The ORIGINS *of* MOVIE "MAGIC"

Most films produced before 1902 were only a few minutes in length. In those films, editing was nothing more than splicing the loose ends of the film together to put the shots in order. With the introduction of George Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) and Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), films began to be longer and more complex. Filmmaking continued to mature over the next several decades as represented by such films as D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), F.W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924) and Sergei M. Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Films such as these helped establish the concept of film as an art form rather than as a novelty or recorded reality.

Porter and Griffith, both American filmmakers, used editing to enhance the emotional impact of a film on its audience. Griffith developed the use of the close-up and experimented with cutting together scenes that were widely separated in physical space to show what was taking place in different locations at the same time.

The film editor is responsible for transforming massive amounts of film into the story seen on the screen. It's not unusual for the editor to begin with hundreds of hours of film. To make things even more complicated, the director may film each scene several times from four or five different camera positions. The scenes are also not shot in the same sequence as the film's story. All the scenes in one location or using a particular actor will be shot together to minimize the cost of the production.

The editor sorts through this rough footage and gradually assembles the film, scene by scene. Working closely with the director, the editor must choose the best acting performances and the most effective camera angles and lighting for each scene to achieve the desired impact. The editor must then decide just how to join together all those segments of film to create the final, finished story.

Some of the terminology that a film editor uses includes:

CLOSE-UP (CU): A shot showing a detail only (ex., face only or hands only).

CROSS-CUTTING: Cutting back and forth between two or more events or actions that are taking place at the same time but in different places.

CUT: An abrupt transition from one shot to another.

CUTAWAYS: A cut away from the primary subject to something the filmmaker has decided is equally or more relevant at that time.

DISSOLVE: An overlapping transition between scenes where one image fades out as another fades in. Editors often use this to indicate a change in time and/or location.

ESTABLISHING SHOT: A shot, taken from a distance, establishing for the viewer where the action is to occur and the spatial relationship of the characters and their setting.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP (ECU): A detail of a close-up (eyes or mouth only, etc.).

FADE IN: A shot that starts in darkness and gradually lightens to full exposure.

FADE OUT: A shot that starts at full exposure and gradually fades to black.

JUMP CUT: A cut where two spliced shots do not match in terms of time or place. A jump cut gives the effect that the camera is literally jumping around.

LONG SHOT (LS): A shot taken at a considerable distance from the subject. A long shot of a person is one in which the entire body is in frame.

MEDIUM SHOT (MS): A shot framing a subject at a medium range, usually a shot from the waist up.

REVERSE CUTTING: A technique alternating over-the-shoulder shots showing different characters speaking. This is generally used in conversation scenes.

SEQUENCE SHOT: An entire scene or sequence that is one continuous camera shot. There is no editing.

View the Death Star battle sequence in *Star Wars* (1977), the rolling boulder sequence from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), the training sequence from *The Matrix* (2000) or another sequence your teacher has chosen. As you watch the scene, try to identify the rhythm the editor established in making cuts. Tap a pencil each time there is a cut. (This will be easier to do if you watch the scene a second time with the sound off.) For example, if all the shots are about the same length, a steady, metrical beat results. Shortening each shot in a sequence results in an accelerating rhythm.

Title of film: _____

Description of the scene you watched: _____

_____

What was your emotional response? _____
What was your intellectual response? _____
How many cuts could you count? _____

Now, view the scene again. Try to identify the specific shots or effects the editor used. Why do you think the editor chose to transition from one shot to the next at each point? What information do the shots communicate? For example: Is the cut to a close-up merely to show us who is speaking or is it an important reaction?

Information the shot communicates

1._____

2._____

3._____

Type of shot

1._____

2._____

3._____