversing, a car racing along a road—can be thought of as occurring along a line or vector. This axis of action determines a half-circle, or 180° area, where the camera can be placed to present the action. The filmmaker will plan, stage, shoot, and edit the shots so as to maintain the axis of action from shot to shot.

The **180° system** can be imagined as the bird's-eye view in **6.52.** A girl and a boy are talking. The axis of action is the imaginary line connecting them. Under the continuity system, the director would arrange the mise-en-scene and camera placement so as to establish and sustain this line. A typical series of shots for continuity editing of the scene would be these:

1. A medium shot of the girl and the boy.
2. A shot over the girl's shoulder, favoring the boy.
3. A shot over the boy's shoulder, favoring the girl.

So far, so simple. But the choices are limited. To cut to a shot from camera position X, or from any position within the tinted area, would be considered a violation of the system because it *crosses* the axis of action. Indeed, some handbooks of




6.52 A conversation scene and the axis of action.

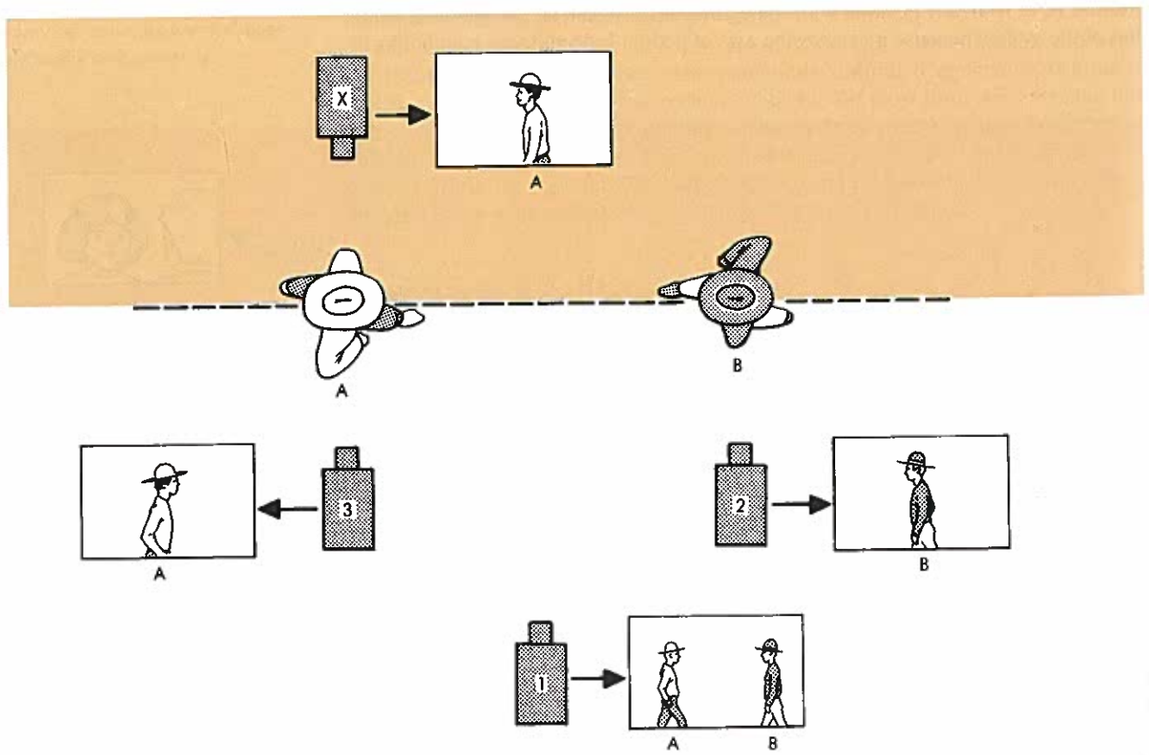
film directing call shot X flatly wrong. To see why, we need to examine what happens when a filmmaker follows the 180° system.

*The 180° system ensures that relative positions in the frame remain consistent.* In the shots taken from camera positions 1, 2, and 3, the characters occupy the same areas of the frame relative to each other. Even though we see them from different angles, the girl is always on the left and the boy is always on the right. But if we cut to shot X, the characters will switch positions in the frame. An advocate of traditional continuity would claim that shot X confuses us: Have the two characters somehow swiveled around each other?

*The 180° system ensures consistent eyelines.* If maintaining the axis of action keeps the figures facing in consistent directions, that has implications for the characters' gazes. In shots 1, 2, and 3, the girl is looking right and the boy is looking left. Shot X violates this pattern by making the girl look to the left.

*The 180° system ensures consistent screen direction.* Now imagine that the girl is walking left to right; her path constitutes the axis of action. As long as our shots do not cross this axis, cutting them together will keep the **screen direction** of the girl's movement constant, from left to right. But if we *cross* the axis and film a shot from the other side, the girl will now appear on the screen as moving from right to left. Such a cut could be disorienting.

Visualize the situation in 6.50, a standard scene of two cowboys meeting for a shootout on a town street **(6.53).** Cowboy A and cowboy B form the 180° line. But here A is walking from left to right and B is approaching from right to left, both seen in the shot taken from camera position 1. A closer view, from camera position 2, shows B still moving from right to left. A third shot, from camera position 3, shows A walking, as he had been in the first shot, from left to right.




**6.53** A Western shootout and the axis of action.



Now imagine that the third shot was instead taken from position X, on the opposite side of the line. A is now seen as moving from right to left. Has he lost his nerve and turned around while the second shot, of B, was on the screen? The filmmakers may want us to think that he is still walking toward his adversary, but the change in screen directions could make us think just the opposite. A cut to a shot taken from any point in the colored area would create this change in direction. Such breaks in continuity can be confusing.

It would be even more disorienting to cross the line as the scene's action is starting. In our shootout, suppose we didn't include an establishing shot but simply started with shot X, showing cowboy A walking from right to left. Suppose we follow that with shot 2, presenting B (from the other side of the line) also walking right to left. The two cowboys would seem to be walking in the same direction, as if one were following the other. We would very likely be startled if they suddenly came face to face within the framing of setup 1. This suggests that the Kuleshov effect, which omits an establishing shot, works best when it respects a consistent axis of action.

The 180° system prides itself on delineating space clearly. The viewer should always know *where the characters are* in relation to one another and to the setting. More important, the viewer always knows *where he or she is* with respect to the story action. The space of the scene, clearly and unambiguously unfolded, does not jar or disorient us. Most filmmakers believe that any disorientation will distract us from the unfolding plot action. We can't build up the story in our minds if we don't understand where characters are in space.

> "I saw David Lynch and asked him: 'What's this about crossing the axis?' And he burst out laughing and said, 'That always gets me.' And I asked if you could do it, and he gave me this startled look and said, 'Stephen, you can do anything. You're a director.' Then he paused and said, 'But it doesn't cut together.'"
>
> —Stephen King, novelist, on directing his first film, *Maximum Overdrive*

## Continuity Editing in *The Maltese Falcon*

Thanks to the 180° principle, filmmakers have employed continuity editing to build up a smoothly flowing space that presents narrative action crisply and clearly. Let's consider a concrete example: the opening of John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon.*

**Who's There? Where Are They?** The scene begins in the office of detective Sam Spade. In the first two shots, this space is established in several ways. First, there is the office window (shot 1a, **6.54**). The camera tilts down to reveal Spade (shot 1b, **6.55**) rolling a cigarette. As Spade says, "Yes, sweetheart?" shot 2 **(6.56)** appears.

This is important in several respects. It serves as an **establishing shot,** delineating the overall space of the office: the door, the intervening area, the desk, and Spade's position. Note also that shot 2 establishes a 180° line between Spade and his secretary, Effie. Effie could be the girl in 6.52, and Spade could be the boy. The first phase of this scene will be built around staying on the same side of this 180° line.

After Huston lays out the space for us in the first two shots, he analyzes it. Shots 3 **(6.57)** and 4 **(6.58)** show Effie and Spade talking. Because the 180° line established at the outset is adhered to (each shot presents the two from the same side), we know their location and spatial relationships. In cutting together medium shots of the two, however, Huston relies on two other common tactics within the 180° system.


**6.54** *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 1a

**6.55** *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 1b

**6.56** *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 2

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How do you edit a simple action like entering a room? We survey some options in "Come in and sit down" and "Alignment, allegiance, and murder."

**6.57** *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 3

**6.58** *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 4

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For thoughts on the importance of eyeline directions in a very different art form, see "The eyeline match goes way, way back."

The first tactic is the **shot/reverse-shot** pattern. Once the 180° line has been established, we can show first one end point of the line, then the other. Here we cut back and forth from Effie to Spade.

A reverse shot is not literally the reverse of the first framing. It's simply a shot of the opposite end of the axis of action, usually showing a three-quarters view of the subject. In our bird's-eye view diagram (6.52), shots 2 and 3 form a shot/reverse-shot pattern, as 6.55 and 6.56 do here. We've seen examples of shot/reverse-shot cutting earlier in this chapter (Figures 6.17; 6.19, 6.20; and 6.34, 6.35).

The second tactic Huston uses here is the **eyeline match.** This occurs when shot A presents someone looking at something offscreen and shot B shows us what is being looked at. In neither shot are *both* looker and object present. In the *Maltese Falcon* opening, the cut from the shot of Effie (shot 3, 6.57) to the shot of Spade at his desk (shot 4, 6.58) is an eyeline match. The shots from *The Birds* of Melanie watching the bird attack and fire also create eyeline matches. So do the examples in which editing balances frame compositions (6.17, 6.18 and 6.19, 6.20).

Note that shot/reverse-shot editing need not employ eyeline matches. You could film both ends of the axis in a shot/reverse-shot pattern without showing the characters looking at each other. (In 6.58, Spade isn't looking at Effie.) On the whole, however, most shot/reverse-shot cuts also utilize the eyeline match.

The eyeline match is a simple idea but a powerful one, since the *directional* quality of the eyeline creates a strong spatial continuity. To be looked at, an object must be near the looker. The eyeline match often helped Kuleshov create false spaces through editing. His expressionless actor seems to be looking at whatever we see in the next shot, and the audience assumes that the performer is reacting accordingly.

Within the 180° system, the eyeline match, like constant screen direction, can stabilize space. Note how in shot 3, Effie's glance off right confirms Spade's position even though he is not onscreen. And though Spade does not look up after the cut to shot 4, the camera position remains on the same side of the axis of action (indeed, the position is virtually identical to that in shot 1b). We know that Effie is offscreen left. The breakdown of the scene's space is consistent. Thanks to the shot/reverse-shot pattern and the eyeline match, we understand the characters' locations even when they aren't in the same frame.

As we'd expect, the purpose is to make the shots clarify the cause-effect flow of the narrative. Shot 1 has suggested the locale and emphasized the protagonist by linking him to the window sign. The noise of the door and Spade's "Yes, sweetheart?" motivate the cut to shot 2. This establishing shot firmly anchors shot 1 spatially. It also introduces the source of the offscreen sound—the new character, Effie. The shot changes at precisely the moment when Effie enters, so we're unlikely to notice the cut. Our expectations lead us to want to see what happens next.

Shots 3 and 4 present the conversation between Spade and Effie, and the shot/reverse shot and the eyeline match reassure us as to the characters' locations. We may not even notice the cutting, since the style works to emphasize what Effie says and how Spade reacts. In shot 5, the overall view of the office is presented again, precisely at the moment when a new character enters the scene, and this in turn situates her firmly in the space. By adhering to the 180° system, Huston has emphasized the most important narrative elements—the dialogue and the entrance of new characters. The editing subordinates space to action.

**The Client's Case: Developing the Spatial Layout** The overall coherence of the space we see is reaffirmed in shot 5, which presents the same framing as we saw in shot 2. The office is shown again (shot 5a, **6.59**), when the new character, Brigid O'Shaughnessy, enters. Spade stands to greet her, and the camera reframes his movement by a slight tilt upward (shot 5b, **6.60**). Shot 5 is a **reestablishing shot,** since it reestablishes the overall space that was analyzed into shots 3 and 4. The pattern, then, has been *establishment/breakdown/reestablishment*—one of the most common patterns of spatial editing in the classical continuity style.



After Brigid has walked toward Spade in shot 5, shot 6 presents a reverse angle on the two of them (shot 6a, **6.61**). She sits down alongside his desk (shot 6b, **6.62**). Up to this point, the 180° line has run between Spade and the doorway. Now the axis of action runs from Spade to the client's chair by his desk. Once established, this new line will not be violated.

A new tactic for ensuring spatial continuity has been introduced in this passage—the **match on action,** a very powerful device. This is simply a matter of carrying a single movement across a cut. As Brigid approaches Spade's desk at the end of shot 5 (6.60), her movement continues into the beginning of shot 6 (6.61). Again, the 180° system aids in concealing the match, since it keeps screen direction constant: Brigid moves from left to right in both shots. As you'd expect, the match on action is a tool of narrative continuity. So powerful is our desire to follow the action flowing across the cut that we ignore the cut itself.

Making a match on action requires skill. Given two shots of the same action, the editor must decide at what point to interrupt it; choosing the wrong point can make the cut bumpy. Moreover, if a piece of action isn't filmed by two cameras at once, it's likely that the first shot, in which the movement starts, will be filmed much earlier or later than the second. The risk of continuity errors—changes of position, or lighting, or props—is considerable.

After the match on action, the rest of the *Maltese Falcon* scene uses the same editing tactics we've already seen. When Brigid sits down, a new axis of action is established (shot 6b, 6.62). This enables Huston to break down the space into closer shots (shots 7–13, **6.63–6.69**). All these shots use the shot/reverse-shot tactic: the camera frames, at an oblique angle, one end point of the 180° line, then frames the other. (Note the shoulders in the foreground of shots 7, 8, and 10—6.63, 6.64, and 6.66.) Here again, the editing of space presents the dialogue action simply and unambiguously.

Beginning with shot 12, Huston's cuts also create eyeline matches. Spade looks off left at Brigid (shot 12, 6.68). She looks off left as the door is heard opening (shot 13, 6.69). Archer, just coming in, looks off right at them (shot 14, **6.70**), and they both look off at him (shot 15, **6.71**). The 180° rule permits us always to know who is looking at whom.

Huston could have played the entire conversation in one long take, remaining with shot 6b (6.62). Why has he broken the conversation into seven shots? As with the gas-station attack in *The Birds,* the cutting controls timing and emphasis. We'll look at Brigid or Spade at exactly the moment Huston wants us to. In a long take and a more distant framing, Huston would have to channel our attention in other ways, perhaps through staging or sound.

Furthermore, the shot/reverse-shot pattern stresses the development of Brigid's story and Spade's reaction to it. As she gets into details, the cutting moves from over-the-shoulder shots (6.63, 6.64) to framings that isolate Brigid (6.65 and 6.67) and eventually one that isolates Spade (6.68). These shots come at the point when Brigid, in an artificially shy manner, tells her story, and the medium close-ups arouse our curiosity

**6.59** *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 5a

**6.60** *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 5b

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Hong Kong combat scenes are fine places to study precise continuity editing. See our entries, "Bond vs. Chan: Jackie shows how it's done" and "*Planet Hong Kong*: The dragon dances."

**6.61** *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 6a

**6.62** *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 6b

6.63 *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 7

6.64 *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 8

6.65 *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 9

6.66 *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 10

6.67 *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 11

6.68 *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 12

6.69 *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 13

6.70 *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 14

6.71 *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 15

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Shots showing characters' reactions are crucial to a film. We talk about this in "They're looking for us."

about whether she's telling the truth. The shot of Spade's reaction (6.68) suggests that he's skeptical. The editing cooperates with framing and figure behavior to focus our attention on Brigid's tale, to let us study her demeanor, and to hint at Spade's response.

When Archer enters, the breakdown into close views stops for a moment, and Huston reestablishes the locale. Archer is integrated into the action by a rightward pan shot (shots 16a and 16b, **6.72** and **6.73**). His path is consistent with the scene's first axis of action, that running between Spade and the doorway. Moreover, the framing on him is similar to that used for Brigid's entrance earlier. (Compare shot 16b with 6a, figures 6.73 and 6.61.) Such repetitions allow the viewer to concentrate on the new information, not the manner in which it is presented.

Now firmly established as part of the scene, Archer hitches himself up onto Spade's desk. His position puts him at Spade's end of the axis of action (shot 17, **6.74**). During the rest of the scene, Huston's editing analyzes this new set of relationships without ever breaking the 180° line.

The viewer isn't supposed to notice all the things that we've analyzed. Throughout, the shots present space to emphasize the cause–effect flow—the characters' movements, words, and facial reactions. The editing has created spatial continuity in order to present continuity of story action.



6.72 *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 16a

6.73 *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 16b

6.74 *The Maltese Falcon:* shot 17

## Continuity Editing: Some Fine Points

The continuity system, largely unchanged, remains in force today. Most narrative films still draw on 180° principles **(6.75, 6.76).** But the system can be refined in various ways.

**Characters in a Circle, Shifting the Axis** If a director arranges several characters in a circular pattern—say, sitting around a dinner table—then the axis of action will probably run between the characters of greatest importance at the moment. In **6.77** and **6.78,** from Howard Hawks's *Bringing Up Baby,* the important dialogue is occurring between the two men, so we can cut to positions around Aunt Elizabeth (in the foreground) to get consistent shot/reverse shots. When David Huxley leaves the table, however, the new arrangement of characters creates a new axis of action running between the two women **(6.79, 6.80).**

Both the *Maltese Falcon* and the *Bringing Up Baby* examples show that in the course of a scene the 180° line may shift as the characters move around the setting. In some cases, the filmmaker may create a new axis of action that allows the camera to take up a position that would have crossed the line in an earlier phase of the scene.

> "The way [Howard] Hawks constructs a continuity of space is remarkable, and generally holds you 'inside' it. There is no possible way of escape, unless the film decides to provide you with one. My theory is that his films are captivating because they build a sense of continuity which is so strong that it allows the complete participation of the audience."
> —Slobodan Sijan, director

**Deleting the Establishing Shot** The power of the axis of action and the eyelines it can create is so great that the filmmaker may be able to eliminate an establishing shot, thus relying on the Kuleshov effect. In Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It,* Nola Darling holds a Thanksgiving dinner for her three male friends. Lee never presents a shot showing all four in the same frame. Instead, he uses medium long shots including all the men (for example, **6.81**), over-the-shoulder shot/reverse

6.75

6.76

**6.75–6.76 Continuity editing in today's cinema.** A train conversation in Duncan Jones' *Source Code* obeys the 180° system, with eyeline matches and foreground shoulders confirming our position on one side of the axis. The arrangement is similar to the one we show in 6.52, and to the staging and cutting in the *Maltese Falcon* scene.

6.77

6.78

**6.77–6.80 Continuity around the dinner table.** In *Bringing Up Baby,* shot/reverse-shot cutting puts the distracted David Huxley on the right (6.77) and Major Applegate on the left (6.78). After David leaves the table, a new axis is established along the length of the table. This permits a shot/reverse-shot exchange favoring first Aunt Elizabeth (6.79) and then Susan (6.80).

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**6.81–6.86 Around the table with the Kuleshov effect: *She's Gotta Have It.*** The first shot, more or less from Nola's point of view, lays out the men's position at the table (6.81). Sometimes a momentary axis of action is established between the men (6.82). Nola is never shown in the same frame with her suitors, but her eyelines always tells us whom she's looking at (6.83). When the men look at her, each one's eyeline is consistent with their initial position at the table (6.84–6.85). In the last frame shown (6.86), we get an optical POV from Nola's position, as Greer addresses her directly.

shots among them (for example, **6.82**), and eyeline-matched medium close-ups of them. Nola is given her own medium close-ups **(6.83).**

Through eyelines and body orientations, Lee's editing keeps the spatial relations completely consistent. For example, each man looks in a different direction when addressing Nola **(6.84, 6.85, 6.86).** This cutting pattern enhances the



dramatic action by making all the men equal competitors for her. They are clustered at one end of the table, and none is shown in the same frame with her. By organizing the scene around her orientation to the action Lee keeps Nola the pivotal character. The men are on display, and Nola is coolly judging each one's behavior.

**Cheating with Cuts** Another felicity in the 180° system is the **cheat cut.** Sometimes a director may not have perfect continuity from shot to shot because each shot was composed for specific reasons. Must the two shots match perfectly? Again, narrative motivation decides the matter. If we're paying attention to the unfolding action and the 180° relations are kept reasonably constant, the director has some freedom to "cheat" mise-en-scene from shot to shot—that is, to slightly mismatch the positions of characters or objects.

Consider two shots from William Wyler's *Jezebel.* Neither Julie nor Pres moves during the shots, but Wyler has blatantly cheated the position of Julie **(6.87, 6.88).** Yet most viewers would not notice the discrepancy since it's the dialogue that is paramount in the scene. The shots are consistent with the axis of action, and the change from a straight-on angle to a slightly high angle helps hide the cheat. There is, in fact, a cheat in the *Maltese Falcon* scene, too, between shots 6b and 7. In 6b (6.62), as Spade leans forward, the back of his chair is not near him. Yet in shot 7 (6.63), it has been cheated to be just behind his left arm. Here again, the narrative flow overrides the cheat cut.

**Crossing the Axis** Most continuity-based filmmakers prefer not to cross the axis of action. They would rather move the actors around the setting and create a new axis, as we saw in *The Maltese Falcon.* Still, can you ever legitimately cut to the other side of an established axis of action?

Yes, sometimes. A scene occurring in a doorway, on a staircase, or in other symmetrical settings may occasionally break the line. More often, filmmakers get across the axis by taking one shot *on the line itself* and using it as a transition. This strategy is rare in dialogue sequences, but it's common in chase scenes. By filming on the axis, the filmmaker presents the action as moving directly toward the camera (a *head-on* shot) or away from it (a *tail-on* shot). The climactic chase of *The Road Warrior* offers several examples. As marauding road gangs try to board a fleeing gasoline truck, George Miller uses many head-on and tail-on shots of the vehicles **(6.89–6.93).**

Filmmakers occasionally violate screen direction without confusing the viewer. They can do this most easily when a scene's physical layout is very well defined. During a chase in John Ford's *Stagecoach,* no confusion arises when the Ringo Kid leaps from the coach to the horses **(6.94, 6.95).** We aren't likely to think that the coach had swiveled to face in the opposite direction, as in the possible misinterpretation of the two cowboys' shootout (6.53).

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Another refinement: What happens if a reverse shot is withheld? We show some examples and discuss their functions in "Angles and perceptions."

6.87

6.88

**6.87–6.88 The cheat cut.** In this shot from *Jezebel,* the top of Julie's head is even with Pres's chin (6.87), but in the second shot (6.88) she seems to have grown.

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**6.89–6.93 Crossing the axis of action.** Near the climax of the chase in *The Road Warrior*, Max is driving the tanker left to right (6.89). In later shots he is still driving toward the right. An attacking thug perched on the front of the truck turns and looks off right in horror (6.90). The chieftain's vehicle, moving right to left, is coming toward them on a collision course (6.91). The crash is shown in several quick shots facing head-on to the vehicles (6.92). These head-on shots provide a transition to cross the axis, so that a long shot can now show Max's truck plowing through the wreckage from right to left (6.93)—opposite to the direction we've seen in earlier shots.

6.94

6.95

**6.94–6.95 Breaking the axis successfully.** In *Stagecoach*, in a long shot where all movement is toward the right, the hero begins leaping from the driver's seat down onto the horse team (6.94). In the next shot both he and the coach are moving leftward (6.95).

**On the Axis: The POV Shot** There's one more fine point with respect to spatial continuity, and it's especially relevant to a film's narration. We have already seen that a camera framing can strongly indicate a character's optical point of view, making the narration subjective. We saw this in our earlier example from *Fury* (p. 193). That example presents a cut from the person looking (5.119) to what he sees (5.120). We have also seen an instance of POV cutting in the *Birds* sequence (pp. 220–221).



Now we're in a position to see how optical POV is consistent with continuity editing, creating the type of eyeline-match editing known as *point-of-view cutting*.

## CREATIVE DECISIONS

### *Are You Looking at Me?* Point-of-View Cutting in Rear Window

The eyeline match shows a person looking in one shot, followed by a shot showing what the person sees. Most eyeline matches, however, don't show the object of the look from the person's vantage point. When Effie looks at Sam Spade (6.57–6.58) or when Brigid looks off at Archer (6.69–6.70), the followup shot doesn't represent the character's point of view. By contrast, POV cutting gives us an eyeline match that presents something as seen by the person looking. The shot is more or less optically subjective. This option doesn't violate the 180° system because the subjective shot is taken from a position presumed to be right *on* the axis of action.

Again Alfred Hitchcock provides clear examples. *Rear Window* is built on a Peeping Tom situation. The photojournalist Jeff is laid up with a broken leg, so he watches life across the courtyard behind his apartment. He starts to wonder if his neighbor has murdered his wife, but he can't go over to investigate. He's confined to whatever clues he can spot from his window.

Throughout the film Hitchcock uses a standard eyeline-match pattern, cutting from a shot of Jeff looking **(6.96)** to a shot of what he sees **(6.97).** Since there is no establishing shot that shows both Jeff and the opposite apartment, the Kuleshov effect operates here: our mind connects the two parts of space, as in our *Birds* POV sequences. More specifically, the second shot represents Jeff's optical viewpoint, and this is filmed from a position on his end of the axis of action **(6.98).** The camera has not crossed the line. Through POV editing, the narration restricts us to what Jeff sees and hears.

Hitchcock is so interested in exploiting subjective cutting that he varies the POV shots as *Rear Window* goes on. Eager to solve the mystery, Jeff begins to use binoculars and a photographic telephoto lens to magnify his view. By using shots

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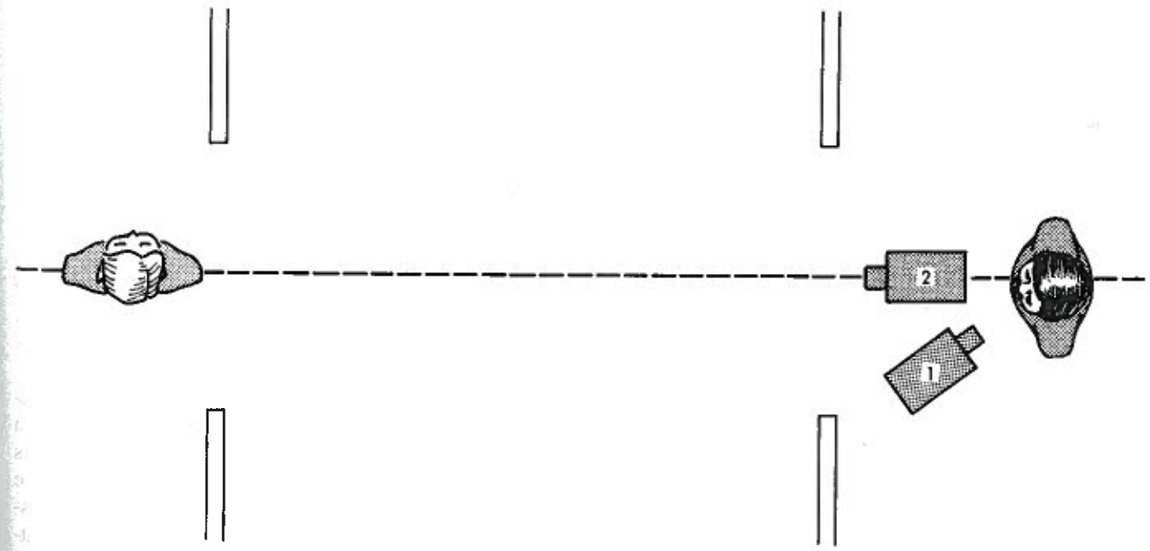
**6.96–6.97 POV cutting in *Rear Window*.** Jeff looks out his window (6.96). The next shot shows what he sees from his optical POV (6.97).




**6.98 POV and the axis of action.** An overhead diagram of POV cutting in *Rear Window*. You can see that the second camera setup doesn't cross the axis of action.

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For more examples of point-of-view editing and an analysis of a scene, see "Three nights of a dreamer."

taken with lenses of different focal lengths, Hitchcock shows how each new optical tool enlarges what Jeff can see **(6.99–6.102).** As the suspense grows, we get to see more clues to a possible murder.

6.99

6.100

6.101

6.102

**6.99–6.102 Magnifying POV.** When Jeff looks through his binoculars (6.99), we see a telephoto POV shot of his neighbor (6.100). When he employs a powerful photographic lens (6.101), the POV shot enlarges his neighbor's activities even more (6.102).

Hitchcock's gradual enlargement of POV framings in *Rear Window* shows that a filmmaker can tweak standardized editing patterns in fresh ways. But in other respects the *Rear Window* scenes, like the gas-pump explosion in *The Birds,* are traditional. For instance, both films present a POV pattern consisting of three shots. We see a shot of the person looking, a shot of what's looked at (seen from a subjective angle), and a return to a shot of the person looking. This ABA scheme anchors the subjective shot in an objective framework and tells us clearly that someone is seeing something.

But what if you delete the first shot in the trio, the shot of someone looking? You can create a small surprise by concealing the fact that someone is being watched. This was the choice made by Debra Granik in one scene in *Winter's Bone* **(6.103–6.106).** Note that even though we lack the usual first shot of Ree looking, the POV shot remains on the 180-degree line, and the following cut to her remains consistent with that.

For *Halloween,* John Carpenter selected a very unusual pattern of POV cutting, one that has strong implications for narration in this slasher horror film **(6.107–6.110).** He created an uncertainty: Does Laurie actually see Michael Myers in the yard? Or is he a figment of her imagination? Or does the character have the supernatural power to disappear? The uncertainty plays into the film's larger mystery about whether the indestructible Michael is indeed "the boogyman." POV cutting is a fairly standardized technique, but it still offers many creative choices to the director inclined to experiment.



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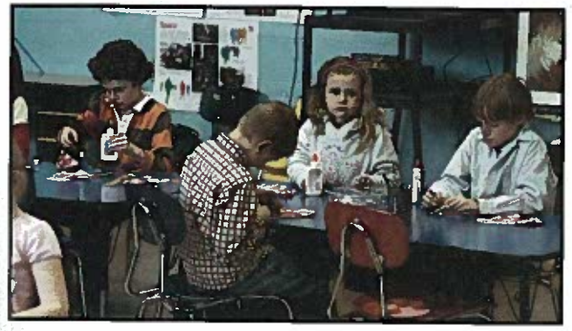
6.104



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6.106

**6.103–6.106 Retroactive POV.** One scene in *Winter's Bone* ends with a telephoto shot of Ree walking her sister and brother to school (6.103). Cut to the sister in class, apparently seen from an objective standpoint (6.104). But soon she lifts her eyes to stare straight at the camera (6.105). Another cut reveals that we've been seeing the girl through Ree's eyes (6.106).

6.107

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6.109

6.110

**6.107–6.110 POV cutting for uncertainty.** Laurie looks out her bedroom window (6.107). Cut to a shot, approximating her viewpoint, of Michael Myers in his mask (6.108). This seems a conventional POV shot, and the return to Laurie (6.109) suggests the standard ABA cutting pattern. But the next shot of the laundry line shows that Michael is now gone (6.110). It's very unusual to conceal such a drastic change in the POV area during a shot of the person looking. Did Laurie imagine that Michael was there? Or does he have the power to vanish? But if he can disappear, why doesn't she seem surprised?

## Crosscutting

The continuity system shows that editing can endow the film's narration with a great range of knowledge. A cut can take us to any point on the correct side of the axis of action. Editing can even create omniscience, that godlike knowledge of things happening to people in many places. The outstanding technical device here is *crosscutting,* first extensively explored by D. W. Griffith in his last-minute rescue scenes. In *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch,* a cavalry troop is riding to rescue some settlers trapped in a cabin and battling the Indians outside **(6.111–6.114).** After 11 additional shots of the cavalry, various parts of the cabin interior, and the Indians outdoors, a 12th shot shows the cavalry riding in from the distance behind the cabin.

Crosscutting gives us a comparatively unrestricted knowledge of story information. It does this by alternating shots of events in one location with shots of events in other places. Crosscutting risks introducing some spatial discontinuity, but it binds the action together by creating a sense of cause and effect and simultaneous time. By setting one action against another in a short time span, it can build tension. In *Jerry Maguire,* for example, crosscutting interweaves the action of sports agent Jerry and his rival racing to phone the same clients **(6.115–6.118).**

Fritz Lang's *M* goes further, crosscutting three lines of action across the whole film. The police seek the child murderer, gangsters prowl the streets looking for him, and we occasionally see the murderer himself. Crosscutting ties together the different lines of action, bringing out a temporal simultaneity and the twists and turns of the pursuit. The crosscutting also gives us a range of knowledge greater than that of any one character. We know that the gangsters are after the murderer, but he and the police don't. Crosscutting also builds up suspense, as we form expectations that are only gradually fulfilled. It may create parallels as well, and Lang exploits this possibility by suggesting analogies between the police and the crooks.

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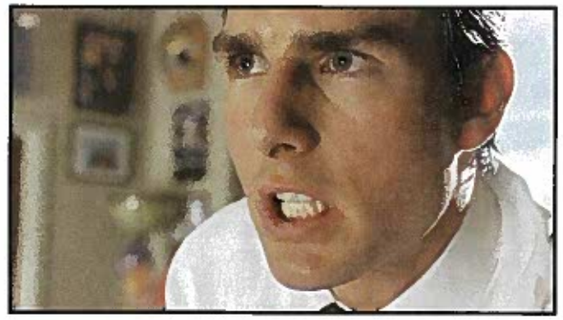
6.114

**6.111–6.114 Crosscutting for a last-minute rescue.** In *The Battle of Elderbush Gulch,* Griffith cuts from a shot of the cavalry (6.111) to a view inside the besieged cabin (6.112). He cuts back to the cavalry (6.113) and then back to the cabin (6.114). The technique gives us an unrestricted range of knowledge and summons up suspense: Will the rescuers arrive in time?





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**6.115–6.118 Crosscutting for tension.** Jerry is in a race to secure his clients' loyalty before his arrogant rival gets to them. A shot of Jerry seething (6.115) is followed by a cut to the rival and his assistant (6.116). As Jerry tries to reach his clients on the phone (6.117) we cut to his rival doing the same (6.118).

By maintaining spatial continuity, filmmakers draw the viewer into the active process of understanding a scene. We assume that setting, character movement, and character position will be consistent and coherent. We make inferences on the basis of cues, so that when Brigid and Spade look off left, we infer that someone is entering the room, and we expect to see a shot of that person. We also form expectations about what shot will follow the one we're seeing.

We have learned the continuity style so well that we aren't usually aware of how it shapes our responses. Filmmakers know how familiar we are with the spatial continuity system, and they can alter it, as long as the variations don't violate its basic principles. (See "A Closer Look.")

## Temporal Continuity: Order, Frequency, and Duration

As we've seen in Chapter 3, in narrative form, the plot's presentation of the story action usually involves manipulating time. Continuity editing offers the filmmaker many choices about presenting story time. Those options involve the dimensions we've already charted: order, frequency, and duration.

**Order and Frequency** Continuity editing typically presents the story events in a 1-2-3 order. Spade rolls a cigarette in one shot, Effie enters in another shot, and so on. The most common violation of 1-2-3 order is a flashback, signaled by a cut or dissolve. As for frequency, classical continuity editing also often presents only *once* what happens *once* in the story. Within this tradition, it would be a gross mistake for Huston to repeat the shot of, say, Brigid sitting down (6.60). So chronological

*(continued on page 253)*

## A CLOSER LOOK

### Intensified Continuity: *Unstoppable, L.A. Confidential,* and Contemporary Editing

By the 1930s, most of the world's commercial filmmakers had embraced the continuity editing system. But it underwent changes over the years. Today's editing practices abide by the principles of continuity but amplify them in certain ways. We can call this newer style *intensified continuity.*

A straightforward example comes from *Unstoppable* **(6.119–6.122).** This scene obeys the 180° system, but some of director Tony Scott's choices wouldn't have been made by Huston in *The Maltese Falcon* or Hitchcock in *Rear Window.* For one thing, the cutting is very fast. The conversation, which takes 28 seconds, is shown in 15 shots, an average of less than 2 seconds per shot. At one point, a single line of dialogue is broken into 3 shots.

Between 1930 and 1960, a film typically consisted of 300–800 shots. Things changed from the sixties onward, and today a 2-hour film might contain 3,000 shots or more. (*Unstoppable* has over 3,200.) The average shot in *The Bourne Ultimatum* lasts about 2 seconds. Hitchcock could cut action scenes quickly, as we saw in *The Birds'* gull attack, but his dialogue scenes were more slowly paced. By contrast, intensified continuity cuts conversations quickly as well. "You always hear things like, 'We need to put more energy into this scene,'" says Tim Streeto, editor of *Greenberg.* "That can translate into quick editing, where you go back and forth between two characters like a ping-pong match."

Partly because filmmakers have chosen faster editing, they tend to build their scenes out of fairly close views of individual characters, rather than fuller, longer-held shots. As we've seen, the viewer can absorb close views more quickly than long shots. As filmmakers have concentrated more on faces, they have opted for fewer establishing shots, and those may come late in the scene's action rather than near the start.

Moreover, many of the close shots are taken with telephoto lenses. Nearly all the shots in the *Unstoppable* scene

> **"Now nobody trusts the actor's performance. If an actor has a scene where they are sitting in the distance, everybody says, 'What are you shooting? It has to be close-up!' This is ridiculous. You have the position of the hand, the whole body—this is the feeling of a movie. I hate movies where everybody has big close-ups all the time. . . . This is television. I have talking heads on my television set in my home all the time."**
>
> **—Miroslav Ondříček, cinematographer**

6.119

6.120

6.121

6.122

**6.119–6.122 The persistence of classical continuity editing.** In *Unstoppable,* two railyard workers come to Connie, their supervisor, and report that an unmanned train is running free. The scene is treated through conventional continuity, with an establishing shot (6.119), reverse angles (6.120), eyeline matches (6.121), and over-the-shoulder framings (6.122). The axis of action is respected throughout, as is the balancing between decentered reverse shot (see 6.19–6.20).



are captured by long focal-length lenses, which can create fairly tight framings (6.120, 6.121). Because modern screen formats are wide, we may find two or more facial close-ups filling the screen. We also find more frame mobility. The *Unstoppable* scene includes many reframings, a tracking shot, and no fewer than five quick zooms.

These creative decisions create a faster, more concentrated version of classic continuity. We can analyze this style in a bit more detail by examining a scene from *L. A. Confidential.* After arresting three black suspects, Lieutenant Ed Exley prepares to bully a confession from them. The scene takes less than a minute but employs nine shots, two with significant camera movement. Director Curtis Hanson shifts the emphasis among several key characters by coordinating his editing with anamorphic widescreen compositions, staging in depth, tight framings, rack-focus, and camera movement **(6.123–6.134).** Interestingly, the actors make little expressive use of their hands or bodies; the performances are almost completely facial.

The persistence of the continuity system may seem surprising, since modern films may feel rougher-textured than classic studio products. Mismatches on actions or eyelines are a bit more common now, but they're often used as an accent within a series of correctly matched cuts. A chase or a fight can be spiced up by a shift in screen direction or a jerkily matched movement. As Chris Lebenzon, an editor on *Unstoppable,* puts it: "In the action world, sometimes what used to be called a 'bad cut' is actually kind of a good one because it jars you in a way that's more appropriate to the scene."

Why did this intensified form of continuity become so common? It was encouraged by many factors, including computer-based editing, but television was a major influence. Since the 1950s, many television directors favored close-ups, fast cutting, and considerable camera movement. On small screens, closer views look better than long shots, which tend to lose detail, while rapid cutting and camera movement constantly refresh the image and might keep the viewer from switching channels. In the 1960s and 1970s, filmmakers realized that the movies they were making for theaters would find their ultimate audience on the home screen. Accordingly, many directors "shot for the box." Later generations of directors, such as Ridley Scott and David Fincher, began their careers in commercials and music videos, so they were already adept in the quick pace of modern television. Today intensified continuity is well adapted to being watched on laptop computers, tablets, and smartphones.

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**After you've read about *L.A. Confidential,* you might visit our blog entries on the *Bourne* trilogy: "Unsteadicam chronicles," "[insert your favorite Bourne pun here]," and "I broke everything new again." The entry titled "Intensified continuity revisited" compares a scene in *The Shop Around the Corner* with the same one in the remake, *You've Got Mail.* For thoughts on multiple-camera shooting and continuity, see "Cutting remarks: On *The Good German,* classical style, and the Police Tactical Unit."**

**6.123** Shot 1: The scene begins by presenting only a portion of the space, a suspect in the interrogation room. A reflection shows Exley waiting and his colleagues milling about outside the room. This image singles out the core dramatic action to come—Exley's brutal confrontation with the suspects.

*Continued*

**6.124** Shot 2: A match on Exley's action of turning gives us a fuller view of the policemen and establishes two other main characters: Jack Vincennes on the far left and Bud White in the background, frontally placed and watching. This is only a partial establishing shot; a later camera movement will specify the layout of the interrogation rooms.

**6.125** Shot 3: Hanson underscores White's presence by cutting to a telephoto shot of him saying that the suspects killed his partner.

**6.126** Shot 4: In an echo of the opening framing, Exley now stands at the second interrogation room, seen in another reflection. The shot also reiterates Vincennes's presence. He'll provide an important reaction later.

**6.127** The camera tracks with Exley moving right to study the suspect in the third room. White's reflection can be seen in frame center. The camera movement has linked the three main detectives on the case while also establishing the three rooms as being side by side. At the end of the camera movement, Exley turns, and . . .



**6.128** Shot 5: . . . a cut to two-shot establishes his superior, Smith, on the scene. As Smith explains that the suspects' shotguns put them at the murder site, the camera racks focus to him, putting Exley out of focus.

**6.129** Shot 6: A cutaway to White listening—again, a tight facial shot taken with a telephoto lens—reminds us of his presence. He is only an observer in this phase of the scene, but as the questioning heats up, he will burst in to attack a suspect.

**6.130** Shot 7: Returning to the two-shot shows Smith demanding that Exley make the men confess.

**6.131** Shot 8: A reverse angle on Exley, the first shot in the scene devoted to his face alone, underscores his determination: "Oh, I'll break them, sir."

Continued

**6.132** Shot 9a. A cut back to the two-shot supplies Smith's satisfied reaction.

**6.133** Shot 9 continues: Exley turns away. The lens shifts focus to catch his grim face in the foreground, preparing us for the brutality he will display.

**6.134** Shot 9 continues as Exley walks out of frame, revealing with a rack-focus Vincennes's skeptical expression. The telephoto lens, supported by the rack-focus, has supplied facial views of Smith, then Exley, and then Vincennes all in a single shot.





sequence and one-for-one frequency are the standard methods of handling order and frequency within the continuity style of editing. There are occasional exceptions, as we saw in our examples from *Hiroshima mon amour, The Godfather,* and *Police Story* (pp. 230–232).

**Duration: Continuous or Elided** Duration offers more unusual editing possibilities. In the classical continuity system, story duration is seldom expanded by editing. Admittedly, overlapping cutting (p. 231) sometimes stretches out an action. But usually duration is presented continuously (plot time and screen time equaling story time) or is elided (story time being greater than plot time and screen time). Dialogue scenes are the most common examples; they're typically played out in their story duration.

Let's first consider *temporal continuity,* the most common possibility. Here a scene occupying, say, five minutes in the story also occupies five minutes when projected on the screen. We can pick out three ways to achieve temporal continuity, all of them present in the first scene of *The Maltese Falcon.*

First, the narrative progression of the scene has no gaps. Every movement by the characters and every line of dialogue are presented. Second, there's the sound track. Sound issuing from the story space (what is called *diegetic* sound) is a standard indicator of temporal continuity, especially when, as in this scene, the sound bleeds over each cut. Third, there's the match on action between shots 5 and 6. So powerful is the match on action that it creates both spatial *and* temporal continuity. The reason is obvious: if an action carries across the cut, the space and time are assumed to be continuous from shot to shot. Continuous story action, diegetic sound overlapping the cuts, and matching on action are three primary indicators that the duration of the scene is continuous.

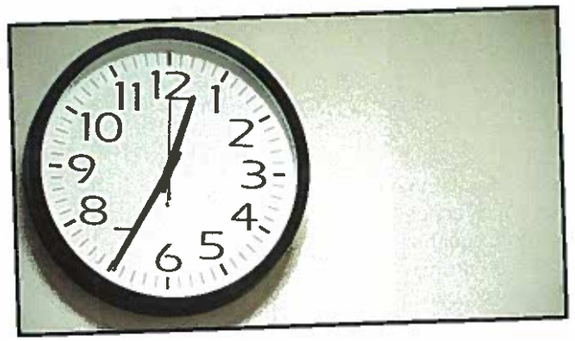
The filmmaker may not want complete continuity of duration. Just as a novelist sometimes condenses a scene to its high points, a filmmaker may want to skip over some less important moments. That will demand editing that creates temporal ellipsis. An ellipsis is something that has been omitted, and thanks to cutting a filmmaker may skip over seconds, minutes, hours, days, years, or centuries. Let's say you want to show a character getting ready for work in the morning. If you're making a classically constructed film, you might reduce this process to a few shots of the character going into the shower, putting on shoes, and frying an egg. As we saw on p. 235, the classical approach to editing may use empty frames, cutaways, or optical devices like dissolves to cover short temporal ellipses.

Elliding time offers a good example of how cinematic conventions have changed. In films made before the 1960s, dissolves, fades, or wipes are typically used to indicate an ellipsis between shots, usually the end of one scene and the beginning of the next. The Hollywood rule was that a dissolve indicates a brief time lapse and a fade indicates a much longer one.

Contemporary filmmakers usually employ a cut for such transitions. For example, in *2001,* Stanley Kubrick cuts directly from a bone spinning in the air to a space station orbiting the earth, one of the boldest graphic matches in narrative cinema. The cut eliminates millions of years of story time. Less drastically, most contemporary films indicate the passage of time through direct cuts. Changes in lighting, locale, or character position cue us that story time has passed **(6.135–6.137).**

The dissolve and fade have made a comeback in the age of digital video. For one thing, editing programs provide them, along with many varieties of wipes, so these optical effects are easy to incorporate. In addition, many online documentaries employ dissolves in the older manner, to indicate a passage of time. When the maker of a YouTube video wants to skip over the boring stretches of a cat fighting with a paper bag, a gentle dissolve may do the trick.

**Montage Sequences** One form of ellipsis has persisted from the 1920s to the present. Sometimes the filmmaker wants to show a large-scale process or a lengthy



6.135

6.136

6.137

**6.135–6.137 Elliptical cuts in *Wendy and Lucy*.** Arrested for shoplifting, Wendy is worried about having left her dog Lucy at the supermarket. As she's fingerprinted, Wendy glances up, and an eyeline match shows the clock (6.135). A cut to the next shot shows Wendy in a cell, indicating that some minutes have elapsed (6.136). The clock shot functioned as a cutaway to cover a time gap. In the cell, another cut shows Wendy in a different position (6.137). This suggests that still more time has passed. An older film would have implied the passage of time through dissolves, but here the abrupt changes of locale and character position suggest the same thing. A later shot of the clock will show that Wendy has been held for at least two hours.

period—a city waking up in the morning, a war, a child growing up. Here the filmmaker can pick another device from the menu: the **montage sequence.** (This should not be confused with the concept of *montage* in Sergei Eisenstein's film theory.) Brief portions of a process, informative titles (for example, "1865" or "San Francisco"), stereotyped images (such as the Eiffel Tower), newsreel footage, newspaper headlines, and the like can be joined by dissolves and music to create a quick, regular rhythm and to compress a lengthy series of actions into a few moments.

American studio films of the 1930s established some montage clichés—calendar pages fluttering away, newspaper presses pounding out an Extra—but in the hands of deft editors, such sequences became small virtuoso pieces. The driving pace of gangster films like *Scarface* and *The Roaring Twenties* owes a lot to dynamic montage sequences. Slavko Vorkapich, an experimental filmmaker, created somewhat abstract, almost delirious summaries of wide-ranging actions such as stock market crashes, political campaigns, and an opera singer's career **(6.138).**

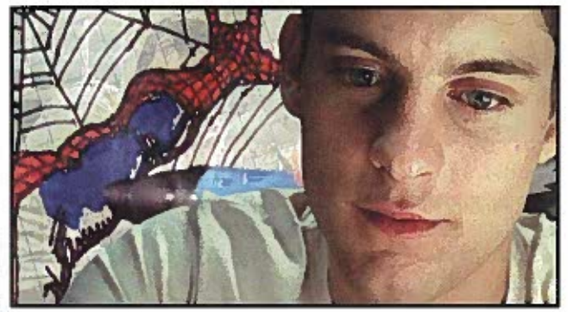
Montage sequences have been a mainstay of narrative filmmaking ever since. *Jaws* employs montage to summarize the start of tourist season through brief shots of vacationers arriving at the beach. A montage sequence in *Spider-Man* shows Peter Parker sketching his superhero costume, inspired by visions of the girl he loves **(6.139, 6.140).** All these instances remind us that because montage sequences usually lack dialogue, they tend to come wrapped in music. In *Tootsie,* a song accompanies a series of magazine covers showing the hero's rise to success as a TV star.

As with space, the filmmaker who employs the continuity style uses cinematic time primarily to advance the narrative. Like graphics, rhythm, and space, time is organized to unfold cause and effect and arouse curiosity, suspense, and surprise. In turn, we viewers who know the conventions pick up the cues and engage with the ways in which time is presented. We expect the editing to present story events in chronological order, with perhaps occasional rearrangement through flashbacks.



6.138

**6.138–6.140 Montage sequences old and new.** *Maytime* uses superimpositions (here, the singer, sheet music, and a curtain rising) and rapid editing to summarize an opera singer's triumphs (6.138). *Citizen Kane* ironically refers to this passage in the montage sequences showing Susan Alexander's failures. For a montage sequence in *Spider-Man,* CGI technique creates a split image, showing both Peter's expression and a close-up of the costume he's designing (6.139). The *Spider-Man* sequence also uses a more traditional linking device, a dissolve that briefly superimposes two shots (6.140).



6.139

6.140

We expect that editing will usually respect the frequency of story events: If something happens once, we see it only once. And we assume that the actions that don't matter to story causality will be dropped or trimmed by judicious ellipses. All these expectations allow the viewer to follow the story with minimal effort.

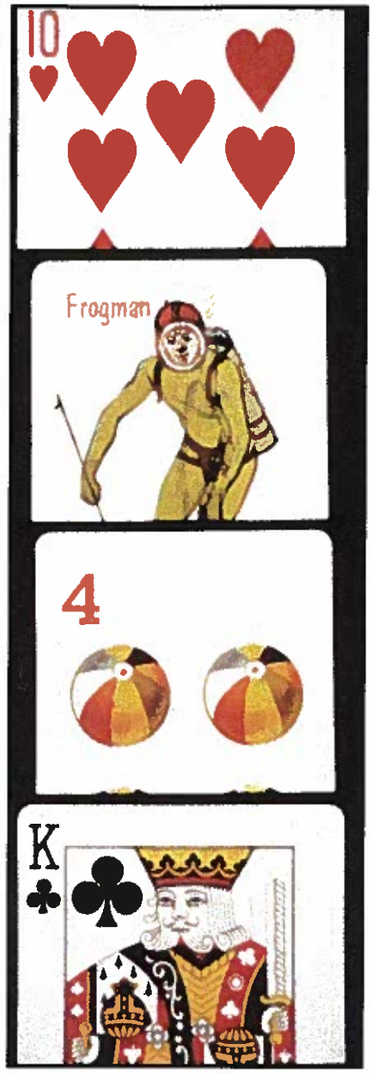
But there are many alternatives to the continuity style of editing, and these are worth a look.

## Alternatives to Continuity Editing

Powerful and widespread as it is, the continuity tradition remains only one approach to editing. As you'd expect, some filmmakers have explored other possibilities.

### Graphic and Rhythmic Possibilities

Films using abstract or associational form have emphasized the graphic and rhythmic dimensions of editing. Instead of joining shot 1 to shot 2 to present a story, you could join them on the basis of purely graphic or rhythmic qualities, independent of the time and space they represent. In films such as *Anticipation of the Night, Scenes from Under Childhood,* and *Western History,* experimentalist Stan Brakhage uses purely graphic means of joining shot to shot. Continuities and contrasts of light, texture, and shape motivate the editing. Similarly, parts of Bruce Conner's *Cosmic Ray, A Movie,* and *Report* cut together newsreel footage, old film clips, film leader, and black frames on the basis of graphic patterns of movement, direction, and speed.




**6.141 Single-frame filming.** This strip of film shows the one-frame shots in Breer's *Fist Fight*. Onscreen, they create a pulsating flicker of barely discernible images.

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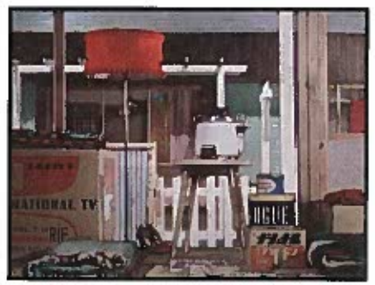
6.144



6.145

**6.142–6.145 Graphic matching in narrative cinema.** In *An Autumn Afternoon*, Ozu cuts from one man drinking sake (6.142) to another in a very similar costume doing the same thing (6.143). In *Ohayo*, Ozu creates a playful graphic match by cutting from a clothes line with a bright red sweater in the upper left (6.144) to an interior with a red lampshade in the same position (6.145).

Many nonnarrative films have emphasized editing rhythm over the images themselves. *Single-frame films* (in which each shot is only one frame long) are the most extreme examples of this concentration on rhythm. Two famous examples are Peter Kubelka's *Schwechater* and Robert Breer's *Fist Fight* **(6.141).** Other avant-garde experiments coordinate editing rhythm with abstract graphics, as we'll see with *Ballet mécanique* in Chapter 10.

The graphic and rhythmic possibilities of editing haven't been neglected in narrative film, either. In Busby Berkeley's elaborate dance numbers in *42nd Street, Gold Diggers of 1933, Footlight Parade, Gold Diggers of 1935,* and *Dames,* the story periodically grinds to a halt, and the film presents intricate choreography that highlights geometrical configurations of dancers and background (4.146, from *42nd Street*). More complex is the graphic editing of Yasujiro Ozu. Ozu's cutting is often dictated by a much more precise graphic continuity than we find in the classical continuity style. He playfully created close graphic matches on movement, position, and color **(6.142–6.145).**

Some silent filmmakers experimented with vigorous rhythmic cutting. In such films as Abel Gance's *La Roue,* Jean Epstein's *Coeur fidèle* and *La Glace à trois faces,* and Alexandre Volkoff's *Kean,* accelerated editing renders the tempo of an onrushing train, a whirling carousel, a racing automobile, and a drunken dance. We can find strong passages of rhythmic editing in sound cinema, too, from 1930s films such as Rouben Mamoulian's *Love Me Tonight* and René Clair's *Le Million* to later films—for example, *Assault on Precinct 13* and *The Terminator.* Pulsating rhythmic editing is prominent in films influenced by music videos, such as *Moulin Rouge.*

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Early Japanese swordplay movies display some daring rhythmic editing, as we demonstrate in "Bando on the run."




6.146

6.147

6.148

**6.146–6.148 Mixing continuity cues and discontinuity.** At one point in *Mon Oncle d'Amérique,* René's pesky office mate calls to him (6.146). Resnais cuts to a shot of Jean Gabin (René's favorite star) in an older film, turning in reverse shot (6.147), as if he were replying to the man. Only then does Resnais supply a shot of René turning to meet his questioner (6.148). The film doesn't definitely present the Gabin shot as a fantasy image. We can't tell whether René imagines himself as his favorite star, or whether the film's narration draws the comparison independent of René's state of mind.

## Spatial and Temporal Discontinuity

How might you tell a story without adhering to the continuity rules? One option is to use spatial continuity in ambiguous ways. In *Mon Oncle d'Amérique,* Alain Resnais interrupts the stories of his three main characters with shots of each character's favorite movie star, taken from French films of the 1940s. In some scenes, the cutting relies on continuity cues but uses them to create a discontinuity that arouses some uncertainty in the viewer **(6.146–6.148).**

More drastically, a filmmaker may violate or ignore the 180° system. The editing choices of filmmakers Jacques Tati and Yasujiro Ozu are based on what we might call 360° space. Instead of an axis of action that dictates that the camera be placed within an imaginary semicircle, these filmmakers work as if the action were not a line but a point at the center of a circle and as if the camera could be placed at any point on the circumference. In *Mr. Hulot's Holiday, Play Time,* and *Traffic,* Tati systematically films from almost every side; edited together, the shots present multiple spatial perspectives on a single event. Similarly, Ozu's scenes construct a 360° space that produces what the continuity style would consider grave editing errors. Ozu's films often do not yield consistent relative positions, eyeline matches, and screen directions **(6.149, 6.150).**

6.149

6.150

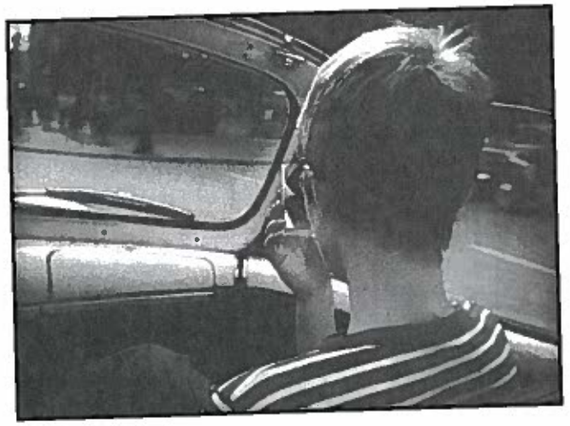
**6.149–6.150 Ozu's 360° editing system.** One of the gravest sins in the classical continuity style is to match on action while breaking the line, yet Ozu does this comfortably in *Early Summer.* He cuts on the grandfather's gesture of drinking (6.149) to a view from the opposite side (6.150).

Are such cuts confusing? Defenders of the standard continuity system would say yes. But anyone who has seen films by Ozu or Tati can testify that their stories don't become unintelligible. These and other directors have found ways to keep the plot developments clear while also recalibrating our perception of space and time. Historically the continuity system offers one effective way to tell a story, but artistically, it isn't a necessity.

Apart from breaking or ignoring the 180° system, there are two other major tactics of discontinuity. One is the **jump cut.** Though this term is used in various ways, one primary meaning is this. When you cut together two shots of the same subject, if the shots differ only slightly in angle or composition, there will be a noticeable jump on the screen. Instead of appearing as two shots of the subject, the result looks as if some frames have been cut out of a single shot **(6.151, 6.152).** Many filmmakers believe that jump cuts can be avoided by shifting the camera at least 30 degrees from shot to shot (the so-called *30° rule*).

Even though jump cuts skip over some moments, they remain different from more common elliptical cuts. We saw an instance earlier, in the shots showing Wendy sitting in two positions on her cell bunk (6.136, 6.137). Those shots present two distinct angles on the subject, respecting the 30° rule. A jump cut, however, shows the action from one angle or two very similar ones.

Jump cuts are quite noticeable and were long considered amateurish mistakes. But audiences eventually accepted them, although not in the doses that Godard supplied. Filmmakers now may use jump cuts in montage sequences and during moments of surprise, violence, or psychological disturbance **(6.153, 6.154).**



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**6.151–6.154 Jump cuts then and now.** Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* used jump cuts freely. A cut from this shot of Patricia (6.151) to the next one (6.152), creates a jarring effect, as if some frames had been dropped. From the first sequence onward, Ridley Scott's *Matchstick Men* uses jump cuts to suggest the neuroses that plague a swindler during everyday tasks like washing the dishes (6.153–6.154).

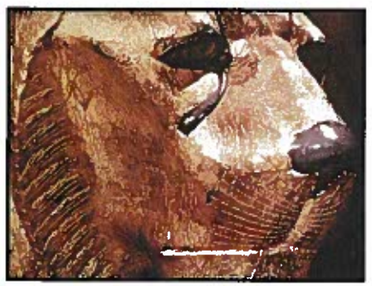


6.155

6.156

**6.155–6.159 Nondiegetic editing.** In *Fury,* Lang cuts from housewives gossiping (6.155) to clucking hens (6.156). A diegetic shot of Henri in *La Chinoise* (6.157) is followed by nondiegetic shots of the lion bed of King Tutankhamen (6.158) and his golden mask (6.159). Do the relics corroborate or challenge what Henri says?

6.157



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A second sort of continuity disruption is created by the **nondiegetic insert.** Here the filmmaker cuts from the scene to a metaphorical or symbolic shot that doesn't belong to the space and time of the narrative **(6.155, 6.156).** In Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike,* the massacre of workers is intercut with the slaughter of a bull. In Godard's *La Chinoise,* Henri tells an anecdote about ancient Egyptians, who thought that "their language was the language of the gods." As he says this **(6.157),** Godard cuts in two close-ups of relics from the tomb of King Tutankhamen **(6.158, 6.159).** As nondiegetic inserts, coming from outside the story world, these prompt the spectator to search for implicit meanings and ask if the relics corroborate what Henri says.

There are still other alternatives to classical continuity, especially with respect to time. Although the classical approach to order and frequency of story events may seem the best option, it's only the most familiar. Story events don't have to be edited in 1-2-3 order.

Modern audiences have become accustomed to scenes that are interrupted by brief flashbacks. But some editing choices trigger greater uncertainty about exactly when something is taking place. Resnais's *La Guerre est finie* interrupts scenes cut in conventional continuity by images that may represent flashbacks, or fantasy episodes, or even future events. In Michael Haneke's *Caché* after a shot of a building, we see a boy looking out a window. This recalls the POV shots of Jeff looking at his neighbors in *Rear Window* (6.96, 6.97, 6.99–6.102). But in *Caché* the apparently logical connection is revealed to be false **(6.160, 6.161).**

We've seen that editing can replay past scenes or Jackie Chan stunts (6.49–6.51). But filmmakers can repeat events to more disruptive effect. In *La Guerre est finie,* a future funeral is depicted in alternative ways, with the protagonist either present or absent. The escape sequence in Godard's *Pierrot le fou* not only scrambles the order of the shots but also plays with frequency by repeating one movement, Ferdinand jumping into the car (and showing it differently each time) **(6.162–6.165).** These editing choices block our normal expectations about story action and force us to concentrate on piecing together the film's narrative.

6.160

6.161

**6.160–6.161 Ambiguous POV editing.** *Caché* repeatedly shows a luxurious apartment building seen from across the street. After one nighttime view (6.160), there is a two-second shot of a boy watching, also at night (6.161). Later we'll learn that the editing has misled us severely.

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6.164

6.165

**6.162–6.165 Juggling temporal order and frequency.** In *Pierrot le fou*, Ferdinand jumps into the car as Marianne pulls away (6.162), but the next shot flashes back to them fleeing their apartment (6.163). After they seem to have escaped (6.164), earlier phases of the action are repeated, including Ferdinand's jump into the car (6.165).

The editing may take liberties with story duration as well. Although complete continuity and ellipsis are the most common ways of rendering duration, expansion—stretching a moment out, making screen time greater than story time—remains a distinct possibility. François Truffaut uses such expansions in *Jules and Jim* to underscore narrative turning points, as when the heroine Catherine lifts her veil or jumps off an embankment into a river.

Filmmakers have reworked some of the most basic tenets of the continuity system. We've indicated, for example, that a match on action strongly suggests that time continues across the cut. Yet Alain Resnais creates an impossible continuity of motion in *Last Year at Marienbad* **(6.166–6.167).** The smooth match on action,



6.166

6.167

**6.166–6.167 The impossible match on action.** In *Last Year at Marienbad*, small groups of guests are standing around the hotel lobby. A medium shot frames a blonde woman beginning to turn away from the camera (6.166). In the middle of her turn, there is a cut to her, still turning but in a different setting (6.167).

along with the woman's graphically matched position in the frame, implies that her head turns continuously, yet the change of setting contradicts this impression. As we'll see in Chapter 10, experimental films push ambiguous or contradictory editing even further.

Over time, audiences can become accustomed to discontinuities in narrative contexts. But with the jump cut, the nondiegetic insert, and the inconsistent match on action, temporal dislocations can push away from traditional notions of storytelling and create ambiguous relations among shots. These ambiguities needn't confuse us: they can stir our imaginations. Sergei Eisenstein's classic *October* provides many good examples.

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We visit some striking editing decisions in "Some cuts I have known and loved."

## CREATIVE DECISIONS

### *Discontinuity Editing in* October

For many Soviet filmmakers of the 1920s, editing didn't simply serve the narrative progression, as in the continuity system that Kuleshov so much admired. Editing could be a tool for organizing the entire form of the film. Eisenstein's *Strike, Potemkin, October,* and *Old and New* were all built on the basis of certain editing devices—sometimes recruited to advance a plot, but at other times serving to comment on the action and suggest implicit meanings.

Eisenstein understood the continuity system quite well, but he sought to go beyond it. He believed that all sorts of clashes from shot to shot would prod the spectator to engage more actively with the film. Discontinuities of space and time could stir the spectator's senses by creating a sharp impact. They could arouse feelings, as viewers began to see the emotional connections among shots. And certain kinds of discontinuities could spur the spectator to reflect on the themes that Eisenstein sought to communicate.

No longer bound by conventional dramaturgy, Eisenstein's films roam freely through time and space. Crosscutting, eyeline cuts, and other devices of the continuity system are pushed in new directions, plunging us into a realm that could only exist on film. A short passage from *October* can illustrate how he uses editing discontinuities.

The sequence is the third one in the film (and comprises over 125 shots!). The story action is simple. The Provisional Government has taken power in Russia after the February Revolution, but instead of withdrawing from World War I, the government has kept its troops on the front. This maneuver has left the Russian people no better off than under the czar they deposed. In classical Hollywood cinema, this story might have been shown through a montage sequence of newspaper headlines smoothly linked to a scene showing a protagonist complaining that the Provisional

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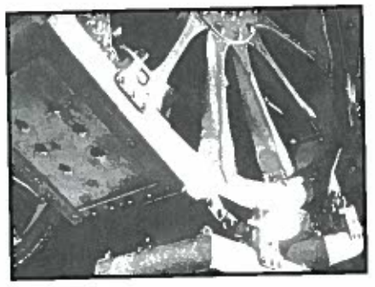

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**6.168–6.174 War, government, and the home front in *October*.** The sequence begins with shots showing the Russian soldiers on the front casting down their rifles and joining the German soldiers. Soon the former enemies are drinking and laughing together (6.168). Eisenstein then cuts back to the Provisional Government, where a flunky extends a document to an unseen ruler (6.169); this pledges the government to continue the war. The soldiers' fraternization is suddenly disrupted by a bombardment (6.170). The soldiers run back to the trenches and huddle as dirt and bomb fragments rain down on them. Eisenstein then cuts to a cannon being lowered off an assembly line by factory workers (6.171). For a time, the narration crosscuts the descending cannon (6.172) with the soldiers (6.173). In the last section of the sequence, the shots of the cannon are crosscut with hungry women and children standing in breadlines in the snow (6.174). The sequence ends with two intertitles: "All as before . . ." / "Hunger and war."

Government has not solved people's problems. *October*'s protagonist, though, is not one person but the entire Russian people, and the film does not usually use dialogue scenes to present its story points. Rather, *October* seeks to go beyond a straightforward presentation of story events by making the viewer actively connect those events and reflect on their implications. So the film confronts us with a disorienting and disjunctive set of images **(6.168–6.174).**

Not only does *October* lack an individual protagonist; this sequence exploits spatial and temporal discontinuities. Although at times the 180° rule is respected (especially in the shots of women and children), never does Eisenstein introduce his situations with establishing shots. Reestablishing shots are rare, and the major components of the locales are seldom shown together in one shot. On the whole, the Kuleshov effect rules. (No surprise: Eisenstein studied under Kuleshov.)

The organizing principle of the sequence is crosscutting. Eisenstein alternates images of battlefield and government, factory and street. In the continuity system, crosscutting usually indicates that different actions are taking place simultaneously. But *October*'s crosscutting doesn't specify when the events are occurring. The women and children are seen at night, but it's daylight on the military front. Do the battlefield events take place before or after or during the women's vigil? We



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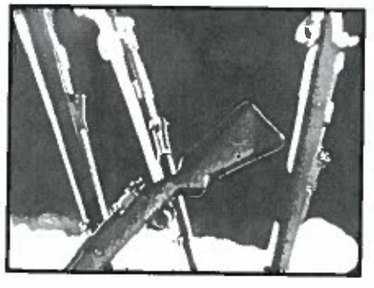

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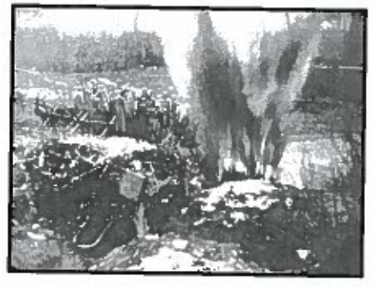

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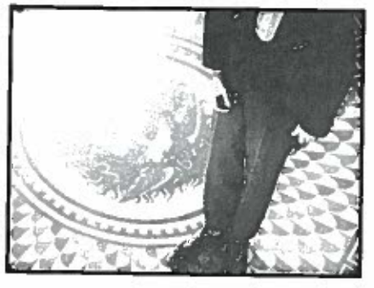

6.180

**6.175–6.180 The government breaks the peace.** Eisenstein cuts from a laughing German soldier facing right (6.175) to a menacing eagle statue, facing left, at the government headquarters (6.176). A static shot of rifles thrust into the snow (6.177) cuts to a long shot of a bursting shell (6.178). The impact is enhanced by a bold jump cut: The flunky is bowing (6.179), but suddenly he is standing up (6.180).

can't say. Eisenstein's crosscutting is primarily emotional and conceptual. He's less concerned with presenting a linear story than arousing indignation at government policy and sympathy for its victims.

For example, to dramatize how the government prevents men meeting peaceably, Eisenstein shatters the friendship of the soldiers with disruptive cuts **(6.175–6.180).** The soldiers fraternize in fairly continuous duration, but the Provisional Government's behavior is given in drastic ellipses. This permits Eisenstein to identify the government as the unseen cause of the bombardment that ruptures the peace. This implication is reinforced by the way the first explosions are followed by the jump cut of the government flunky (6.179–6.180). Ellipsis takes on another role when the editing dramatizes the suffering of the women and children waiting in line. Instead of a gradual wasting away, we get abrupt decline: First we see them standing, then later lying pitiably on the ground.

Thinking like a filmmaker: How would you dramatize the idea that the government oppresses its people? Eisenstein does it daringly, by creating a visual metaphor. Once the government orders the bombardment of the front, the soldiers are huddling under the barrage. This already suggests that the government, not the German army, is the real enemy. Eisenstein takes things further by showing men crushed by the war machine. Thanks to editing, shots of the cannon slowly descending are contrasted with shots of the men crouching in the trenches (6.172, 6.173). The graphic clash of directions is reinforced by a false eyeline match. The soldier looks upward, as if he could see the lowering cannon, even though he and the cannon are in entirely separate places. By showing the factory workers lowering the cannon (6.171), the cutting links the captive soldiers to the proletariat. Finally, as the cannon hits the ground, Eisenstein crosscuts images of it with the shots of the starving families of the soldiers and the workers. They, too, are oppressed, literally pressed down, by the government machine. As the cannon wheels hit the floor

ponderously, Einstein cuts to the women's feet in the snow. The machine's heaviness is linked by titles ("one pound," "half a pound") to the steady starvation of the women and children. Eisenstein's editing discontinuities encourage us to build up a political commentary on the story events.

Graphic discontinuities recur throughout *October,* especially in scenes of dynamic action, and they hit our eyes more forcefully than neatly matched shots would. To watch an Eisenstein film is to submit oneself to percussive graphic editing. But that editing also gives us powerful images—friendly soldiers, faceless bureaucrats, suffering women and children—that stir our emotions. By refusing to focus on one protagonist, Eisenstein moves masses of people to the fore.

But he did not want to stop with mere sympathy. *October* tries to show the underlying causes of the masses' suffering more directly than the traditional dramatic conflict between individualized heroes and villains could. Eisenstein's editing constructs correspondences, analogies, and contrasts that ask us to *interpret* the story events. The interpretation is not simply handed to the viewer; rather, the editing discontinuities push us to work out implicit meanings. By assembling the shots in our minds, we grasp his idea that the new government is no different from the old one and that ordinary people are sacrificed to an unfeeling political regime.

No one was more aware of the multitude of creative decisions involved in editing than Eisenstein. He saw that classical continuity would not achieve his purposes. So he chose to make a film in which discontinuities of graphic elements, time, and space could prod the spectator into sympathy and thought. In the process he demonstrated that there are powerful alternatives to the principles of continuity editing.

## SUMMARY

When any two shots are joined, we can ask several questions:

1. How are the shots graphically continuous or discontinuous?
2. What rhythmic relations are created?
3. Are the shots spatially continuous? If not, what creates the discontinuity? (Crosscutting? Ambiguous cues?) If the shots are spatially continuous, how does the 180° system create the continuity?
4. Are the shots temporally continuous? If so, what creates the continuity? (For example, matches on action?) If not, what creates the discontinuity? (Ellipsis? Overlapping cuts?)

More generally, we can ask the question we ask of every film technique: How does this technique *function* with respect to the film's narrative form? Does the film use editing to lay out the narrative space, time, and cause-effect chain in the manner of classical continuity? How do editing patterns emphasize facial expressions, dialogue, or setting? Do editing patterns withhold narrative information? In general, how does editing contribute to the viewer's experience of the film?

Some practical hints: You can learn to notice editing in several ways. If you are having trouble noticing cuts, try watching a film or video and tapping each time a shot changes. Once you recognize editing easily, watch any film with the sole purpose of observing one editing aspect—say, the way space is presented, or the control of graphics or time. Sensitize yourself to rhythmic editing by noting cutting rates; tapping out the tempo of the cuts can help.

Watching 1930s and 1940s American films can introduce you to classical continuity style; try to predict what shot will come next in a sequence. (You'll be surprised at how often you're right.) When you watch a film on video, try turning off the sound; editing patterns become more apparent this way. When there's a violation of continuity, ask yourself whether it is accidental or serves a purpose. When you see a film that does not obey classical continuity principles, search for its unique editing patterns. Use the slow-motion, freeze, and reverse controls on a video player to analyze a film sequence as this chapter has done. (Almost any film will do.) In such ways as these, you can considerably increase your awareness and understanding of the power of editing.



## RECOMMENDED DVD AND BLU-RAY SUPPLEMENTS

Watching people editing is not very exciting, and this technique usually gets short shrift in DVD supplements. There are some exceptions, however.

Each film in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy contains an "Editorial" section, and *The Fellowship of the Ring* includes an "Editorial Demonstration." This presents an excerpt from the Council of Elrond scene, then displays the raw footage from six cameras before showing how sections from each setup were fitted together. Incidentally, this Elrond scene can give you good practice in noticing continuity. The interactions among many characters are stitched together with correct eyeline matches and occasional matches on action. (Imagine how confusing the conversations could have been if no attention had been paid to eyeline direction.)

The DVD release of Lodge Kerrigan's *Keane* includes not only the theatrical version but a completely recut version of the film by producer Steven Soderbergh. Soderbergh calls his cut his "commentary track" for the disc.

In "Tell Us What You See," the camera operator for *A Hard Day's Night* discusses continuity of screen direction, and in "Every Head She's Had the Pleasure to Know," the film's hairdresser talks about having to keep hair length consistent for continuity.

"15-Minute Film School with Robert Rodriguez," one of the *Sin City* supplements, provides a clear instance of the Kuleshov effect in use. Although Rodriguez does not use that term, he demonstrates how he could cut together shots of characters interacting with one another via eyeline matches even though several of the actors never worked together during the filming. Rodriguez's commentary for *El Mariachi* (Sony "Special Edition") also points out examples of the Kuleshov effect.

A brief section of *Toy Story*'s supplements entitled "Layout Tricks" demonstrates how continuity editing principles govern animation as well as live-action filming. In a shot/reverse-shot sequence involving Buzz and Woody, the filmmakers diagram (as we do on p. 233) where a camera can be placed to maintain the axis of action (or "stage line," as it is termed here). The segment also shows how a camera movement can be used to shift the axis of action just before an important character enters the scene.

"Destination Yuma," a supplement for *3:10 to Yuma,* contains an excellent demonstration of multiple-camera shooting for a scene of a stagecoach flipping over. The short runs the footage from different cameras and then runs the scene as it was finally cut.