# EDITING: PUDOVKIN'S FIVE EDITING TECHNIQUES

## A Little Theory

Editing is the construction of scenes through the assembly of shots. In the 1920s when the great Russian theorists scoped out what the new elastic medium could do, they focused on the storytelling potential of editing.

## Five Editing Principles

In the 1920s Vsevold Pudovkin set down five editing techniques that remain the foundation of modern day cutting. He named them as follows:

1. Contrast
2. Parallelism
3. Symbolism
4. Simultaneity
5. Leitmotif

For Pudovkin the purposeful use of editing could guide the audience's emotional response. Therefore he believed it was the job of both the writer and editor to master editing as their single most important job was the "psychological guidance" of the spectator." (Pudovkin 125)

Pudovkin's five principles show how editing choices can evoke specific audience emotions. As effective then as they are now, Pudovkin's principles are reproduced here as they appeared in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 4th edition (Eisenstein). Pudovkin first published his editing principles in his native Russian in 1926. Numbering was added for clarity.

Here's how Pudovkin explained his editing principles almost 100 years ago.

## On Editing

—V. Pudovkin 1926

*1. Contrast — Suppose it be our task to tell of the miserable situation of a starving man; the story will impress the more vividly if associated with mention of the senseless gluttony of a well-to-do man.*

*On just such a simple contrast relation is based the corresponding editing method. On the screen the impression of this contrast is yet increased, for it is possible not only to relate the starving sequence to the gluttony sequence, but also to relate separate scenes and even separate shots of scenes to one another, thus, as it were, forcing the spectator to compare the two actions all the time, one strengthening the other. The editing of contrast is one of the most effective, but also one of the commonest and most standardised, of methods, and so care should be taken not to overdo it.*

*2. Parallelism — This method resembles contrast, but is considerably wider. Its substance can be explained more clearly by an example. In a scenario as yet unproduced a section occurs as follows: a working man, one of the leaders of a strike, is condemned to death; the execution is fixed for 5 a.m. The sequence is edited thus: a factory-owner, employer of the condemned man, is leaving a restaurant drunk, he looks at his wrist-watch: 4 o'clock. The accused is shown — he is being made ready to be led out. Again the manufacturer, he rings a door-bell to ask the time: 4:30. The prison wagon drives along the street under heavy guard. The maid who opens the door — the wife of the condemned — is subjected to a sudden senseless assault. The drunken factory-owner snores on a bed, his leg with trouser-end upturned, his hand hanging down with wrist-watch visible, the hands of the watch crawl slowly to 5 o'clock. The workman is being hanged. In this instance two thematically unconnected incidents develop in parallel by means of the watch that tells of the approaching execution. The watch on the wrist of the callous brute, as it were connects him*

*with the chief protagonist of the approaching tragic denouement, thus ever present in the consciousness of the spectator. This is undoubtedly an interesting method, capable of considerable development.*

*3. Symbolism — In the final scenes of the film Strike the shooting down of workmen is punctuated by shots of the slaughter of a bull in the stockyard. The scenarist, as it were, desires to say: just as a butcher fells a bull with the swing of a pole-axe, so cruelly and in cold blood, were shot down the workers. This method is especially interesting because, by means of editing, it introduces an abstract concept into the consciousness of the spectator without use of a title.*

*4. Simultaneity — In American films the final section is constructed from the simultaneous rapid development of two actions, in which the outcome of one depends on the outcome of the other. The end of the present-day section of Intolerance... is thus constructed. The whole aim of this method is to create in the spectator a maximum tension of excitement by the constant forcing of a question, such as, in this case: Will they be in time? — will they be in time?*

*The method is a purely emotional one, and nowadays overdone almost to the point of boredom, but it cannot be denied that of all the methods of constructing the end hitherto devised it is the most effective.*

*5. Leit-motif (reiteration of theme) — Often it is interesting for the scenarist especially to emphasise the basic theme of the scenario. For this purpose exists the method of reiteration. Its nature can easily be demonstrated by an example. In an anti-religious scenario that aimed at exposing the cruelty and hypocrisy of the Church in employ of the Tsarist regime, the same shot was several times repeated: a church-bell slowly ringing and, superimposed on it, the title: "The sound of bells sends into the world a message of patience and love." This piece appeared whenever the scenarist desired to emphasise the stupidity of patience, or the hypocrisy of the love thus preached.*

—1926 (Pudovkin 125-6)

## Further Reading

1. Pudovkin, Vsevolod. *Film Technique and Film Acting, 1926.* New York: Grove Press, 1970.
2. Eisenstein, Sergei. *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory.* Edited and translated by Jay Leyda. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1949 (1977).
3. Kuleshov, Lev. *Kuleshov on Film, 1922-1968.* Selected, translated and edited with an introduction by Ronald Levaco. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.
4. Mast, Gerald, Marshall Cohen and Leo Brady, eds. *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings.* 4th Edition. London: Oxford University Press, 1992.

## Editing: Additional Techniques

By the end of the 1920s the basics of scene construction had been laid down. Pudovkin along with Sergei Eisentein, D.W. Griffith, and Fritz Lang had so successfully advanced the craft that much of what followed were variations of their basic techniques.

In the same way that modern day editing is a footnote to these early pioneers, many of their inventions have been attributed to 19th century novelists. Eisenstein, for example, credited much of Griffith's early innovations like progressive montage, intercutting, the close-up and even the dissolve to the novels of Charles Dickens (Eisenstein 398). What these early theorists did was create film equivalents for proven literary forms while, at the same time, mining the new medium for yet undiscovered techniques.

Here is a representative selection of the staple editing techniques used by contemporary filmmakers.

## Film Elements

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 17. Montage | *Citizen Kane* | 22. Split Screen | *Kill Bill Vol. 1* |
| 18. Montage | *Adaptation* | 23. Dissolves | *Citizen Kane* |
| 19. Assembly | *Psycho* | 24. Dissolves | *Barton Fink* |
| 20. Mise-en-scène | *Psycho* | 25. Smash Cut | *American Beauty* |
| 21. Intercutting | *Cabaret* | | |

## 17. Film Element: Montage

A *montage* is created through an assembly of quick cuts, disconnected in time or place, that combine to form a larger idea. A montage is frequently used to convey passage of time, coming of age, or emotional transition.

Originally "montage," which is a French term meaning "to assemble," referred to the creative construction of scenes from the "assembly of shots." Today it means a specific narrative construction — a series of shots usually without dialog.

### Film Example: *Citizen Kane*

There are a number of superb montages in *Citizen Kane*. Interestingly, almost identically constructed montages are used to depict Kane's disintegrating relationship with both his first and second wife. Each montage takes place in a single setting, each shows the couple engaged in a single activity. The first shows the couple at the breakfast table. The second is set in a huge great room. Both montages return us to the same location and the same activity. There are no cutaways to other locations or characters. In this way the audience can focus on the changing behavior of the couple as the location and activity are unchanged. By showing the disintegration with a mirrored form, the montage is able to suggest a certain inevitability with respect to Kane's ability to hold onto relationships. It's as though the wives change, but the pattern of disintegration is constant. Here's a look at the second montage featuring Susan, Kane's second wife.

### Susan's Montage

As we go into the montage, Kane and Susan are seen arguing as Susan works on a puzzle. When we come out of the montage, years later, the couple is still arguing and Susan is still working on a puzzle. In a brief two minutes of screen time, we get a sense of their prolonged unhappiness and its escalation over time.

The script uses the progression of puzzle-making to indicate the passage of time. The choice of puzzle-making as an activity also cleverly reminds us that Kane is as much an enigma to Susan as he is to the journalists. It's as though Kane himself is like an unending series of puzzles; as soon as one is done, another presents itself.

### Dramatic Value

Here the montage suggests passage of time and character progression. By using the same construction twice, it allows the audience to make comparisons and, from that, new inferences.

# Citizen Kane (1941)

Screenplay: Herman J. Mankiewicz and Orson Welles.

INT. THE GRAND HALL IN XANADU - 1925

Closeup of an enormous jigsaw puzzle. A hand is putting in the last piece. Camera moves back to reveal jigsaw puzzle spread out on the floor.

Susan is on the floor before her jigsaw puzzle. Kane is in an easy chair. Behind them towers the massive Renaissance fireplace. It is night and Baroque candelabra illuminates the scene.

*(We are dropping in at the end of the scene)*

> SUSAN
> If I promise to be a good girl!
> Not to drink - and to entertain
> all the governors and the senators
> with dignity -
> (she puts a slur into the word)
> Charlie -

There is still no answer.

DISSOLVE OUT:

DISSOLVE IN:

Another picture puzzle - Susan's hands fitting in a missing piece.
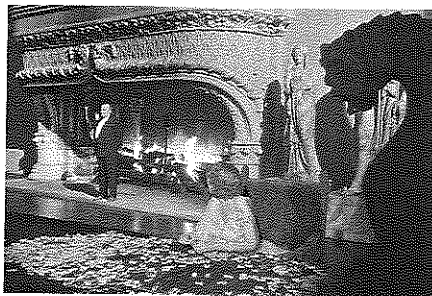
DISSOLVE:

Another picture puzzle - Susan's hands fitting in a missing piece.

DISSOLVE:

INT. XANADU - LIVING ROOM - DAY - 1928

Another picture puzzle.

Camera pulls back to show Kane and Susan in much the same positions as before, except that they are older.
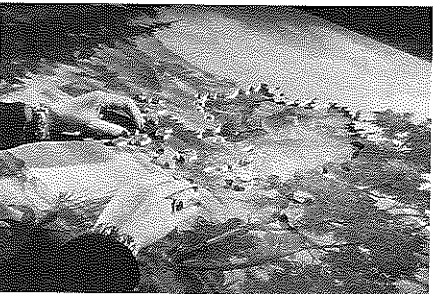


1.



2.



3.



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## 18. Film Element: Montage

Character-driven movies often fail to enlist cinematic tools defaulting to dialog instead. The scripts appear more like "radio plays" or what Hitchcock has called "talking photographs." But there are many character-driven films like *The Piano*, *American Beauty*, and *Time of the Gypsies* that succeed beautifully. These films, like Charlie Kaufman's *Adaptation*, use the full complement of cinematic tools available.

### Film Example: *Adaptation*

Charlie Kaufman's *Adaptation* opens on a black screen with a voiceover monologue, cuts to a scene establishing the character, and then returns to voice over which poses the questions "Why I am I here? How did I get here?" The question is met with a sweeping cinematic montage that immediately sets up tone and conflict. The montage takes us through the great evolutionary achievements of nature and of man. Finally we arrive at the last stage of evolutionary progression — Charlie Kaufman dining in an L.A. restaurant.

### Dramatic Value

The montage gives the film a spectacular visual complement to the intelligence of the opening voice over and the introductory scene. It depicts the scope of the protagonist's historical and philosophical continuum and the impossible standard against which he will evaluate the meaning of his life. Right off the bat, we are given a clear picture of just how high the cards are stacked against the protagonist finding the answers he needs.

### Script Note

The script excerpt is taken from a November 21, 2000 draft. In this draft the montage appears in Act Two, much later in the film.

### Other Films

*Apocalyse Now* (opening thematic montage)

*Falling Down* (opening thematic montage)

## Adaptation (2002) (Page 41, Scene 62)

Screenplay: Charlie Kaufman and Donald Kaufman, Draft:
November 21, 2000.

Adapted from the book, *The Orchard Thief* by Susan Orlean.

### MONTAGE

This sequence shows the entire history of mankind from a
world sparsely populated with primitive hunter gathers to
today's overcrowded technological society. We see the history
of architecture, war, religion, commerce. We see murder and
procreation. We see man interacting with his environment:
farming, eating meat, admiring a view. We see old age and
birth. We see it again and again at dizzying speed. We see
Laroche as a child alone with his turtles. We see Orlean
as a child alone with her diary. We see Alice serving food,
smiling at customers. We finish on sad Kaufman getting into
his car and leaving the Santa Barbara Orchid Show. The entire
sequence takes two minutes.

1.

Hollywood, CA
Four Billion And Forty Years Earlier

2.

3.

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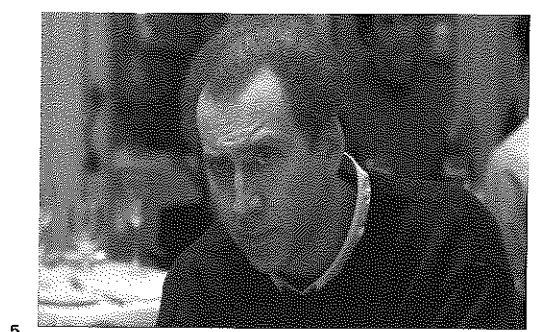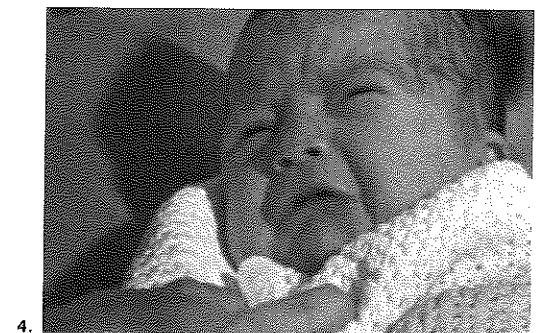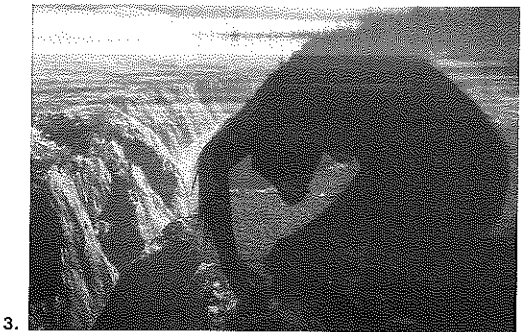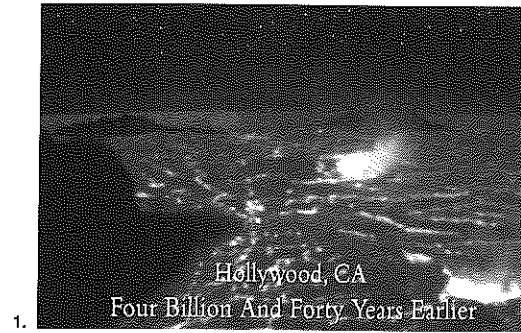
## 19. Film Element: Assembly

Assembly editing is a term that Alfred Hitchcock used in referring to the kind of editing used in *Psycho's* shower scene. In this case assembly means the creative construction of a scene through the assembly of separate pieces of film. The resulting scene being a kind of mosiac of shots producing a larger idea.

### Film Example: *Psycho*

Cutting, as Hitchcock said in his 1959 televised interview for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, is a kind of severance (Hitchcock). It is also a kind of assembly.

In *Psycho*, Hitchcock intentionally differentiates the film's two murders by editing choices.

### Shower Scene
In the shower scene, Hitchcock's purpose is to first shock us with the event of a murder and then horrify us with its brutality. In a rapid succession of cuts, 78 in 45 seconds, Hitchcock takes us past the shower curtain into the stall giving us the POV of the murderer. It's almost as though Hitchcock's exaggerated use of cutting intentionally refers back to the cutting of the victim.

### Stairwell Scene
The second murder is shot and edited entirely differently. The focus is not on the brutality of the murderer, as we have already seen that. The focus is on whether or not the victim will be killed. Consequently, it's a suspense scene with our attention directed on the minutes preceding the murder, not the murder. In the second murder, the shots are long takes. Once the audience and the victim realize that the victim is about to be killed, the scene is over. Despite the fact that the methods of both murders were identical, the editing generates two entirely different emotional responses.

### Dramatic Value
Editing can guide the emotional response of the viewer by choosing how to parcel out the event in shots over time.

### Script Note
The script excerpt from the "shower scene" is included to show how highly stylized editing can be suggested without disrupting the mounting suspense.

### Other Films
*Metropolis* (dream sequence)

## *Psycho* (1960) (Shower Scene)

Screenplay: Joseph Stephano. Revised Draft, Dec. 1, 1959.
Novel: Robert Bloch.

INT. MARY IN SHOWER

Over the bar on which hangs the shower curtain, we can see the bathroom door, not entirely closed. For a moment we watch Mary as she washes and soaps herself.

There is still a small worry in her eyes, but generally she looks somewhat relieved.

Now we see the bathroom door being pushed slowly open.

The noise of the shower drowns out any sound. The door is then slowly and carefully closed.

And we see the shadow of a woman fall across the shower curtain. Mary's back is turned to the curtain. The white brightness of the bathroom is almost blinding.

Suddenly we see the hand reach up, grasp the shower curtain, rip it aside.

CUT TO:

MARY - ECU

As she turns in response to the feel and SOUND of the shower curtain being torn aside. A look of pure horror erupts in her face. A low terrible groan begins to rise up out of her throat. A hand comes into the shot. The hand holds an enormous bread knife. The flint of the blade shatters the screen to an almost total, silver blankness.

THE SLASHING

An impression of a knife slashing, as if tearing at the very screen, ripping the film. Over it the brief gulps of screaming. And then silence. And then the dreadful thump as Mary's body falls in the tub.

REVERSE ANGLE

The blank whiteness, the blur of the shower water, the hand pulling the shower curtain back. We catch one flicker of a glimpse of the murderer. A woman, her face contorted with madness, her head wild with hair, as if she were wearing a fright-wig. And then we see only the curtain, closed across the tub, and hear the rush of the shower water. Above the shower-bar we see the bathroom door open again and after a moment we HEAR the SOUND of the front door slamming.

CUT TO:

THE DEAD BODY

Lying half in, half out of the tub, the head tumbled over, touching the floor, the hair wet, one eye wide open as if popped, one arm lying limp and wet along the tile floor. Coming down the side of the tub, running thick and dark along the porcelain, we see many small threads of blood. CAMERA FOLLOWS away from the body, travels slowly across the bathroom, past the toilet, out into the bedroom. As CAMERA approaches the bed, we see the folded newspaper as Mary placed it on the bedside table.



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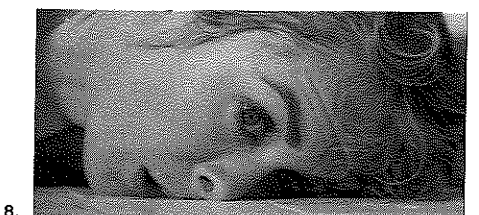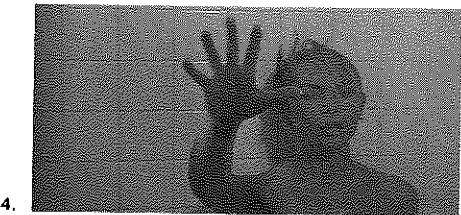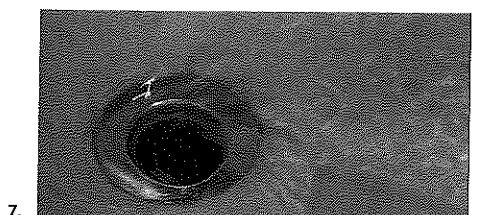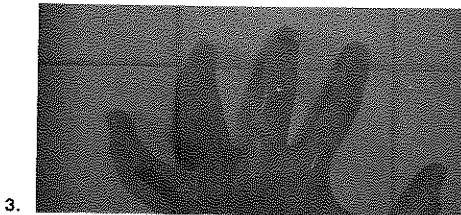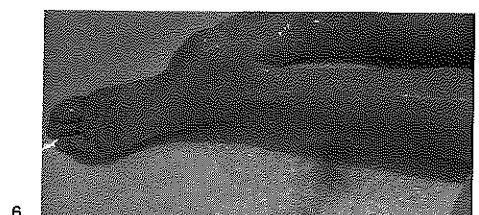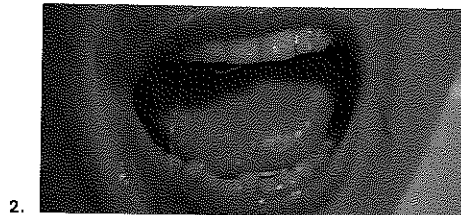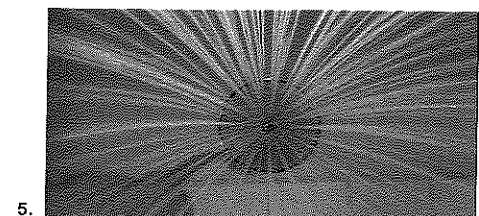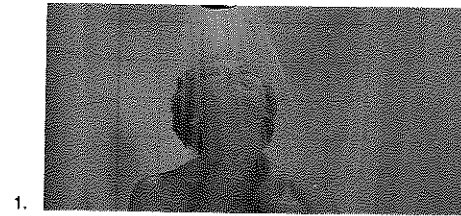
## 20. Film Element: *Mise-en-Scène*

*Mise-en-scène* is a French term meaning "putting in the scene," originally used to describe the physical production of the film. Today, however, mise-en-scène refers to a scene in which the action plays out in front of a continually running camera. New compositions are created through blocking, lens zooms and camera movement instead of cutting. The scene is shot in real time as one uninterrupted take that will stand on its own without the aid of editing.

### Film Example: *Psycho* (Shower Scene Aftermath)

Right after *Psycho*'s shower scene, the cutting changes to mise-en-scène. Now we see Norman rushing from his mother's house to the cabin where Marion was killed. Once inside, the camera moves with Norman as he paces back and forth thinking about what to do with the body. When Norman enters another cabin to retrieve janitorial supplies, the camera continues to roll outside the door, until he returns with a mop and a bucket. When Norman re-enters the cabin we watch in real time as Norman drags the body onto the plastic sheeting. This is followed by Norman mopping out the tub and finally driving off with the body. Hitchcock's switch to mise-en-scène achieves a number of things.

### Dramatic Value

Where the rapid assembly editing of the shower scene appeared constructed to add chaos and disorient, the mise-en-scène shots in the aftermath scene appear to return us to normalcy. The shots are long, smooth takes that spool out slowly in real time. However, the content sabotages any sense of relief. Seeing Norman carefully smooth out the plastic sheeting readying it for Marion's body, then sloshing her blood around the tub with a janitor's mop only serves to sustain our revulsion. We are supposed to feel soothed by the return to normalcy, but instead it heightens our fears.

### Script Note

Take a look at how effortlessly the script exploits editing technique but does not call attention to technical details.

### Other Films Using Mise-en-Scène Shots

*Rope* (entire film)

*Touch of Evil* (opening)

*The Player* (opening)

*The 400 Blows* (many shots throughout)

### Historical Note

Hitchcock filmed *Rope* (1948) as one continuous *mise-en-scène* shot. The only breaks in filming occurred when he stopped for necessary magazine changes.

## *Psycho* (1960) (Shower Scene Aftermath)

Screenplay: Joseph Stephano. Revised Draft, Dec. 1, 1959.

Novel: Robert Bloch.

EXT. THE PATH - (NIGHT)

Norman is coming AT CAMERA, running head-on. He dashes into an
extreme close up and we see the terror and fear ripe in his face.
CAMERA PANS as Norman races past, holds as Norman runs to the porch
and quickly along it and directly to Mary's room.

INT. MARY'S CABIN - (NIGHT)

Norman pauses a moment in the doorway, glances about the room, hears
the shower going, sees the bathroom door is open. He goes to the
bathroom, looks in, sees the body.

Slowly, almost carefully, he raises his hands to his face, covers
his eyes, turns his face away. Then he crosses to the window, looks
out at the house. Shot is so angled that we see the bedside table
with the newspaper on it.

After a moment, Norman moves from the window, sinks onto the edge of
the bed.

FRESH ANGLE - BEHIND NORMAN

Norman sitting on bed, the bathroom in b.g. of shot. We can see only
the hand of the dead girl, lying along the tile floor.

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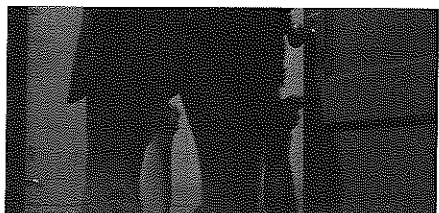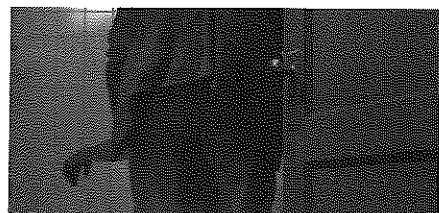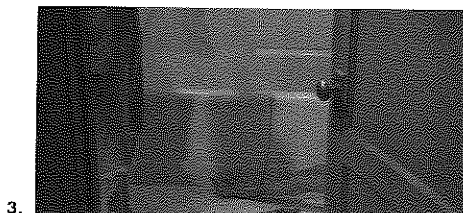
## 21. Film Element: Intercutting

*Intercutting* (also called cross-cutting) occurs when two scenes are shot in sequence, but presented by cutting back and forth between them. This creates a sense of two actions occurring simultaneously in two different locations. Frequently intercutting is used leading up to the climax scene in Act Three. Intercutting can also be used for other purposes. In *Cabaret*, winner of eight Academy Awards, intercutting is used at the end of Act Two to suggest change: in this case that of political climate. This is a tough abstract concept to convey without dialog. Here's how it was done in *Cabaret*.

### Film Example: *Cabaret*

Set in Berlin during Hitler's rise, we first see the freewheeling world of the Berlin cabaret. As the film progresses, the Nazi's presence strengthens until finally, it has taken over the culture. The change of political climate is suggested in a dance number that adds intercutting to the end of the scene to make the inferences less abstract and more particular.

### Part 1

The dance number starts like ones earlier in the movie. A kick-line of dancers perform, while the MC throws out sexual innuendoes to his audience. Then the change begins.

### Part 2

The dancers stop. Each tears off the flowers pinned to their hats. They spin their hats around. The hats change from flirtatious to militaristic. Their dance steps change from chorus line kicks to the goose-stepping march of the Nazis. The orange yellow saturated lighting associated with the era's expressionism and freedom drains away. It's replaced by a chilling blue fog. Then the film begins to intercut.

### Part 3

It cuts from the goose-stepping dancers to the home of a young Jewish woman. Each cut back to the woman's house steps up the brutality of the lawless thugs that have trespassed onto her property. First we see the thugs rush onto her gated property. Next, the woman stands bewildered at her doorway responding to late night callers who have disappeared. Lastly, we see her family dog lying dead on her doorstep. The brutal murder of her dog, grounds the abstract dance with a specific incident.

### Dramatic Value

The intercutting goes from the abstract to the specific. It immediately sets up the idea that the old world is gone, and a new one has arrived. The violence of the Nazi thugs has become the norm and will go without punishment.

### Script Note

The two scenes excerpted here were combined into one scene in the final film.

### Other Films

*Pulp Fiction, The Graduate, Thelma and Louise*

## *Cabaret* (1972)

Screenplay: Jay Presson Allen, First Draft June 7, 1970
Book: Christopher Isherwood, *Berlin Short Stories.*
Play: John van Druten, *I am a Camera.*

**INT. KIT KLUB - NIGHT (Page 21-2)**

CRASHINGLY LOUD BAVARIAN MUSIC - SHOW LIGHTS FULL UP

-KLUB AUDIENCE WILDLY ENTHUSIASTIC.



The MC, still in cabaret make-up, but now wearing shirt
and leiderhosen, is performing a traditional Bavarian
Slapdance... upon an unidentifiable GIRL PARTNER; he
smilingly administers face and body slaps in time to the
music. The comic violence of this dance should play in
juxtaposition to the inter-cut scenes of realistic violence.
Music cuts off on each quick cut to the mugging.

QUICK CUT TO:

MAX, being knocked to the ground, bloody, but silent still,
as the Nazis begin to kick him brutally.

QUICK CUT TO:

Shot of MC's feet in sturdy Bavarian boots as his feet
continue the rhythm of the slapdance.

QUICK CUT TO:

Shot of NAZI's feet, kicking MAX.

QUICK CUT TO:

Smiling MC, dancing, slapping, stomping.

QUICK CUT TO:

On the music's last beat, the YOUNG NAZI aims one

final kick at MAX, who rolls over in silent anguish.

**INT. KIT KAT CLUB - NIGHT (Page 105)**

The Kit Kat CHORUS GIRLS (about seven) enter the wings doing a typical "Tiller Girls" routine. Facing front, arms around each others' waists, unison kicking, etc. They are dressed in abbreviated costumes, revealing much flesh above their stocking tops and at the cleavage. Suddenly we are aware that one of the girls is the M.C.

(Note: This will be a version of the very effective number from the show in which the M.C. reveals himself to be a transvestite.)

As the dance begins to fall apart, we hear the ominous sounds of military drums. The music changes to a martial version of "TOMORROW BELONGS TO ME" as the M.C. and the GIRLS goose-step offstage.
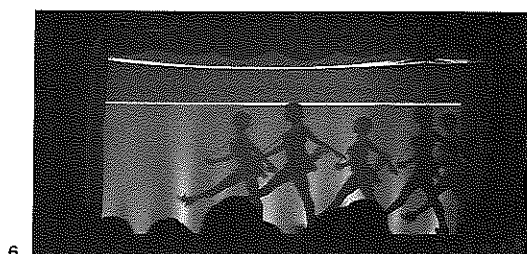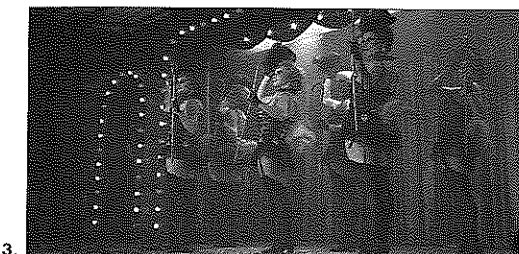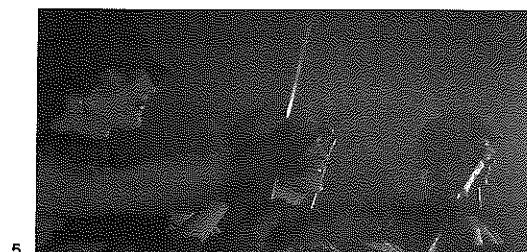
## 22. Film Element: Split Screen

A split screen runs two shots side-by-side within a single frame. Like intercutting, a split screen creates the idea of simultaneous action. Split screen was a staple of the 1950s and 1960s. It was often used to depict phone conversations as in *Pillow Talk* that starred Rock Hudson and Doris Day. It was also used in classic horror films. Its use, however is not limited to genre. Recently Quentin Tarantino revived the split screen in his comic book–inspired film *Kill Bill Vol. 1*.

### Film Example: *Kill Bill Vol. 1*

Black Mamba (Uma Thurman) lies comatose in a hospital bed. In having unexpectedly survived a brutal attempt on her life, an assassin is sent in to finish the job.

As the assassin, dressed as a nurse, walks toward Thurman's hospital bed, the film switches to split screen. By using split screen we are able to see both Thurman lying unconscious in bed and the approaching assassin at the same time.

### Dramatic Value

Split screen can show two or more images on the screen at one time. It is most often used to suggest simultaneity, but is not limited to this. In this instance the split screen also suggests the imminent physical proximity of the victim to the assassin by having the two share the frame and appearing to almost touch. This serves to further heighten the suspense.
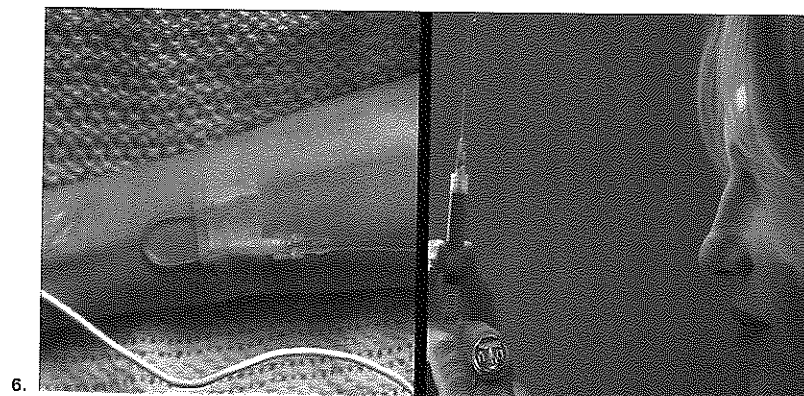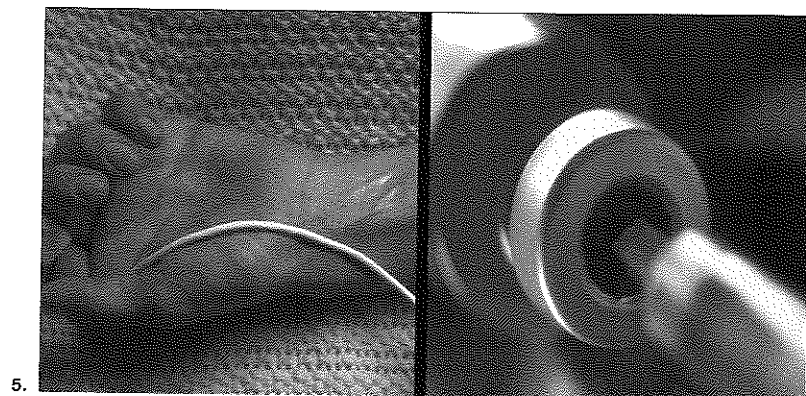
## 23. Film Element: Dissolves

*Dissolves* blend one shot into another. This is achieved optically by fading out the first shot while the second shot fades up. A dissolve softens a cut. Dissolves can be brief or extended depending how "soft" the filmmaker wants the effect to be. Dissolves have been a staple technique since the 1920s.

### Film Example: *Citizen Kane*

In the script of *Citizen Kane*, Orson Welles and co-writer Herman Mankiewitz use dissolves to convey the idea of enormity. In the opening scene, the camera introduces Kane's estate, dissolving twelve times. Each dissolve shows us a different part of the estate. This underscores its magnitude. The implication is that no one shot could have encompassed the massive grounds, so multiple shots had to be taken.

### Dramatic Value

A dissolves links two ideas together by blending one image into another. In this case multiple views of the estate are presented but remain connected by the use of dissolves. Dissolves offer endless dramatic possibilities. They are often used to show the passage of time.

### Script Note

Although twelve dissolves were included in the script, due to space, only two of the twelve are included here.

### Other Films

*Metropolis* (transformation of the heroine into an evil robot)

*Barton Fink* (arriving at the Hotel Earle, waves)

## *Citizen Kane* (1941) (Page 1)

Screenplay: Herman J. Mankiewicz and Orson Welles.

```
EXT. XANADU - FAINT DAWN - 1940 (MINIATURE)
```

Window, very small in the distance, illuminated.

All around this is an almost totally black screen. Now, as the camera moves slowly towards the window which is almost a postage stamp in the frame, other forms appear; barbed wire, cyclone fencing, and now, looming up against an early morning sky, enormous iron grille work.

Camera travels up what is now shown to be a gateway of gigantic proportions and holds on the top of it - a huge initial "K" showing darker and darker against the dawn sky. Through this and beyond we see the fairy-tale mountaintop of Xanadu, the great castle a silhouette at its summit, the little window a distant accent in the darkness.

```
DISSOLVE:

(A SERIES OF SET-UPS, EACH CLOSER TO THE GREAT WINDOW, ALL TELLING
SOMETHING OF:)
```

The literally incredible domain of CHARLES FOSTER KANE.

Its right flank resting for nearly forty miles on the Gulf Coast, it truly extends in all directions farther than the eye can see. Designed by nature to be almost completely bare and flat - it was, as will develop, practically all marshland when Kane acquired and changed its face - it is now pleasantly uneven, with its fair share of rolling hills and one very good-sized mountain, all man-made. Almost all the land is improved, either through cultivation for farming purposes or through careful landscaping, in the shape of parks and lakes. The castle dominates itself, an enormous pile, compounded of several genuine castles, of European origin, of varying architecture - dominates the scene, from the very peak of the mountain.

```
DISSOLVE:

GOLF LINKS (MINIATURE)
```

Past which we move. The greens are straggly and overgrown, the fairways wild with tropical weeds, the links unused and not seriously tended for a long time.

```
DISSOLVE OUT:
```



1.



2.



3.
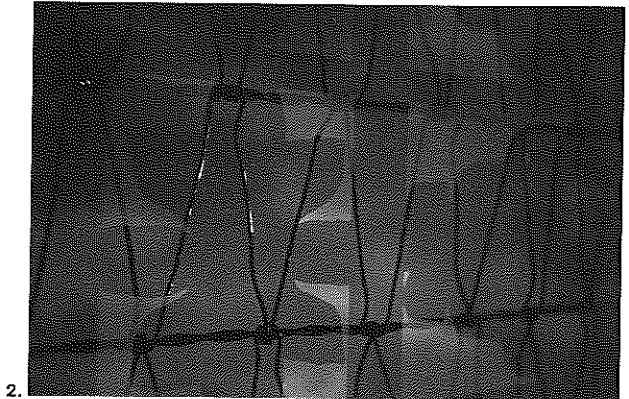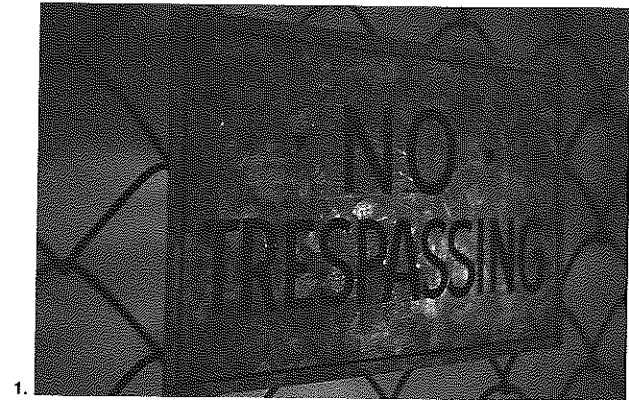
## 24. Film Element: Dissolves

As we discussed in the previous example, dissolves are created optically by blending two shots together by fading out the first, as the second shot fades up.

### Film Example: *Barton Fink*

*Barton Fink* opens with the success of Barton's Broadway play. In the afterglow of his success we see Barton in a heated exchange with his agent who urges Barton to go to California and "cash in" on his fame. Barton adamantly refuses not wanting to leave New York or the common man , which are the wellsprings of his creativity.

**First Shot**
The dissolve reveals the outcome of their argument: an iconic image of waves crashing in the sunlit Pacific Ocean. Clearly the agent has won. Then we see an extended dissolve blending the ocean imagery with an unexpected location: the creepy foyer of the Hotel Earle.

**Second Shot**
The second image is anything but Hollywood. As the slow dissolve plays out, the floor of the hotel seems washed with the ocean. Then the ocean imagery dissolves away and Barton is left alone. It's as though Barton has been ejected from the ocean into the worn foyer — a fish-out-of-water. The dissolve works to contrast the iconic image of California against the new reality in which Barton has found himself. It also serves to underscore Barton's status as an outsider.

### Dramatic Value

Endless dramatic possibilities. Often used in montages to indicate the passage of time. Dissolves also soften the cuts between images.

### Other Films

*Titanic* (see Film Element 50)

*Apocalypse Now* (introduction of protagonist)

*Adaptation* (opening montage)
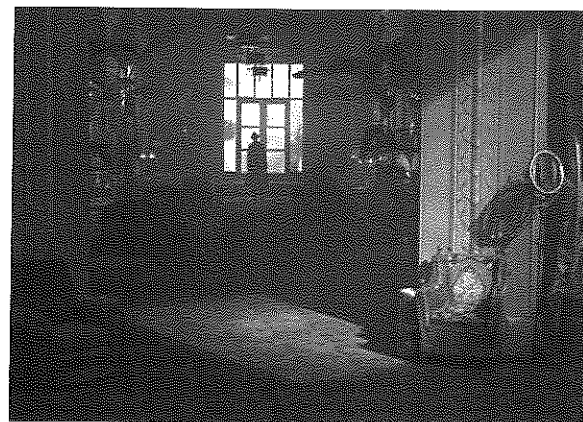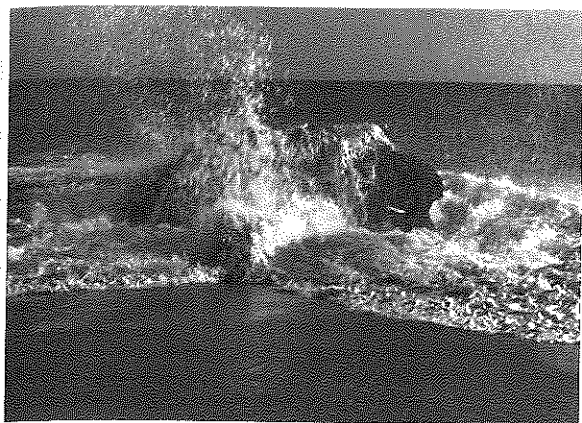
## 25. Film Element: Smash Cut

The purpose of a *smash cut* is to jar the audience with a sudden and unexpected change in image or sound. Here are two film examples of how a smash cut was created — there are many more methods used and many more yet to be invented.

### Film Example: *American Beauty*

In *American Beauty*, the writer, Alan Ball, employs both visual and audio smash cuts to introduce protagonist Lester Burnham fast asleep in his suburban cocoon. Although the visuals suggested by the writer were greatly pared down by director Sam Mendes, the overall story elements were left in place.

The smash cut is created visually by going from an aerial wide shot to a close up of a clock. It was augmented aurally by going from silence to the blast of an alarm clock.

### Film Example: *Psycho*

A smash cut can also be produced by cutting a wide shot against a huge close-up. The effect is like a loud visual bang. It jolts the audience by sabotaging their visual expectations. This was done in the stairway scene in *Psycho*. In this case it was also a high-angle.

Note: Another method is to splice a fast moving shot against a static shot. The audience feels like they are on a speeding train that just hit a cement wall.

### Script Note

Writers will sometimes specifically spell out their intentions by using "smash cut to" between the two images or scenes. However, oftentimes, the writer will just juxtapose the two images without cueing the reader.

### Dramatic Value

Like many other techniques, a smash cut underscores a scene. However, its purpose is to create a jarring, uncomfortable sensation for the audience. Used sparingly, it can be effective. If, however, the audience learns to expect it, it will feel hackneyed.

## *American Beauty* (1999) (Page 8)

Screenplay: Alan Ball, 4/1/98.

```
EXT. SUBURB - EARLY MORNING

----

The boy on the bike watches in admiration. the MAN
slowly floats by above him and tousles his hair. The
dog BARKS. The man continues flying, rolling on his back
like a playful porpoise. The dog keeps BARKING... and we
SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BURNHAM HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

We HEAR the harsh BUZZ OF an ALARM CLOCK. Vic Damone
still sings "I'M NOBODY'S BABY" elsewhere in the house.
Outside, a dog is still BARKING.
```



1.



2.

*American Beauty*

## *Psycho* (1960)

Screenplay: Joseph Stephano. Revised Draft, Dec. 1, 1959.

Novel: Robert Bloch.

```
INT. STAIRWAY AND UPSTAIRS LANDING

We see Arbogast coming up the stairs. And now we see,
too, the door of the mother's room, opening, carefully
and slowly.

As Arbogast reaches the landing, the door opens and the
mother steps out, her hand raises high, the blade of an
enormous knife flashing.

C.U. - A BIG HEAD OF AN ASTONISHED ARBOGAST

The knife slashes across his cheek and neck....
```



1.



2.

*Psycho*

# Chapter Credits By Film Element

**17. *Citizen Kane* (1941)**
Writer: Herman J. Mankiewicz (Screenplay) and Orson Welles (Screenplay)
Writer: John Houseman (Screenplay) (Uncredited)
Writer: Orson Welles
Director: Mercury Productions
Production Company: RKO Pictures
Production Company: RKO Pictures Inc. (1941) USA Theatrical
Distributor: Warner Home Video (DVD)
Distributor:

**18. *Adaptation* (2002)**
Writer: Charlie Kaufman (Screenplay) and Donald Kaufman (Screenplay)
Writer: Susan Orlean (Book: *The Orchid Thief*)
Writer:

Director: Spike Jonz
Production Company: Beverly Detroit
Production Company: Clinica Estetico Ltd.
Production Company: Good Machine
Production Company: Magnet Productions
Production Company: Propaganda Films
Distributor: Columbia Pictures USA (Theatrical)
Distributor: Columbia/TriStar Home Video 2003 (DVD)

**19. *Psycho* (1960)**
Writer: Joseph Stephano
Writer: Robert Bloch (Novel)
Director: Alfred Hitchcock  Production
Company: Shamley Productions
Distributor: Paramount Pictures
Distributor: Universal Home Entertainment (USA) (DVD)

**20. *Psycho* (1960)**
Same as above.

**21. *Cabaret* (1972)**
Writer: Jay Presson Allen
Writer: Christopher Isherwood (Book: *Berlin Short Stories*)
Writer: John van Druten (Play: *I am a Camera*)
Writer: Joe Masteroff (Musical: *Cabaret*)
Director: Bob Fosse
Production Company: ABC Circle Films
Production Company: American Broadcasting Company (ABC)
Distributor: Allied Artists Pictures Corporation
Distributor: Warner Home Video (USA) (DVD)

**22. *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003)**
Writer: Quentin Tarantino (Screenplay)
Writer: QI and U1 (Character of the Bride)
Director: Quentin Tarantino
Production Company: Miramax Films
Production Company: A Band Apart
Production Company: Super Cool ManChu
Distributor: Miramax Films

**23. *Citizen Kane* (1941)**
Writer: Herman J. Mankiewicz (Screenplay) and Orson Welles (Screenplay)
Writer: John Houseman (Screenplay) (Uncredited)
Writer: Orson Welles
Director:

Production Company: Mercury Productions
Production Company: RKO Pictures
Distributor: RKO Pictures Inc. (1941) USA Theatrical
Distributor: Warner Home Video (DVD)

**24. *Barton Fink* (1991)**
Writer: Joel Coen (Screenplay) &
Writer: Ethan Coen (Screenplay)
Director: Joel Coen
Director: Ethan Coen (Uncredited)
Production Company: Circle Films Inc.
Production Company: Working Title Films
Distributor: 20th Century Fox Film Corporation

**25. *American Beauty* (1999)**
Writer: Alan Ball
Director: Sam Mendes
Production Company: Dreamworks SKG
Production Company: Jinks/Cohen Company
Distributor: Dreamworks

# TIME

A film is a *dramatic* representation of life. It is made up of scenes ordered to represent the passage of film time through the assembly of edited shots. Film time is rarely paced as we would experience it. With the exception of mise-en-scène, most edited sequences manipulate real time. As soon as we cut from one shot to another we have the opportunity of altering the experience of real time. We can speed it up, slow it down, freeze it, or disrupt it. We can also move backwards or forward.

The reason filmmakers alter time is because they are creating a dramatic story. Only those moments that contribute to its advancement are included, all else is left out.

## Time Alteration within a Scene

Audiences have come to expect time alteration within a scene: A woman opens the door to a high rise. We see her briefly inside the ascending elevator. We then cut to her walking into a law office on the 35th floor. This is a staple editing technique to speed up time. Editing can also slow down an event by cutting to multiple reaction or insert shots. Both have become standard techniques that lend a lot of elasticity to a scene in terms of time manipulation.

## Flashbacks and Flashforwards

Where there is less flexibility is when time periods change from scene to scene. While a single flashback or flashforward is rarely a problem, the continual interweaving of different time periods throughout a movie is a lot more difficult.

## Limitations

By use of its narrator, a novelist can relay a character's reflections on his/her past or dreams of the future all in a single paragraph. Subsequent flashbacks to remembered dialog or imagined future actions can occur continuously throughout the story. This falls within the reader's expectations.

Unless the filmmaker borrows the novelist's narrator or uses extended dialog, it is extremely difficult to do this in a film. Cutting back and forth in time is usually too visually disruptive. Even if the filmmaker opts for narration or dialog-heavy passages, most audiences will soon get restless.

Despite the difficulty, flashbacks and flashforwards can offer a powerful tool. The following is a list of films that have used these tools to great effect.

## Recommended Movies

| | |
|---|---|
| *Citizen Kane* | *Sunset Boulevard* |
| *Titanic* | *Back to the Future* |
| *Sorry, Wrong Number* | *Groundhog Day* |
| *To Kill a Mockingbird* | *Raising Arizona* |
| *Midnight Cowboy* | *Run, Lola, Run* |
| *Out of Africa* | *The People vs. Larry Flynt* |
| *Dolores Claiborne* | *Adaptation* |
| *Cape Fear* | *American Beauty* |

## Recommended Study

Compare any novel, upon which a movie has been based, to the screenplay. Compare for example, the first ten pages of *Dances with Wolves*, the novel, to *Dances with Wolves*, the screenplay. Take a look at how much interweaving of time occurs in the novel. The narrator carries the reader

back and forth, recreating the protagonist's memories while at the same
time commenting on future aspirations. Then look at the screenplay. The
screenplay's narrator is completely absent during the first ten pages. There
are almost no references to the past or the future. The difference in how
these two formats use time to tell the same story is especially striking when
you consider that Michael Blake authored both versions. Comparing a novel
to its script version will quickly demonstrate how differently novelists and
screenwriters approach the use of dramatic tools.

The following films demonstrate different methods of using time dramatically.

## Film Elements

| | |
|---|---|
| 26. Pacing | *Barton Fink* |
| 27. Contrast of Time | *Pulp Fiction* |
| 28. Expanding Time | *Pulp Fiction* |
| 29. Slo-motion | *Raging Bull* |
| 30. Fast-motion | *Amélie* |
| 31. Flashback | *Sunset Boulevard* |
| 32. Flashforward | *The People vs. Larry Flynt* |
| 33. Freeze Frame | *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Thelma and Louise, The 400 Blows* |
| 34. Visual Foreshadowing | *The Piano* |

## 26. Film Element: Expanding Time through Pacing

As audiences we expect time to spool out as we experience it. Disrupting the audience's expectation provides a creative opportunity. Altering time can be done in a number of ways. In the following example, taken from *Barton Fink*, pacing is used to slow down time and externalize the protagonist's anxiety about his new environment.

### Film Example: *Barton Fink*

The Hotel Earle is the strange new home for recently arrived New York playwright, Barton Fink. The Coen brothers use the hotel to externalize Barton's discomfort in his new L.A. environment.

In the script pages that follow Barton, who is already ill at ease after registering with Chet, now enters the hotel elevator. Once inside the elevator, it's as though Barton has entered a parallel universe. Every action the elevator man makes is noticeably delayed. It's as though the elevator man lives in a different time zone where minutes and hours are generated from a different clock.

### Dramatic Value

This technique suggests that the world is disjointed and somehow off-kilter. It adds suspense without dialog, leaving the audience to fear what might lie ahead. It also suggests that the time alteration might not be real, just a projection of Barton's own anxiety. This helps to further represent Barton's inner turmoil. Changing pacing within a scene serves to separate a scene into distinct parts and/or characters into distinct worlds.

## *Barton Fink* (1991) (Act 1, Page 12)

Screenplay: Joel Coen & Ethan Coen, Feb. 19, 1990.

Barton is walking to the elevator.

ELEVATOR

Barton enters and sets down his bags.

An aged man with white stubble, wearing a greasy maroon uniform, sits on a stool facing the call panel. He does not acknowledge Barton's presence.

After a beat:

                    BARTON
          . . . Six, please.

The elevator man gets slowly to his feet. As he pushes the door closed:

                    ELEVATOR MAN
          Next stop: Six.



1.



2.



3.

## 27. Film Element: Contrast of Time (Pacing and Intercutting)

By intercutting two separate scenes, a number of dramatic effects can be created. For example, comparison is the product of intercutting in *Thelma and Louise*'s introductory scene where the career choices of Thelma and Louise are established. Later their character differences are further externalized when we cut back and forth as the two women pack.

Intercutting can also be used to quicken the pace and heighten suspense. Here's an example from *Pulp Fiction*'s prelude to its "adrenalin shot" scene.

### Film Example: *Pulp Fiction*

*Setup: Vince races to his drug dealer's house terrified that Mia, his boss's wife, is going to O.D. in the front seat of his car.*

*Conflict: Vince desperately needs his drug dealer's help. But Lance, the drug dealer, thwarts Vince at every turn.*

**Vince's Shots**
Vince spins into the scene driving his car toward the camera.

From here on Vince is seen in a tight close-up. His head fills the frame. He looks screen left and never changes his position. He looks like an unstoppable missile.

We then cut to Lance's house, where Lance, the slightly stoned drug dealer, munches on breakfast cereal while laughing at an old slap-stick comedy on TV.

**Lance's Shots**
Lance's shots are wide and loose and initially *mise-en-scène*. Lance's lackadaisical manner, coupled with his slovenly living room, makes the scene feel unfocused. Lance moves slowly in his bathrobe toward the phone. The wide shots and slow moments peak the suspense. Lance's slightly stoned manner and his combative nature further heighten the suspense.

We then cut back and forth between the two locations.

### Dramatic Value

Each time we cut to Lance's house Vince hopes for the right answer, but each time he is stalled by the visuals and Lance's reaction. This makes Vince more desperate, and Lance more combative. Lance's shots are long and the results and their outcome unproductive. Vince's shots are quick and tight, and visually commanding. The dramatic value of the intercutting is used here to step-up the suspense. Notice that the suspense is also augmented by other techniques like contrast in movement, length of shots, and camera angles.

## Pulp Fiction (1994)

Screenplay: Quentin Tarantino, May 1993.

Stories by: Quentin Tarantino & Roger Roberts Avary

26.    INT. LANCE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

At this late hour, Lance has transformed from a bon vivant drug dealer to a bathrobe creature.

He sits in a big comfy chair, ratty blue gym pants, a worn-out but comfortable tee-shirt that has, written on it, "TAFT, CALIFORNIA," and a moth-ridden terry cloth robe. In his hand is a bowl of Cap'n Crunch with Crunch Berries. In front of him on the coffee table is a jug of milk, the box the Cap'n Crunch with Crunch Berries came out of, and a hash pipe in an ashtray.

On the big-screen TV in front of the table is the Three Stooges, and they're getting married.

                    PREACHER (EMIL SIMKUS)
                    (on TV)
          Hold hands, you love birds.

The phone RINGS.

Lance puts down his cereal and makes his way to the phone.

It RINGS again.

Jody, his wife, CALLS from the bedroom, obviously woken up.

                    JODY (OS)
          Lance! The phone's ringing!

                    LANCE
                    (calling back)
          I can hear it!

                    JODY (OS)
          I thought you told those fuckin' assholes never
          to call this late!

                    LANCE
                    (by the phone)
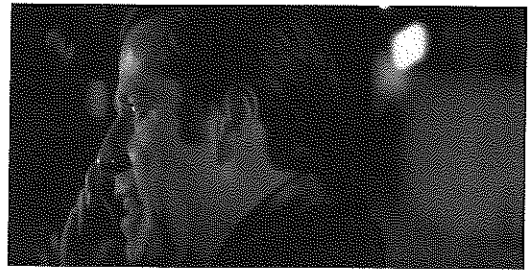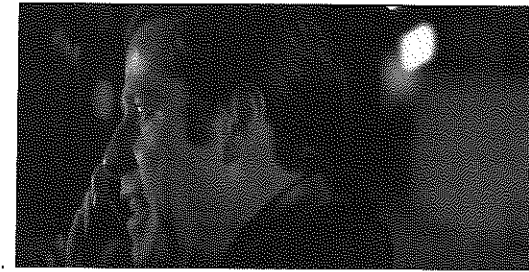          I told 'em and that's what I'm gonna tell this
          fuckin' asshole right now!

                    (he answers the phone)
          Hello, do you know how late it is? You're not
          supposed to be callin' me this fuckin' late.

BACK TO VINCENT IN THE MALIBU

Vincent is still driving like a stripe-assed ape, clutching the phone to his ear. WE CUT BACK AND FORTH during the conversation.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

## 28. Film Element: Expanding Time — Overlapping Action

Movies have rhythms made up of a number of variables, one of which is film time. Expanding film time by overlapping action can add great dramatic value to a scene. It can shine a light on a particular moment or an entire scene. It is often used to underscore important plot twists, climactic scenes, and pivotal emotional revelations. Expanding film time is conventionally used to evoke suspense.

One way screenwriters and directors expand film time is by overlapping the action. For this to work they need to design the scene with enough cutaways and reaction shots to cut to. In this way, time can be stopped by extending the time it takes for the moment to play out on screen. This is done by showing the audience the same moment from different camera angles and points of view.

### Film Example: *Pulp Fiction*

One of the most suspenseful scenes in *Pulp Fiction* is the "adrenalin shot" scene where Vincent stabs overdosed Mia, hoping to save her. If the scene had been depicted in real time, it would have taken about three seconds to play out. In fact the main character, Vincent, actually counts out the three seconds in the scene. Yet the filmed moment actually takes about forty seconds of screen time. This is thirteen times longer than the dialog suggests. Take a look at the scripted excerpt and see how Quentin Tarantino paces out this pivotal event through the use of multiple angles and reaction shots.

### Dramatic Value

By expanding time, Tarantino tells the audience that the scene is important. Time is completely slowed down in such a way that it's as though each shot is a breath. The audience absorbs the rhythm of the editing; breathing with Vincent, his anxiety becomes ours, as we watch Vincent prepare to plunge the needle into Mia's chest.

### Script Note

Notice in the scripted excerpt that each sentence is a shot. Without it being called out specifically, you can tell whether a shot is a close-up, medium shot, or wide-angle because of content.

### Other Films

*Psycho* (shower scene)

*Silence of the Lambs* (climax scene)

## *Pulp Fiction* (1994) (Page 62)

Screenplay: Quentin Tarantino, May 1993.
Stories by: Quentin Tarantino & Roger Roberts Avary

Vincent lifts the needle up above his head in a stabbing
motion. He looks down on Mia.

Mia is fading fast. Soon nothing will help her.

Vincent's eyes narrow, ready to do this.

> VINCENT
> Count to three.

Lance, on this knees right beside Vincent, does not know
what to expect.

> LANCE
> One...

RED DOT on Mia's body.

Needle raised ready to strike.

> LANCE (OS)
> ...two...

Jody's face is alive with anticipation.

NEEDLE in the air, poised like a rattler ready to strike.

> LANCE (OS)
> ...three!

The needle leaves frame, THRUSTING down hard.

Vincent brings the needle down hard, STABBING Mia in the
chest.

Mia's head if JOLTED from the impact.

The syringe plunger is pushed down, PUMPING the adrenalin
out through the needle.

Mia's eyes POP WIDE OPEN and she lets out a HELLISH cry
of the banshee. She BOLTS UP in a sitting position, needle
stuck in her chest -- SCREAMING.

1.


2.


3.


4.


5.


6.


7.


8.


9.


10.
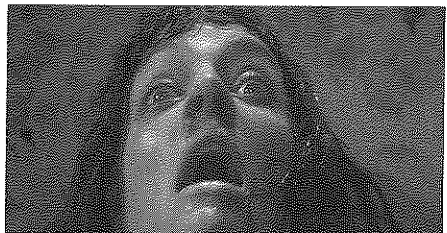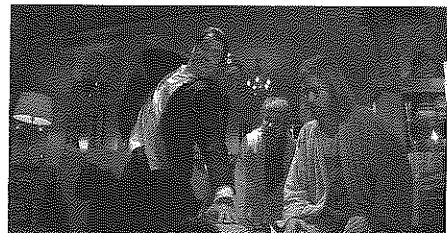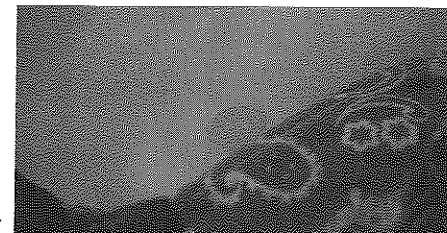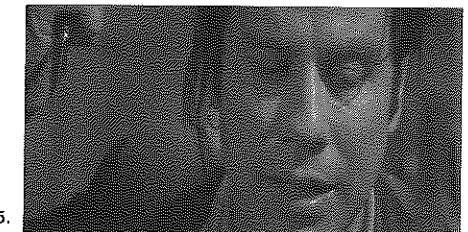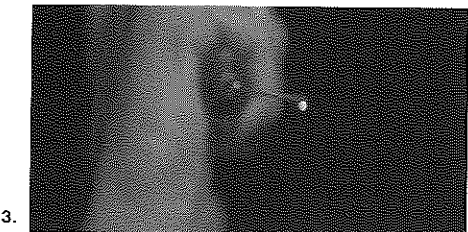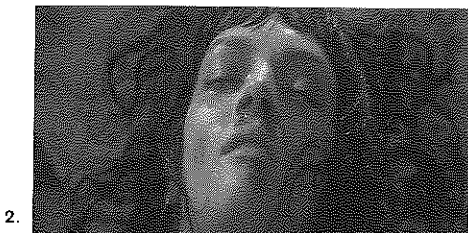
## 29. Film Element: Slo-Motion

*Slo-motion* is usually created in-camera by running the film through the gate faster than the standard 24 frames per second used to represent real time. This effect can create a number of heightened dramatic ideas.

One of the hallmark characteristics of slo-motion is that it can visually suggest two states of consciousness by contrasting it to real time. In this example from *Raging Bull*, it is used to separate normalcy and trauma.

### Film Example: Raging Bull

In Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull*, we go inside the ring with Jake La Motta to see the slo-motion brutality of the boxing world as Jake is pummeled to near death. The speed switches to slo-motion as Jake becomes weakened. The audience sees the world from behind Jake's eyeballs until the final blow is delivered.

### Dramatic Value

Slowing down reality is often used to show how a character sees the world when in the midst of a traumatic event. This draws our attention to the scene. When slo-motion is coupled with a POV shot it can greatly increase audience sympathy.

1.



2.



3.



4.
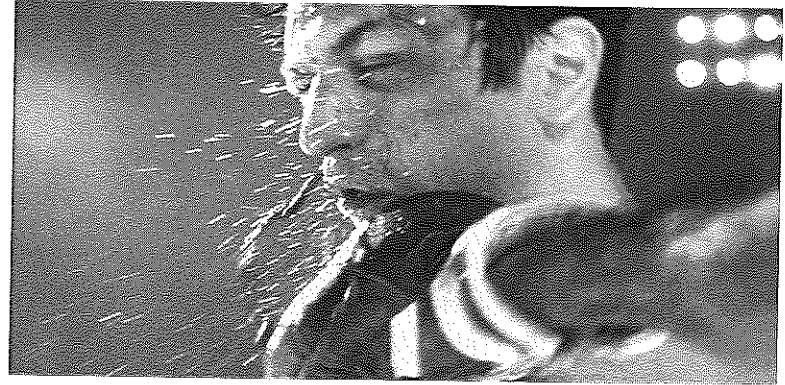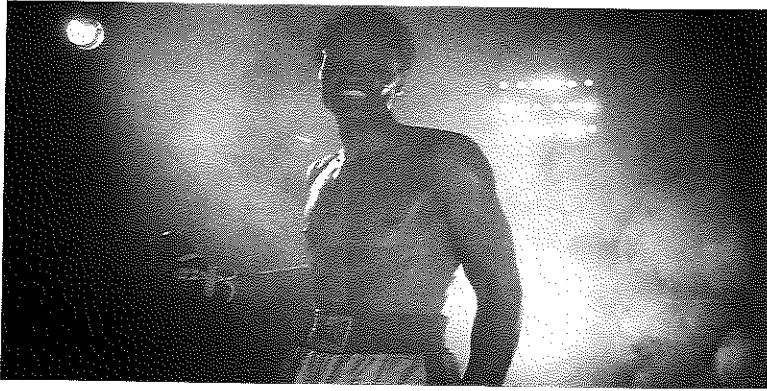
## 30. Film Element: Fast-Motion (Time Compression)

*Fast-motion* compresses reality by having the film pass through the gate at a slower rate than the standard 24 frames per second. As it breaks the veneer of reality, fast-motion scenes are immediately separated from the rest of the film. Consequently, fast-motion is reserved for those moments that need to be especially highlighted. Fast-motion is often used in comedy, but can also be effective in drama. The examples below are taken from two films: the first is magical realism, the second, a dark comedy.

### Film Example: *Amélie*

In Amélie, written by Guillaume Laurant and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Amélie is a whimsical character who anonymously meddles in the lives of others to bring them unexpected joy. As the film is shot in the style of magical realism, director Jeunet frequently uses exaggerated effects like fast-motion. In these excerpted frames Amélie forges a letter from her landlady's lover to help the landlady heal a broken heart.

### Film Example: *Requiem for a Dream* (not pictured)

In Darren Aronofsky's highly stylized film based on the novel by Hubert Selby, Jr., fast- motion is cleverly used to convey the shoddy treatment that protagonist Sara, receives from her doctor. The doctor approaches Sara in the outer offices in fast-motion. He simply ups her prescription and leaves. The effect of the speeded-up action underscores the doctor's inattention and the inevitability of Sara's descent.
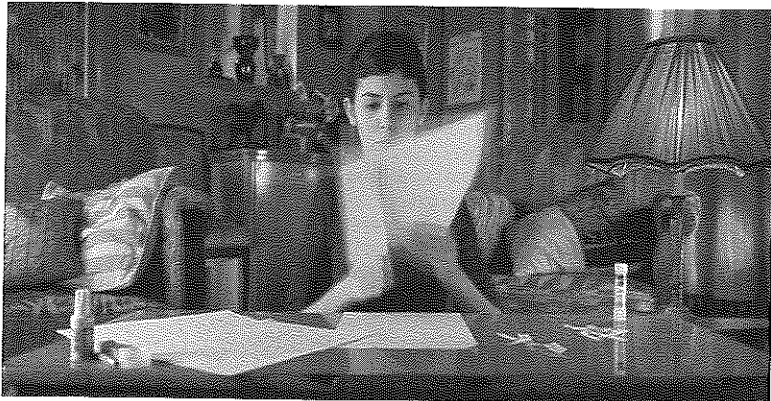
### Dramatic Value

Fast-motion both compresses time and separates the fast-motion scene from the rest of the film. For this reason it is used when emphasis is intended.
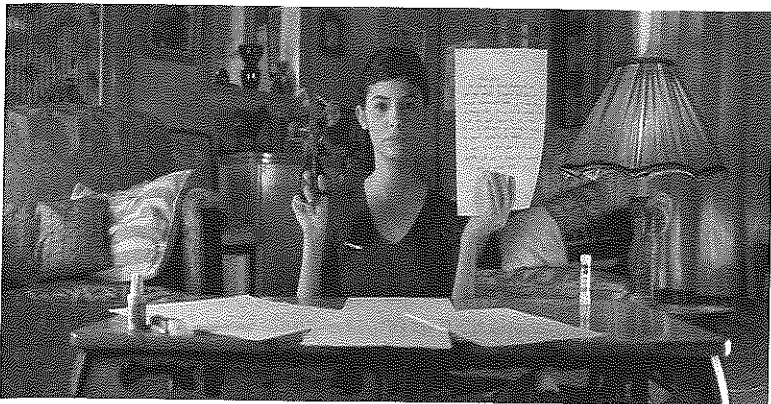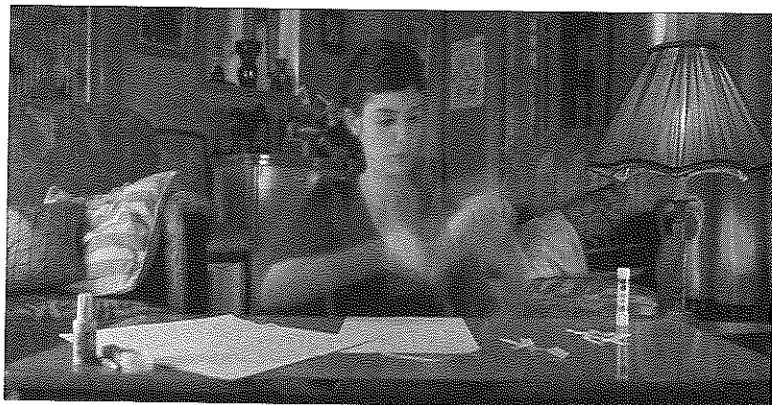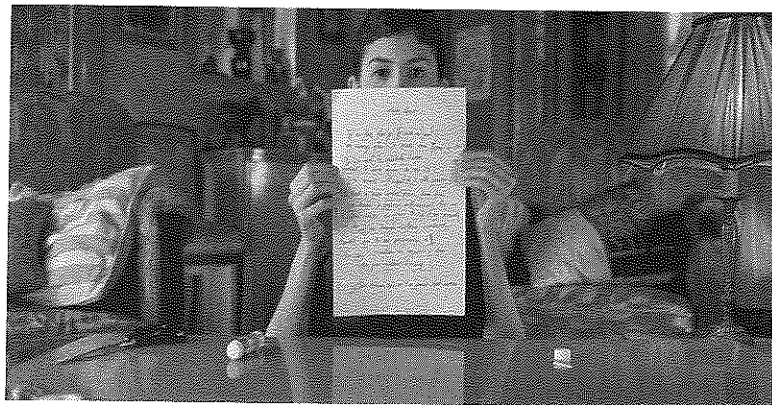
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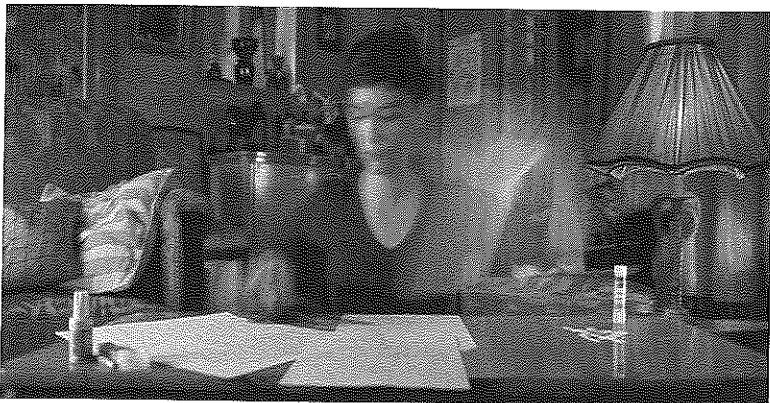


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## 31. Film Element: Flashback

A *flashback* is a staple technique in novels and plays. In movies it is used more sparingly as it risks taking us out of the forward-moving plot. The purpose of the flashback is to fill the audience in on important backstory. Many screenwriting books advise against them, arguing that flashbacks are an obvious catch-up device. It's true they are a "catch-up device"; in fact, that is precisely their function. Whether they are effective or not, however, depends entirely on their rendering.

Backstory is a very difficult problem for filmmakers. Without the luxury of the narrator there are limited ways to present the past. Flashbacks are one way to solve the problem.

The key to whether a flashback works is whether the flashback moves the plot forward. If it puts the film artificially on hold, is obviously dropped in the movie "just in time," or is aesthetically hackneyed, the audience will reject it. There are, however, too many beautifully rendered flashbacks to justify rejecting the device outright. The list below contains movies that use flashbacks. They represent some of the most acclaimed films in cinema history. Let's take a look at one such film, *Sunset Boulevard*, and see how it put the flashback to use.

### Film Example: *Sunset Boulevard*

In the classic film *Sunset Boulevard*, we first meet the protagonist by way of his voice over. He tells us that a Hollywood screenwriter has just died and the police are investigating. In a few cuts we learn that the narrator is in fact the dead screenwriter. We then meet the narrator. He is the corpse floating upside-down in a Beverly Hills pool.

The rest of the movie is told as a flashback from the dead screenwriter. His objective is to tell us how he came to his end.

### Dramatic Value

Backstory.

### Other Films

*Citizen Kane*
*Sorry, Wrong Number*
*To Kill a Mockingbird*
*Midnight Cowboy*
*Out of Africa*
*Dolores Claiborne*
*Cape Fear*

## *Sunset Boulevard* (1950)

Writers: Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder, D.M. Marshman, Jr. Script Version: March 21, 1949.

A-1
Thru
A-7

Start with sidewalk credits, music, camera moving
down the street as credits play out, then at finish,
pan up to street and see Coroner's hearse turning into
Norma's. Narration begins as credits finish and
Camera pans up, sirens screaming--

        GILLIS' VOICE

Yes, this is Sunset Boulevard,
Los Angeles, California. It's
about five o'clock in the morning.

cops,
hearse,
bike cops,
all turning
into driveway…

    That's the homicide squad. Complete
with detectives and newspapermen.
    A murder has been reported from one
of those great, big houses in the
ten thousand block. You'll read
about it in the late editions. I'm
sure. You'll get it over your
radios, and see it on television.

EXT. NORMA'S
cops arriving,
drive up to
house, men
getting out,
camera pans
as they walk
around to
the pool…

Because an old time star is involved.
One of the biggest. But before
you hear it all distorted, and blown
    out of proportions. Before those
Hollywood columnists get their hands
on it, maybe you'd like to hear the
facts, the whole truth. If so, you've
come to the right party. You see the
body of a young man was found floating
in the pool of her mansion. With
two shots in his back, and one in

UNDERWATER
SHOT OF GILLIS
face down in
pool, flashing
pictures taken
from above…

    his stomach. Nobody important really,
just a movie writer, with a couple
of B-pictures to his credit. The
poor dope, he always wanted a pool.
Well, in the end he got himself a
pool, only the price turned out to
be a little high. Let's go back

DISSOLVE:
EXT. GILLLIS'
APT. IN
HOLLYWOOD

    about six months and find the day
when it all started. I was living
in an apartment house above Franklin
and Ivar. Things were tough at the
moment. I hadn't worked in a studio
for a long time. So I sat there grinding
out original stories. Two a week.
Only I seemed to have lost my touch. All I
know is, they didn't sell.

1. 

2.

## 32. Film Element: Flashforward

A *flashforward* is a cut to the future. We can start in the past and flashforward to the present, or start in the present and flashforward to the future, real or imagined. A flashforward is typically assisted with a slow dissolve to prepare the audience for the time change.

In *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, writers Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski deliver an original take on the convention that's both organic to the scene and dramatically effective.

### Film Example: *The People vs. Larry Flynt*

In the aftermath of being shot, Larry Flynt experiences chronic pain. Deadening the pain with drugs, Flynt soon finds himself addicted. Soon Flynt's wife joins him and the two are unable to lift themselves out of their "narcotic fog."

The flashforward scene begins with the clang of their bedroom door slamming shut. In this case the door is a huge, steel security door with a locking system. Once locked, everyone, including the audience, is kept out. The camera remains on the door as a text generator scrolls through the months and years that pass. When five years is up, the door reopens.

### Dramatic Value

The flashforward not only tells us that time has passed, but also characterizes the passage of time for the audience. It's a brilliant economic and story-advancing use of the device.

### Script Note

For a superb example of a script treatment, see the published version of *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (Newmarket Shooting Script Series, 1996.) The treatment, originally sent to Oliver Stone in the form of a letter, is brilliant in its economy and its ability to convey, in a brief three pages, how the movie will play on the screen. Writers Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewki have given their readers an invaluable template with which to conquer the difficult task of treatment writing.

### *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (1996)

Screenplay: Scott Alexander & Larry Karaszewski, Revised First Draft, 1994.

```
INT. BEDROOM

- - - -

ANGLE - ALTHEA
```

No reply. She listens to the miserable wailing. Althea stares at Larry, then at the needle in her hand.

She thinks, then refills the syringe and rolls up her own sleeve. Althea injects herself. As the drug consumes her body, she starts shivering uncontrollably. Althea climbs into bed and lies down next to Larry…

A pause, then she reaches over and hits a BUTTON.

OUTSIDE THE BEDROOM

A hulking 500-pound STEEL DOOR swings shut and locks with a thud.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

The vaultlike door is still closed.

A SUPER appears: "FIVE YEARS LATER. 1983

INT. BEDROOM

The room has become a chamber of horrors: Dirty, dark, and clammy. Years of insane drug use have aged Althea and Larry beyond belief: Larry looks wasted and put on a bloated 50 pounds. Althea is gaunt, haggard, and a punked-out junkie. She wears a nose ring, and track marks run up and down her arms.

They converse in an incoherent, narcotic fog.



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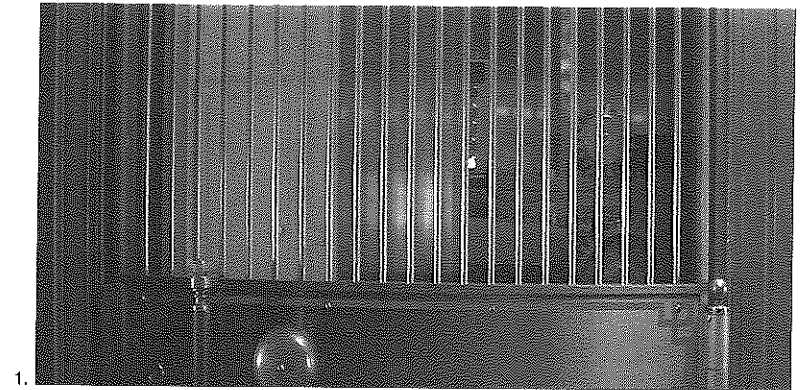
## 33. Film Element: Freeze-Frame

A *freeze-frame* is created when a single frame appears "frozen" on the screen. This is achieved by repeatedly reprinting the frame, then letting it play out over time. In separating one image from the rest of the moving images, and having the audience view the frame like a photograph, the image takes on an iconic air. In *Kill Bill Vol. 1* Uma Thurman's character is given a freeze frame when she recalls being shot. By freezing the moment, the audience is cued to take special notice of the content.

In the three films reviewed below, freeze-frame is also used for emphasis. In these films, the freeze-frame is used at the end of the film, leaving us with a single emblematic impression of the protagonist.

### Film Examples: *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Thelma and Louise, The 400 Blows*

In *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *Thelma and Louise*, the audience comes to love the protagonists who are most probably about to die. Rather than see their beloved characters face the final moments of their life, the writers/directors freeze the characters, so they can live forever.

The same technique is used in *The 400 Blows*, where the young protagonist has just run away from reform school. Having used all available options, he heads for the beach. Rather than see him further brutalized by his circumstances, the film leaves us with his frozen image.

### Dramatic Value

By halting the image, the freeze-frame suspends a character or action in time. Though we may suspect what will happen next, we won't ever know. The event will never unfold, and the characters will never grow, change — or die. In freezing the characters, it protects them from time. When placed at the end of the movie, it gives the audience a final visual picture, a kind of emblematic summary to take away with them.

### Other Films

*Blood Simple* (final shot)

*Kill Bill Vol. 1* (moment of realization)

## *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969)

Screenplay: William Goldman, 1969.

```
CLOSE-UP - THE CAPTAIN

Over and over as he gestures forward toward the tiny room
where Butch and Sundance are:

                    CAPTAIN
            Ataque-Ataque-Ataque-

Cut to:

One group of men, vaulting the wall, moving forward and
quickly.

Cut to:

Another group of men and another, all of them vaulting the
wall and starting to run and-

Cut to:

CLOSE-UP - BUTCH and SUNDANCE

The Camera freezes them. And as it does, a tremendous
fusilage of shots is heard, then another, even louder, and
more and more shots, building its tempo and sound. The shots
continue to sound.

Butch and Sundance remain frozen.

Final fade-out

THE END
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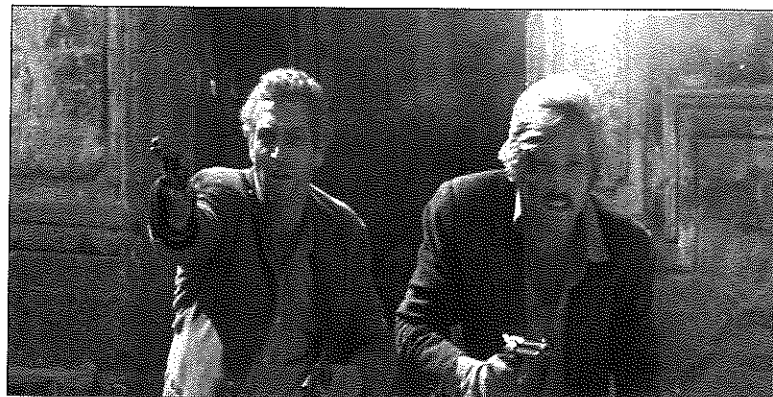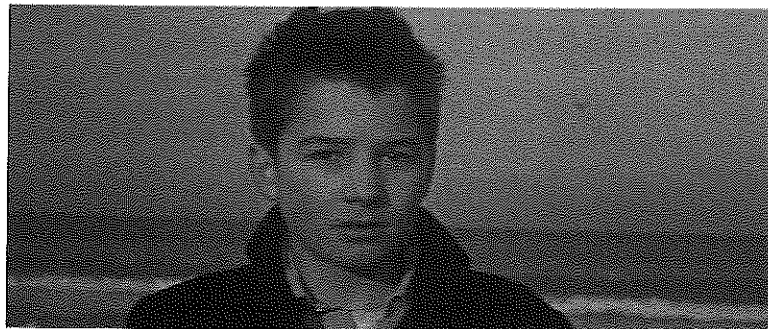


*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*



*Thelma and Louise*



*The 400 Blows*

## 34. Film Element: Visual Foreshadowing

*Visual foreshadowing* is when a visual symbol, planted early, suggests an action that will take place later in the film. Here's how it was used in Jane Campion's *The Piano*.

### Film Example: *The Piano*

At the end of Act Two, Ada, the female protagonist in Jane Campion's *The Piano*, is punished for betraying her husband. Her husband takes an ax and chops off one of Ada's fingers.

The brutal scene is foreshadowed earlier in the film in a shadow play. At the end of Act One, a local Reverand and Ada's sisters-in-law participate in rehearsing a shadow play. The play's action mimics the later plot point almost identically in shadows.

Though the first scene sets up the foreshadowing, the audience is only cognizant of it when the second scene provides the pay off.

### Dramatic Value

Foreshadowing sets up expectations in the audience. In this case the play sets up both the physical action and the societal values that will be called up later in the film.

### Other Films

*Back to the Future* (clocks in opening scene)

## The Piano (1993)

Screenplay: Jane Campion, 4th Draft 1991.

Sc 59    INT    MISSION HOUSE    NIGHT

Inside the REVEREND is closely watched by STEWART, AUNT MORAG and
NESSIE as he cuts out the shape of an axe from a piece of marbled
cardboard. A lamplight flickers warm tones across their faces while
the rest of the room is dark giving it a conspiratorial air.

                    REVEREND
          Nessie, your hand out ... out
          here, please.

                    NESSIE
          Oh, no use Mr. Stewart, I can't
          act.

                    REVEREND
          Nessie, please.

NESSIE hesitatingly puts her arm out towards him and the REVEREND
chops away in the air two feet in front other, NESSIE looks at AUNT
MORAG puzzled.

                    REVEREND
          Look you are being attacked!

The REVEREND points to the opposite rose-papered wall, where his
shadow and paper axe now look very real as they loom large above the
crouching NESSIE chopping into her. NESSIE squeals, as does MARY.

                    REVEREND
          And with the blood ... it will
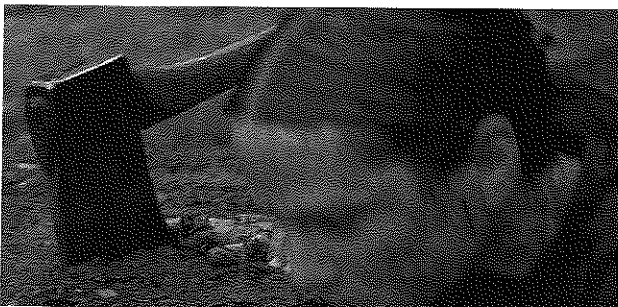          be a good effect:

Sc 60    INT    BAINES' HUT    DAY

ADA's finger plays the fourth black key from the left hand side,
denoting lesson four.



1.



2.



3.

# Chapter Credits By Film Element

**26. *Barton Fink* (1991)**
| | |
|---|---|
| Writer: | Joel Coen (Screenplay) & |
| Writer: | Ethan Coen (Screenplay) |
| Director: | Joel Coen |
| Director: | Ethan Coen (Uncredited) |
| Production Company: | Circle Films Inc. |
| Production Company: | Working Title Films |
| Distributor: | 20th Century Fox Film Corporation |

**27. *Pulp Fiction* (1994)**
| | |
|---|---|
| Writer: | Quentin Tarantino (Screenplay) |
| Writer: | Quentin Tarantino (Stories) & |
| Writer: | Robert Avary (Stories) |
| Director: | Quentin Tarantino |
| Production Company: | A Band Apart |
| Production Company: | Jersey Films |
| Production Company: | Miramax Films |
| Distributor: | Miramax Home Entertainment (USA) (DVD) |

**28. *Pulp Fiction* (1994)**
Same as above.

**29. *Raging Bull* (1980)**
| | |
|---|---|
| Writer: | Paul Shrader (Screenplay) & |
| Writer: | Mardik Martin (Screenplay) |
| Writer: | Jake La Motta (Book) & |
| Writer: | Joseph Carter (Book) & |
| Writer: | Peter Savage (Book) |
| Director: | Martin Scorsese |
| Production Company: | Chartoff-Winkler Productions |
| Distributor: | United Artists |
| Distributor: | MGM Home Entertainment (USA) (DVD) |

**30. *Amélie* (2001)**
| | |
|---|---|
| Writer: | Guillame Laurant, Jean-Pierre Jeunet (Screenplay) |
| Writers: | Guillame Laurant, Jean-Pierre Jeunet (Story) |
| Director: | Jean-Pierre Jeunet |
| Production Company: | Filmstiftung Nordhein-Westfalen |
| Production Company: | France 3 Cinema |
| Production Company: | La Sofica Sofinergie 5 |
| Production Company: | Le Studio Canal+ |
| Production Company: | MMC Independent GmblH |
| Production Company: | Tapioca Films |
| Production Company: | UGC Images |
| Production Company: | Victories Productions |
| Distributor: | Miramax |

**31. *Sunset Boulevard* (1950)**
| | |
|---|---|
| Writer: | Charles Brackett (Screenplay) & |
| Writer: | Billy Wilder (Screenplay) & |
| Writer: | D.M Marshman, Jr. (Screenplay) |
| Director: | Billy Wilder |
| Production Company: | Paramount Pictures |
| Distributor: | Paramount Pictures |

**32. *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (1996)**
| | |
|---|---|
| Writer: | Scott Alexander (Screenplay) & |
| Writer: | Larry Karaszewski (Screenplay) |
| Director: | Milos Forman |
| Production Company: | Columbia Pictures |
| Production Company: | Filmhaus |
| Production Company: | Illusion Entertainment |
| Production Company: | Ixtlan Corporation |
| Production Company: | Phoenix Pictures |
| Distributor: | Columbia TriStar |

**33. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969)**
| | |
|---|---|
| Writer: | William Goldman |
| Director: | George Roy Hill |
| Production Company: | 20th Century Fox |
| Production Company: | Campanile |
| Distributor: | CBS/Fox |
| Distributor: | 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment |

**34. *The Piano* (1993)**
| | |
|---|---|
| Writer: | Jane Campion |
| Director: | Jane Campion |
| Production Company | Australian Film Commission, CiBy, New South Wales Film and Television Office |
| Distributor: | Miramax Films |