

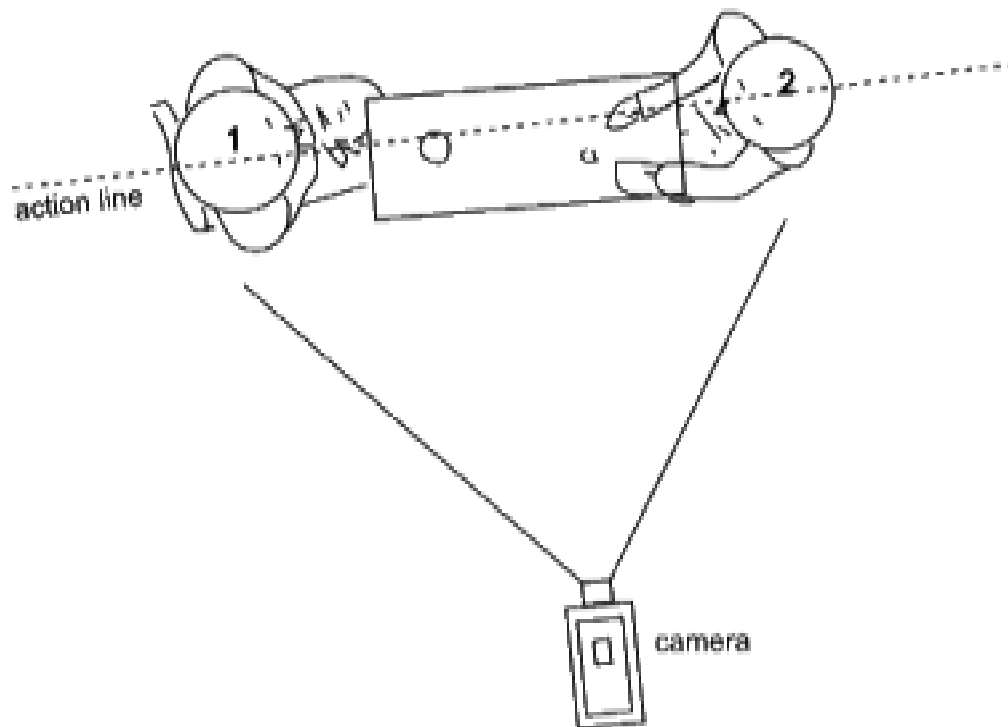
Continuity and Montage

There are two basically different approaches to editing, CONTINUITY EDITING and MONTAGE THEORY. We will take a look at both techniques in the following.

CONTINUITY EDITING (also, CLASSICAL CONTINUITY)

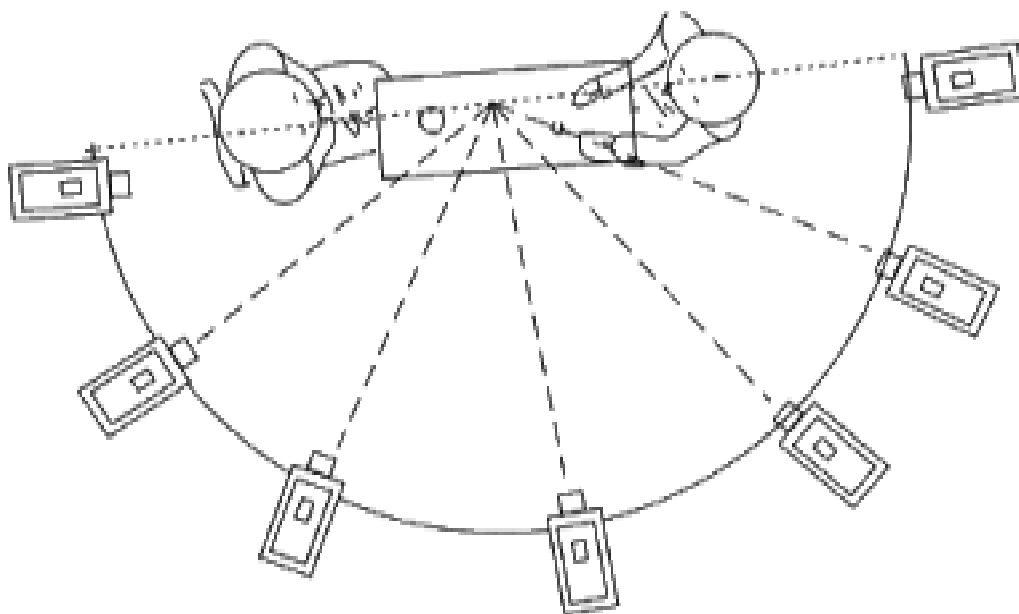
Continuity refers to the way shots go together to create a seamless chain of events. Some strategies already need to be observed during the shooting of footage for good continuity. After recording the raw material, editing techniques provide further means for binding scenes together smoothly. In direct contradiction to montage theory, continuity editing aims at hiding (or at least minimizing) the shift from one cut to the next, in effect making the edit as "transparent" as possible. This strategy has several component parts, the principal ones being:

- Shots which carry an action across a cut (match on action cuts), from Alfred Hitchcock's "Vertigo". This example also contains eye-line match cuts after the match on action cut.
(See example: http://www.gardensandmachines.com/AD30400/Downloads_S2012/vertigo1.mov)
- Camera set ups which observe the action from alternating points of view (angle, reverse angle) (See example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xauSCz1mEk>, at 1:20minutes)
- Cuts which are "led" by a character's on-screen actions. For example, if character "A" looks off-screen and a direct cut to character "B" ensues, the effect is that character "A" is looking at character "B"; sometimes called eye-line matches.
(See example: http://www.gardensandmachines.com/AD30400/Downloads_S2012/vertigo2.mov)
- Rigorous respect for the Action Line (180 degree rule), assuring continuity of the direction of screen action: Every shot has the potential to suggest to the audience that a location has changed. The 180 degrees rule ensures the audience that the whole action (e.g. a conversation) takes place in the same location and during the same short period of time. The rule is based on an imaginary action line (line of movement or line between characters). For a fluid continuity, the camera should never cross this line of action in any shot:



Jump Cuts:

If the camera moves less than 30 degrees in between shots, then the resulting edit jumps abruptly from one shot to the other (almost as if one piece of tape had been cut out in between these shots). To avoid this effect, make sure to move the camera more than 30 degrees on one side of the action between shots:



Movement:

Try to edit on movement, it maintains continuity and flow of action the best. If there is movement in the image, it is important to keep the direction of the movement between edits. For example, if an object moves from left to right and exits the screen on the right, then the same object should appear in the following shot from the left. An interesting psychological phenomenon while watching a video or a movie is the idea of "moving to a place" and "coming from a place". Normally, a movement from the left to the right is interpreted as progress, moving forward, to a place, whereas a movement from the right to the left is considered to be a movement of return from somewhere.

Other elements that could help in the continuity of a project are: edits based common prominent elements in shots (such as a strong color, a strong graphical element or a clear compositional element, e.g. the line of the horizon). Light is also an important factor in continuity – the less the light situation changes (even light temperature) the more fluid the edits look. Sometimes, sound can be used to keep the continuity. However, this should be only considered if none of the visual techniques work.

All the above-featured strategies to maintain continuity are based on hard cuts (i.e. no transitions). Although you do not need to observe the above rules in your own projects, you should at least know when to use them and why to break them!

MONTAGE THEORY (also, SOVIET MONTAGE)

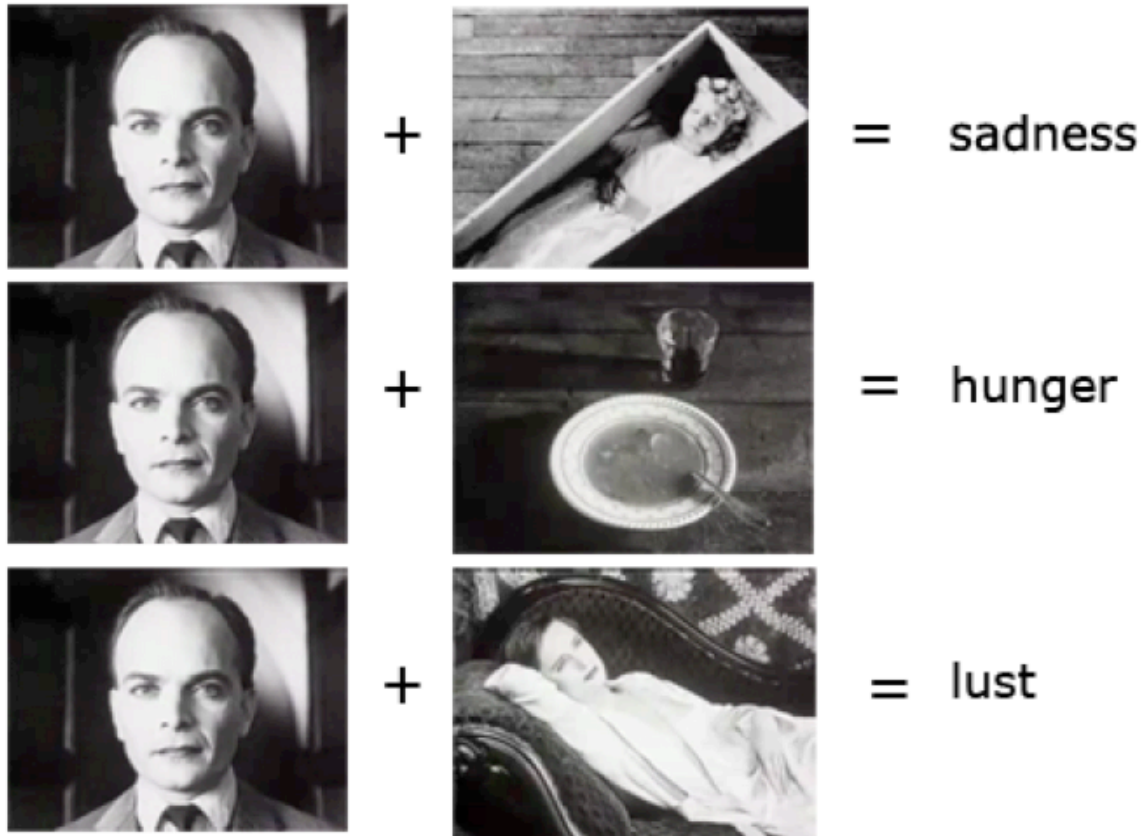
Basically a theory, which develops the proposition that it is through editing that film finds its greatest--and most unique--powers of expression. This premise is based on the dialectical relationship between two shots, "A" and "B", in a cut. By putting shot "A" in juxtaposition (and in opposition) to shot "B" the result is not a sum of the two, but a new idea which might be called "C". Obviously, there has to be significant involvement on the part of the audience to make the dialectical relationship effective.

See examples from Sergej Eisenstein's "October":

- http://www.gardensandmachines.com/AD30400/Downloads_S2012/october1.mov
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This effect is also called Kuleshov Effect (named after the Russian film theoretician Lev Kuleshov). As mentioned above, it is based on the mental tendency of viewers to attempt to figure out how filmed shots fit together, even if the shots are totally unrelated. Around 1919, Kuleshov began a series of editing experiments, which led to a startling discovery (in what has become known as the "Mozhukhin Experiment"). In separate sequences, shots of various objects (a bowl of soup, a smiling child, and a dead body), were juxtaposed against identical archive clips of a famous actor (Ivan Mozhukhin). The audience reads a different meaning into Mozhukhin's expression with each combination. This discovery demonstrated the power of editing to alter the perception of the subject, in this case, the actor's emotions and thoughts. The experiment also, implicitly, advanced the verisimilar acting style as the ideal for film; purportedly, Mozhukhin was praised by the audience for his subtle acting abilities.

On the following page are some still images of the original experiment:



The following series of stills was taken from Dziga Vertov's film "The Man with the Movie Camera". We see how Vertov applied the Kuleshov Effect to create ambiguity: the audience interprets the first scene, shot in an official building, based on the following scenes. The couple can be seen as either reporting the death of a family member, reporting their wedding or the birth of a new family member:





In another experiment, Kuleshov spliced together another series of shots, which had been filmed entirely out of sequence and in different times and places: a waiting man, a walking woman, a gate, a staircase, and a mansion. The audience read spatial and temporal 'sense' into the sequence, deciding that they saw the man and the woman meeting in front of the gate at the same time. This demonstrated the viewer's essential role in creating a film's continuity and advanced the notion that a filmmaker creates a 'fictive space', with the freedom to shoot out of sequence and join together unrelated shots. Kuleshov used these discoveries to advance the theory of montage as the central device of cinema, later adapted by Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin.

Further Resources

- The Rosebud Project: A Film Studies Resource
http://mith2.umd.edu/clients/mlifton/rosebud_old (unfortunately no longer available online)
- Alfred Hitchcock on cutting/editing: A Talk with Hitchcock (from the 1964 television series "Telescope") – excerpt on
www.youtube.com/watch?v=NG0V7EVFZt4
- Francis Ford Coppola on editing (see:
<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/cop0int-1>):

"The essence of cinema is editing. It's the combination of what can be extraordinary images, images of people during emotional moments, or just images in a general sense, but put together in a kind of alchemy. A number of images put together a certain way become something quite above and beyond what any of them are individually."