



HAVING FUN WITH THE CUT / JUMP CUTS

You sit down in front of the computer, and have a dozen or so hours of footage. You don't even know where to begin in order to mash it up together into something that makes sense. The perspective frightens you. This is probably a very common experience especially for those who are just starting their adventure with editing. To find satisfaction in the whole process, you should think of it as a puzzle or a game of Tetris. What a joy it is to find matching pieces of the puzzle! It's the same with editing, but it's a more creative, inventive process because there can be infinitely many matching pieces of the puzzle, with only imagination constraining you. Of course, there are certain frames and rules of editing, but if you know them well, you can also learn how to break them. And after that "sky is the limit". But firstly be aware of the rules.

It is said that a film is made three times. The first time, when we write a script, the second time, when we film it. And the third time on the "editing table". During each of these stages the same film can change slightly or sometimes even end up to be vastly different. This makes the editing stage extremely important. Anything can happen once the editor gets his hands on the building blocks. The material that the editor has at his or her disposal offers the potential for an infinite number of films, which can vary thematically and aesthetically.

Remember to prepare something to eat and drink. The editing process can be so absorbing that for a few hours or, in extreme cases, a dozen or so you might not leave your computer. It can be addictive and all-consuming, like the ultimate computer game. In fact, just like with Minecraft, for example, your task is to create a world from scratch. This world will follow your rules with the goal in mind to make it understandable and accessible to those who will be watching it.

Where should we start? How to organise yourself?

Apart from selecting the editing program (there is a very large selection, but in principle editing programs are very similar to each other, they only differ when it comes to the variety of functions and possibilities they offer. More about this in the document entitled Editor's Tools), which is basically of secondary importance, the concept is the most integral matter. How to create it? It is certainly worth starting by looking at the materials and organising them so that you know how to use them and what they can be useful for. It is good to group the materials into folders, creating groups with regards to various factors – topics, characters,



shots. The allocation is up to you. Now comes the most creative moment – creating concepts. A lot depends on whether you create it yourself or work in a group. The group process is more difficult because it requires more negotiation, but it also results in more ideas. When creating a concept, it is worth answering the questions: What is our film about? What story do we want to tell? How do we want to tell the story (through which shots, characters, situations)? Once we have this resolved you can move on to the painful selection process.

Selection

You must remember that the editing process is often accompanied by a sense of loss. Loss of material that does not enter the final cut. Walter Murch, a well-known editor who edited such timeless cinema classics as “Apocalypse Now”, “The Godfather” part II and III, “The Conversation”, described the process of working on “Apocalypse Now” in his excellent book about the art of editing: “In the Blink of an Eye”. “One of the reasons for time-consuming post-production was simply the amount of film that had been printed. (...) Since the finished film runs just under two hours and twenty-five minutes in length, that gives a ratio of ninety-five to one. That is to say, ninety-five “unseen” minutes for every minute that found its way into the finished product. By comparison, the average ratio for theatrical features is around twenty to one.” (p. 20). Just think about all the tough decisions that have to be made! What to throw away and what to leave behind? On the other hand, this great responsibility also gives you a sense of extraordinary causality. A lot depends on the editing itself and the editing concept. Think about which shots, which characters, which scenes fit your concept, will help form and support the main idea, the theme. Anything that moves us away from this theme, that makes the story meander and cause the viewer to get lost, must be thrown out. In the case of narrative films (with a clear plot line) it is possible to map everything out in the form of a timeline and put scenes, shots in such an order to make sure the story is well told. This is basically the “timeline” in the editing program. In the case of a more abstract film, based on visual associations, freely combining various shots and scenes, this narrative arc ceases to be causal as one would expect with a normal plot, and is hinges more on associations that build meanings and sensations in the viewer.

A good example of such combinations that build associations is the so-called Kuleshov effect, which is the result of an experiment carried out by Soviet film director Lev Kuleshov in the 1920s, that proved the importance of film editing in creating meaning.



Watch this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-AypTPI4E0>

The same shots depicting the actor's face devoid of expression when coupled with other shots, create different meanings, e.g. the face + a plate of soup = hunger, the face + a coffin with a woman's body = sadness, the face + a child playing = cheerfulness, tenderness. Check out how the Kuleshov effect impacts you.

Several rules and rules on how to break them

The Kuleshov effect is one of the rules you can apply. At the same time, it is a principle that can lead to various interpretations. A lot depends on the viewer, but also on your intentions.

Thanks to editing, the world presented in the film can be intensified and made more precise. Despite time cuts and various cheats (e.g. cheats with regards to changes in terms of space), we are able to create a conventional world that seems natural to the viewer.

Some basic editing rules:

- One shot – the master shot

Editing safety can be provided by using a large number of master shots, i.e. a scene shot in one shot, without cuts or stops. Did you know that there are whole films that are one long master shot? E.g. "Russian Ark" (2002) by Alexander Sokurov, which is shot in one, eighty-minute shot.

- Editing on movement

Planning the shot in such a way that each subsequent one starts with the movement where the previous one ended, e.g. full plan: the actor presses the door handle, zoom in: his hand presses the handle. Remember to change the shot at least twice, i.e. the wide shot, then the so called American shot, or the full shot, then the close-up). Too small a change causes an animation effect – unless the goal is to achieve such an effect.

- Directions

The images must be visually consistent so as not to introduce a sense of chaos to the viewer. An important concept here is the axis of action – an imaginary line between the object and the point to which it moves. For example, Red Riding Hood goes to the forest (the action axis connects it with the forest). We first see this in the wide shot, and then in the American shot. If the camera is on the same side of the axis in each shot, we can be sure that visual continuity will be maintained via association. In such cases it is best to rely on intuition. See the juxtapositions and think about whether something is jarring.



Assembly uses many means of expression. Below are some of them. Take a moment to think whether you have met with them in movies you have watched:

- Gradation – the arrangement of related shots in an ascending or descending sequence; one of the experimental uses of this method are so-called jump cuts (used for the first time by the creators of the French New Wave) – breaking the continuous movement into static shots and grading them in a jump form;
- Repetition – repeated use of the same means of expression, the aim: to draw the viewer's attention to something;
- Refrain – a special form of repetition, a recurring theme;
- Ellipsis – omitting elements of the plot that the viewers can fill in by their own (e.g. it is not necessary to show the whole process of opening and entering through the door);
- Suspension – before a given dramatic resolution we put in neutral shots, the aim: to intensify tension;
- Mitigation (euphemism) – showing a concept or event by means of more subtle, not straightforward shots, the aim: to be less literal, e.g. a red cloth instead of injured bodies;
- Antithesis – the juxtaposition of two extremely different shots, the aim: to highlight the difference;
- Synecdoche – an object or an event specified by part of it;
- Metaphor – giving the shot relative meaning by juxtaposing it with another (such as the Kuleshov effect).

Play with these means, see how they work and how they can be used.

The fact is that editing can be most appreciated when you participate in it at least once. The same materials can be used to create many stories told in different ways. You are playing with implications, experimenting with associations and in a positive sense with cheating.

If you have some time we recommend the book:

Walter Murch "In the blink of an eye. The Art of Film Editing", Wojciech Marzec Publishing House, Warsaw 2006.

