

Coordinating the Shots:

Film Editing

Editing: what's the idea?

- The general idea behind editing in narrative film is the coordination of one shot with another in order to create a coherent whole.
- The system of editing employed in narrative film is called *continuity editing* – its purpose is to create and provide efficient and artful transitions.

Relations in Editing

There are five areas of choice and control in editing, based on five types of relationships between shots:

Graphic Relations

Rhythmic Relations

Temporal Relations

Spatial Relations

Thematic Relations

Graphic Relations

Although the primary focus of the film editor is to ensure continuity of the narrative, film editors remain acutely aware that film is a visual art. Therefore, they work to achieve visual interest by creating transitions between shots that are graphically similar and graphically dissimilar, depending on the desired effect.

Graphic Continuity

- A **graphic match** is achieved by joining two shots that have a similarity in terms of light/dark, line or shape, volume or depth, movement or stasis.
- A **graphically discontinuous edit** creates a clash of visual content by joining two shots that are dissimilar in terms of one or more of the above visual principles.

Graphic Match



Graphic Discontinuity



Rhythmic Relations

Film is not only a visual art, but also an auditory and even tactile art. Therefore, editors also remain aware of the effects achieved by manipulating the **rhythms** experienced by perceivers through thoughtful juxtapositions of longer and shorter shots as well as through transitional devices that affect the perceiver's sense of beat or tempo.

Rhythmic Transitional Devices

- **Straight cut**
- **Jump cut**
- **Freeze-frame**
- **Fade-out**
- **Fade-in**
- **Dissolve**
- **Wipe**
- **Flip frame**

Temporal Relations

Editing is the process by which the difference between **temporal duration** and **screen duration** is reconciled. It sounds simple, but consider this: most feature films present in roughly two hours sufficient intersection of story and plot to provide perceivers with everything they need in order to understand days, weeks, months or even years in characters' lives.

Temporal Relations: Chronology

- Most narrative films are presented in roughly chronological order, with notable exceptions (*Memento*, anyone?)
- The two most common disruptions to chronological order are **flashbacks** (*a leap to an earlier moment*) and **flashforwards** (*a leap into the future*) - the former is much more typical than the latter).

Temporal Relations: The Passage of Time

- To speed up time, editors make use of **elliptical editing** techniques such as
 - **Transitional devices**
 - **Empty frames** - *figure walks out of the frame in Shot A and then into the frame in Shot B*
 - **Cutaway shots** – *cut from a scene to another scene that takes less time, and then back*
- To slow down time, editors make use of **expansion editing** techniques such as
 - **Overlapping** – *end of Shot A is identical to beginning of Shot B*
 - **Repetition** – *multiple views of a single shot*

Elliptical Editing

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Expansion Editing

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Spatial Relations

Perhaps the most important, as well as the most overlooked, principle of editing is its function in providing perceivers a reliable sense of the physical space that constitutes the world of the film. Editors are responsible (with assistance from cinematographers) for **relating points in space** in order to achieve narrative continuity.

Spatial Continuity

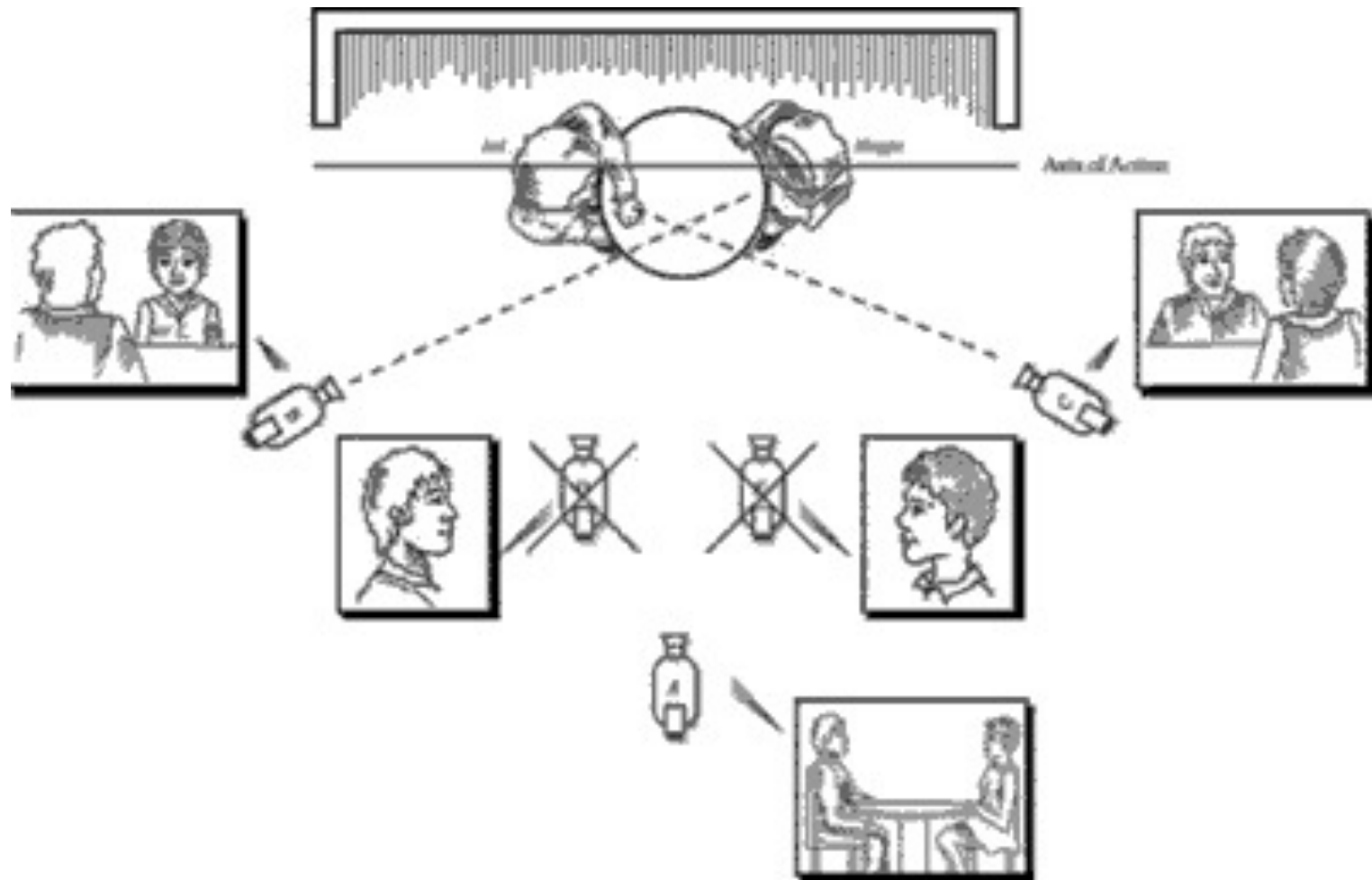
- The standard pattern for editing a scene in a narrative film includes the following:
 - **Establishing shot** – *shows the characters in relation to each other*
 - **Shot/Reverse-shot** – *shows each character, one after the other, from over the other character's shoulder*
 - **Eyeline match (POV shot)** – *shows what a character is looking at*

Continuity Editing

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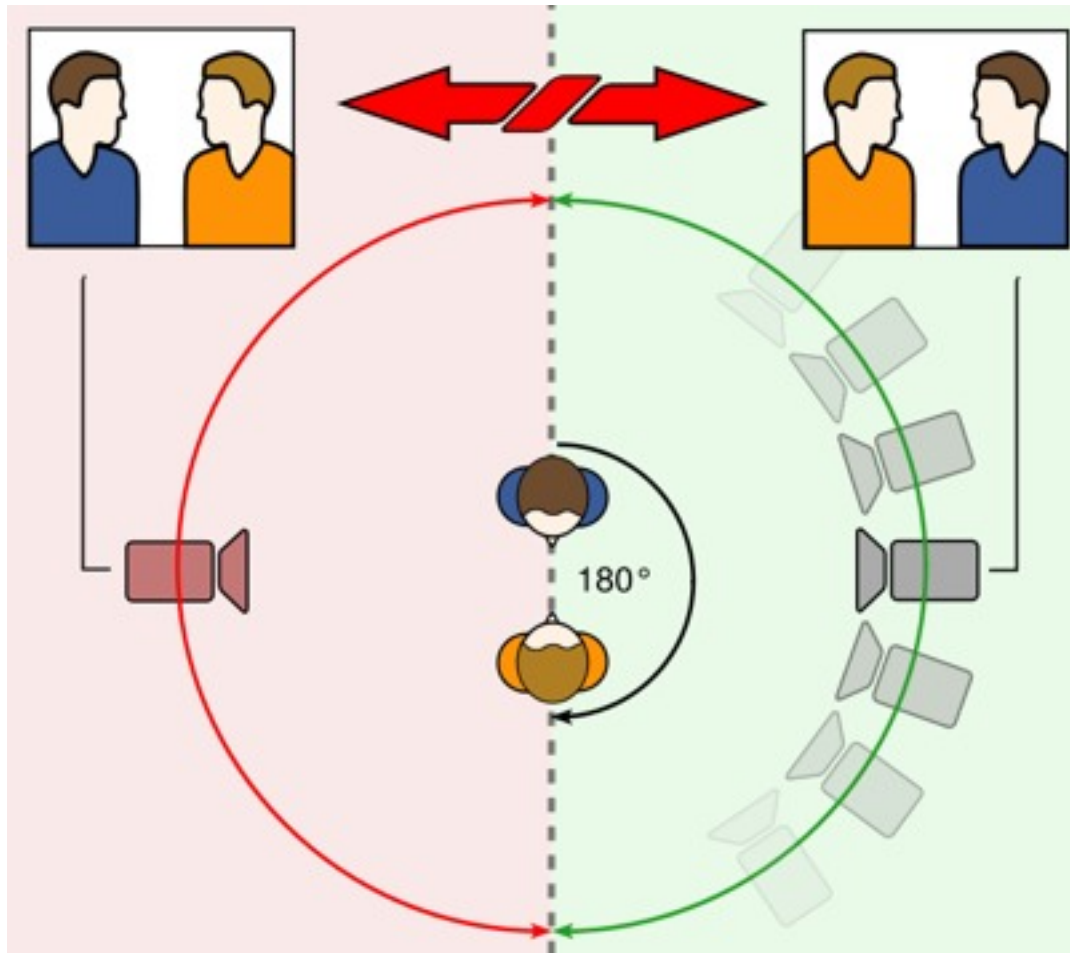
Spatial Continuity



More Spatial Concepts

- **Multiple camera technique** – *used for difficult/expensive shots*
- **Axis of Action (180-degree line)** – *can't be violated without disorienting the perceiver*
- **Match on Action** – *lines up the end of action A and the beginning of action B*
- **The Kuleshov Effect** – *implies a spatial relationship in the absence of an establishing shot*

Axis of Action



Thematic Relations

Editors have at their disposal two very powerful techniques for manipulating the perceiver's place in the hierarchy of knowledge, and therefore affecting our thematic understanding of the film:

- **Montage sequences** – *visual motifs, communicate passage of time*
- **Crosscut editing** – *cutting back and forth between two lines of action happening simultaneously; greatly heightens perceiver's position in the hierarchy of knowledge*

Montage

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Crosscutting

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A Couple of Cool Editing Weblinks

[The Cutting Edge: The Magic of Movie Editing](#)
(98-minute documentary film)

[Martin Scorsese's Editing Techniques](#)
(10-minute compilation)