

**Pudovkin's Precept, Part 1:  
the 'Basic Method' of Filmmaking**

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## **Pudovkin's Precept, Part 1: the 'Basic Method' of Filmmaking**

The making of a film is the elimination of the unessential.

Robert Flaherty<sup>1</sup>

. . . clarity of vision is largely a question of attention and thus of exclusion, narrowing. It remains for the peculiarly alienating faculty of the movie camera to clarify and 'selectify' vision in a generally significant sense.

Parker Tyler<sup>2</sup>

Wasn't it Lubitsch who said there are a thousand ways to point a camera but really only one?

Anthony Mann<sup>3</sup>

In 1926, Vsevolod Pudovkin, a not-so-young Russian of 32, began to direct his first feature-length film, MOTHER.

Born on 6 February 1893, Pudovkin had early trained as a chemist, pursuing side interests in the theatre, painting and poetry. In 1920, however, while working as a laboratory technician, he saw Griffith's INTOLERANCE, having previously seen few if any movies.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Jay Ruby in his Introduction to his edition of Paul Rotha's *Robert J. Flaherty: a Biography* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), page 5.

<sup>2</sup> From Parker Tyler's "Hollywood's Surrealist Eye", a chapter of his *The Hollywood Hallucination* (New York, New York: Creative Age Press, 1944) reprinted as pages 72-79 of *Film: an Anthology*, compiled and edited by Daniel Talbot (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1959 [seventh printing, 1975], page 73.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by J.H. Fenwick and Jonathan Green-Armytage in "Now You See It: Landscape & Anthony Mann", *Sight & Sound*, No. 34 (Autumn, 1965), page 188.)

About that time [1920] I happened to see Griffith's great film, 'Intolerance'. In that wonderful work I saw for the first time the possibilities of the epic picture. Yes, Griffith was really my teacher. Later I saw 'Broken Blossoms', and I fell more and more under the spell of Griffith. My first three pictures, therefore, were really influenced by this great American director.<sup>4</sup>

This picture [INTOLERANCE] became the symbol of the future art of the cinema for me. After seeing it I was convinced that cinematography was really an art and an art of great potentialities. It fascinated me and I was eager to go into the field.<sup>5</sup>

Pudovkin applied and was accepted at age 27 into the State Film School and two years later joined Kuleshov's workshop, absorbing his prescient ideas. He worked on a quasi-documentary on Pavlov, the noted neurophysiologist, constructed a short comedy, CHESS FEVER, from footage taken on Capablanca's celebrated visit to the Soviet Union, and now, in 1926, was about to direct his first enacted film, MOTHER, written in collaboration with the dramatist, Zarkhi.

As shooting commenced, Pudovkin began in the evenings to draft two booklets as a contribution to a series of manuals on filmmaking for soviet filmmakers, one on The Film Scenario and the other on the Film Director and Film Material. Clearly, however, he was also writing to clarify for himself what he ought to be doing when directing a film, for he had little experience of constructing enacted continuities. (Remember: he had no idea of how Griffith had directed INTOLERANCE. Having subjected the film to intense frame-by-frame study, as Eisenstein and other compatriots were to do as well, all he knew was how the print of INTOLERANCE appeared.)

The booklets, sixty-four and ninety-two pages respectively, appeared while MOTHER was still in production and achieved enormous internal distribution.<sup>6</sup> A single-volume German translation soon followed, and by 1929 Ivor Montagu had translated the work into English under the title Film Technique, thereby securing world-wide attention.

Pudovkin had set out to teach filmmakers (and himself) how to make enacted films as powerfully as Griffith had done, employing a notion that he, in turn, had taken from his

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<sup>4</sup> From an interview with Beaumont Wadsworth cited in his special to *The New York Times*, 12 May 1929 (dateline, Berlin) entitled "Russian Film Expert: Pudovkin, Producer of 'End of St. Petersburg', was Inspired by Griffith."

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Jay Leyda in his *Kino: a History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: the MacMillan Company, 1960), page 150.

<sup>6</sup> According to Leyda, 7000 copies of the first edition of the second manual were printed in April, 1926, and sold at 50 kopeks each! See *Ibid.*, page 211.

teacher, Kuleshov, namely, that every art has a material that must be formed, and the material to be formed by filmmakers are pieces of film (that is, shots).<sup>7</sup> All of Pudovkin's examples, therefore, were drawn from within the tradition of constructing enacted films out of shots. Fortunately, however, the precept that Pudovkin advanced to assist filmmakers when designing their films could be applied far beyond the limits either of the tradition of enacted filmmaking within which he was working, the Kuleshovian notion of shots upon which he relied or the examples that he chose with which to illustrate it.

Consequently, Pudovkin's little book was to change irreversibly how filmmakers of every kind thought about filmmaking, as Newton's *Principia* had changed how physicists thought about physics (and I mean the parallel exactly). Whereas the diversities of their world had hitherto appeared beyond comprehension, accessible only intermittently and at random through a hodgepodge of maxims and rules-of-thumb, they now appeared within a cosmos, well-ordered and subject to principle.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "But a chance meeting with a young painter and theoretician of the film – Kuleshov – gave me an opportunity to learn his ideas, making me change my views completely ... All he said was this: 'In every art there must be firstly a material, and secondly a method of composing this material specially adapted to this art.'... Kuleshov maintained that the material in filmwork consists of pieces of film, and that the composition method is their joining together in a particular, creatively discovered order." (V. I. Pudovkin, *Film Technique & Film Acting*, translated by Ivor Montagu (London: Vision Press, 1968 [1929, 1933]), pages 166 and 167). I shall refer hereafter to this edition of Pudovkin's texts as FTFA.

<sup>8</sup> Jay Leyda was to remark, long after the publication of Pudovkin's writings, that it is "difficult, now, to believe that the articulate, assured voice in these booklets was that of a man who had produced almost no independent artistic work." (Leyda, op. cit., page 211) Why difficult? All over Europe at about the same time, young men and women of limited experience were advancing principles of physics, chemistry, psychology, etc., that were to shake the very foundations of our conception of the universe and of our place therein. Leyda's difficulty arose from a misconception as inaccurate as it is common, namely that principles must *reflect* practices. The truth, as Popper has always insisted and we now have no excuse not to know (though not enough do), is that practices presuppose principles, not the reverse.

A tale told by Montagu in 1953 indicates how influential the little book became amongst filmmakers:

... the other day a perfect stranger on an aeroplane, catching sight of my passport, introduced himself to me as the Hollywood producer of a current festival prizewinner and avowed his own entry-ticket and bible in the industry to have been that all-arousing book.<sup>9</sup>

Montagu's story, however, may well mislead readers into assuming that filmmakers influenced by the book in later generations were generally aware of the source of their inspiration. Unfortunately, this is untrue. Although every major director, cinematographer and editor in the western world was within a few years to be sequencing films in accordance with Pudovkin's precept, few had any idea who had first articulated it, what exactly had been said or what its scope and limits were.

What, then, did Pudovkin say? Before answering, let me sketch how uniquely important his achievement was to be by means of single example.

### **The Puzzle of the Master-Scene Screenplay**

Filmmakers throughout the world have relied for nearly three-quarters of a century upon the master-scene screenplay as the primary planning document when making enacted films, a tool so indispensable that no one, to my knowledge, has heretofore noted how oddly formed it is. Were Pudovkin's explanation of its format unavailing, the ubiquitous use of the master-scene screenplay would pass understanding, constituting a most perplexing puzzle in the history of filmmaking.

When composers wish to convey to instrumentalists the kinds of sounds they should like them to make, they rarely describe the sounds themselves but rather specify how the performers are to use their instruments to produce them. They write a score indicating for each instrument when, at what pitch and for how long and loudly it is to sound. A competent musician, by perusing the score and noting how the instruments are to be played, can then imagine what sounds will be heard. Composers must score their works rather than describe them, for sounds are unamenable to exact description. Even were such descriptions possible, it would still be more elegant to specify how the tools are to be sounded than to describe the sounds themselves, for music cannot be made without the tools.

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<sup>9</sup> From page 13 of the "Personal Memoire by Ivor Montagu" included as pages 11-18 of the prefaces to the 'Memorial Edition' of Pudovkin's *Film Technique and Film Acting*, translated and edited by Ivor Montagu (London, England: Vision Press Ltd., 1958; second impression 1969).

Filmmaking, like music-making, requires the skilful use of tools. The engagement of an audience with an event seen by means of an enacted film depends, as every filmmaker knows, on which shots of the scene were taken, edited and presented in what order and for how long, how the scene was lit for each shot, what film stocks and filters were used, where the camera was positioned and what lenses were employed. One might reasonably expect, therefore, that the primary planning document for an enacted film would specify, at a minimum, how the principal production tools should be used: which shots, for example, should be taken of which aspects of the event from which perspectives and for how long?, thus stipulating for the camera and lighting crew, at least, how they ought to perform.

Were one to think so, however, the appearance of a master-scene screenplay would be inexplicable. Let's look at how it is structured and what it does and does not say.

[Appendix 1 to this essay reproduces five pages from the screenplay of THE BIG SLEEP, written in 1944 by William Faulkner, Leigh Brackett and Jules Furthman, exemplary of the master-scene format that has with minor variations been the international standard for enacted filmmaking since the 1920s.]

Each scene is numbered as it appears, followed by an abbreviated designation of whether we are inside or outside the space in which we shall find ourselves. Then, without further ado, we are told what we would see and hear of what is happening in that space as an event unfolds within it. We are told, that is, what we would see and hear were we present in the space and free to attend to the event as it unfolds – but we are *never* told how we should attend to it! Save under exceptional circumstance, neither sizes or shots nor camera angles are specified (much less descriptions of lenses, filters, etc.). Indeed, no indication whatever is given of the aspects of the event to which we would be attending, in what order, from what perspective and for how long were we to be encountering it by means of film!

The event is described within the screenplay, that is, as if it were occurring in our presence, and we were attending to it, without it being filmed at all!

But how is that possible within a document designed to be used as the primary planning tool for making a film? How is it possible, that is, for filmmakers working within an art that depends decisively upon the aspects of an event to which we are enabled to attend, in what order, from what perspective and for how long, and thus, for example,

upon precise and accurate camera positioning, lens selection and length of take, to rely upon a primary planning document that specifies *nothing whatever* about any of them?

To this question, and to others of equivalent perplexity, Pudovkin gave the first and, as yet, only adequate answer that we know. He did so by recommending a precept that filmmakers ought to follow when designing films. The precept with its reasons constitute the first and only testable principle of general film construction ever advanced by any thinker, a principle to which, as yet, no intractable anomalies have been found.

### **Pudovkin's Precept**

Pudovkin never summarized his precept nor amplified the reasons behind it. We may nevertheless gather from a sampling of what he wrote how filmmakers reconstructed their common understanding of it:

The Foundation of film art is editing. ... I claim that every object, taken from a given viewpoint and shown on the screen to spectators, is a dead object, even though it has moved before the camera ... Only if the object be placed together among a number of separate objects, only if it be presented as part of a synthesis of different separate visual images, is it endowed with filmic life. (FTFA, pages 23, 24 and 25)

It is generally known that the finished film consists of a whole series of more or less short pieces following one another in definite sequence. In observing the development of the action the spectator is transferred first to one place, then to another; yet more, he is shown an incident, even sometimes an actor, not as a whole, but consecutively by aiming the camera at various parts of the scene or of the human body. This kind of construction of a picture, the resolving of the material into its elements and subsequent building from them of a filmic whole, is called 'constructive editing'. (FTFA, page 31)

Here we approach closely the basic significance of editing. Its object is the showing of the development of the scene in relief, as it were, by guiding the attention of the spectator now to one, now to the other separate element. The lens of the camera replaces the eye of the observer, and the changes of the angle of the camera – directed now on one person, now on the other, now on one detail, now on another – must be subject to the same conditions as those of the eyes of the observer. The film technician, in order to secure greatest clarity, emphasis, and vividness, shoots the scene in separate pieces and, joining them and showing them, directs the attention of the spectator to the separate elements, compelling him to see as the attentive observer saw. (FTFA, page 70)

[Constructive editing] builds the scenes from separate pieces, of which each concentrates the attention of the spectator only on that element important to the action. The sequence of these pieces must not be uncontrolled, but must correspond to the natural transference of attention of an imaginary observer (who, in the end, is represented by the spectator). ... The guidance of the attention of the spectator to different elements of the developing action in succession is, in general, characteristic of the film. It is its basic method. (FTFA, page 71)

One must learn to understand that editing is in actual fact a compulsory and deliberate guidance of the thoughts and associations of the spectator. If the editing be merely an uncontrolled combination of the various pieces, the spectator will understand (apprehend) nothing from it; but if it be co-ordinated according to a definitely selected course of events or conceptual line, either agitated or calm, it will either excite or soothe the spectator. (FTFA, page 73)

The greater part of the methods of editing a film yet known to us can be linked to this regarding of the camera as observer. The considerations that determine changes of glance coincide almost exactly with those that govern correct editing construction. (FTFA, page 115)

Pudovkin, unlike Eisenstein, was no intellectual. He had been trained as a laboratory scientist to work with things and only secondarily with symbols, and he wrote as he thought, generalizing from examples vividly described. He thus coupled concreteness with the unwitting certainty that careless readers unfamiliar with the rudiments of filmmaking, and even most filmmakers, would misunderstand his principle as being narrowly bounded by the examples chosen to illustrate it.

If we are to comprehend how profoundly Pudovkin thought about filmmaking, we must rearticulate what he said as broadly yet precisely as possible. Otherwise we shall be tempted to poke holes in his articulation rather than grasping his insights in their keenest form, missing the forest for the trees.

Our understanding of a profound thinker, like our understanding of the world, must come in waves. There is no moment of recognition, no conversion experience, when all that was dark becomes light. Instead, it is a progressive peeling away, piece by piece, of the clutter that obscures the thought, much of which we have brought to it. Pudovkin is a good example: to come to comprehend his ideas, accurately and with deepest penetration, requires (as he, a born teacher, well knew) an engagement with a preliminary account that must later be refined. The refinement to come could never be understood without the preliminaries; yet the preliminaries, without the refinement, misrepresent and distort.

What then, as a preliminary account, did Pudovkin do? He offered a precept, a guide to filmmaking through a *gedenkenexperiment* in which, in his opinion, all filmmakers ought continually to engage. The precept was to be misread by filmmakers and nonfilmmakers alike. The nature of their misreadings contrasted sharply, however, and if we are to understand Pudovkin's precept as he meant it, we must attend to the division between them, for only filmmakers came close to getting it right.

To filmmakers, Pudovkin appeared to be recommending a precept that could be summarized as follows:

If you wish, by means of a film, to enable viewers to encounter an event that will engage them intensely, answer the following question:

To what aspects of the event, in what order, from what perspective and for how long would you attend were you to witness it, earnestly but unobserved, if free to move instantaneously to any viewpoint in space and time as the event unfolds?

Then, by means of the tools of filmmaking, construct a film that will enable viewers to attend only to those aspects, in that order, from that perspective and for that duration.

So far, so good – and to the extent that Pudovkin's reasons for accepting the precept can be reconstructed from the examples upon which he relied to persuade, they compass four conjectures about how we must attend to things about us followed by a reminder of the capabilities of our cinemactical tools with which no quarrel need be taken.

(1) We are habituated, genetically and culturally, to attend to the events we encounter about us as reliably as we can, for our continued existence depends upon it;

(2) We are habituated, in particular, to attend only to those aspects of the events we encounter that require prompt conscious consideration, relegating the remainder to nonconscious peripheral registration;

(3) We can attend visually to things only by focusing serially upon them, aspect by aspect, for our eyes (unlike our ears) have lenses that must at any time be focused upon a single focal point before us to enable us to register events in the world;

(4) Whenever we attend visually to things about us, however, we are limited in our ability to attend differentially to aspects of them because we must be bodily present amongst them. We are constrained, that is, to attend to them only as a participant must, bound within our bodies with regard for our safety and survival, rather than as a massless, freely-mobile and non-participatory reactor could do.

To which we may add a cinematal reminder!

By using the tools of filmmaking, however, we can access events, aspect by aspect, as freely as a massless, freely-mobile reactor could, unencumbered by the constraints of the body that would bind us as participants, and hence with uncluttered perceptual accuracy and concentration, and consequent emotional engagement.

From these Pudovkin drew the crucial cinematic moral:

If, as filmmakers, we are to enable viewers to encounter events by means of film that will engage them most deeply and comprehensively, we must permit them by means of the cinematal tools to attend to those events, aspect by aspect, as a freely mobile yet attentive reactor would.

We *ought* therefore to practice the precept noted above, for it exemplifies the only comprehensive and as-yet unrefuted conjecture we know, both perceptual and cinematal, by which to do so most efficiently and affectively.

Pudovkin had suggested, in summary, that:

(A) We encounter events about us constrained by nonconscious perceptual habits that compel us to attend, insofar as possible, only to those aspects of things that are causally and comparatively important.

(B) By means of the tools of filmmaking, we can present events to viewers that not only permit identical shifts of attention and hence correlative affective and cognitive responses, but which can intensify those responses by eliminating unimportant aspects that would necessarily intrude upon our perception of them were we present amongst them as embodied participants.

The incipient power, range and promise of Pudovkin's precept, thus construed, were immediately noted by filmmakers working within the tradition of enacted filmmaking from which he drew his examples, and many others sensed, however indistinctly, that it would prove important to the making of their films as well.

Nonfilmmakers, however, have to this day been perplexed by the precept and its influence, especially those trained only in the arts of language whose tools may refer to but can never present things, and hence for whom naturalism, as Pudovkin conceived it, could never be an intuitively felt and yet testable option.<sup>10</sup> Some have considered the principle incomprehensible, others coherent but trivial or of only restricted use, for few could read him as filmmakers did, hungry for precepts by which to solve better the everyday problems of film design and construction. No wonder misreadings abound.

To understand how Pudovkin's precept influenced filmmakers pervasively, we must correct misconceptions of it that have become standard fare among nonfilmmakers, reaffirming the conclusions that he drew about the observations made, the observer making them and the events being observed. Only then shall we be able to attend fully to his conclusions, reaffirming others that even filmmakers overlooked.

### Shifts of Attention

Some readers, confusing seeing with attending, have presumed that Pudovkin must have been comparably confused and his precept flawed, for by means of a film, however well-photographed and edited, we never see things as we would have seen them were it possible for us to have been present amongst them. Pudovkin spoke often, indeed, of seeing things by means of film, and sometimes incautiously, but as his remarks in context attest, however, he neither said nor implied that we could see things by means of film as we should otherwise have seen them if present amongst them, nor that his precept was designed to enable us to do so. Rather, the aim of the precept was

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<sup>10</sup> The word 'naturalism' is Pudovkin's own. See, for example, FTFA, page 117, when, after describing and commending a sequence from Eisenstein's *THE BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN* that concludes with three short shots of stone lions, one sleeping, one with opened eyes and the last rampant, he notes that it could not "be brought into relation with the use of the camera as observer" for here "film passes from naturalism, which in a certain degree was proper to it" to a "free, symbolic representation, independent of the requirements of elementary probability." Pudovkin was right in his description and therefore wrong in his commendation of the sequence, for, as even Eisenstein's admirers were later to admit, it failed to serve the purposes for which it was intended and, as Eisenstein himself was later to explain, could not have done so because it did not *in context* permit us to encounter the stone lions *naturally* as they would have been encountered "in life itself".

to enable us, by seeing things by means of film, to *attend* to them as we could otherwise have done, a distinction transparent to every filmmaker.

Pudovkin, accustomed as a filmmaker to solving daily the cinematographic problems of exposure, contrast, inferred depth, etc., central to the task of presenting things by means of films, was aware that we see things by means of film differently than were we present amongst them. He knew as well as anyone, for example, that we see things grainily by means of film, often uncoloured or indistinctly or distortedly so, almost always 2-dimensionally and inevitably within severely restricted contexts of peripheral vision through framing. Nevertheless, he insisted, that we can see the same things by means of film, however differently, that an imaginary observer could have seen if present amongst them, and, by so seeing them, attend to these same things, aspect by aspect, as the imaginary observer would have done by changing glance.

Pudovkin was right on all three counts: we see things differently by means of film, but we can see the same things as an imaginary observer would have done and can attend to them comparably. Pudovkin thus distinguished the inexactness of seeing from the exactness of attending, placing the former in the service of the latter. The goal of filmmaking was to enable us to attend to things exactly, however inexactly we must see them.

Subtly but firmly, therefore, Pudovkin had taken the crucial step beyond his contemporaries that would enable him to understand editing. Griffith or the younger Eisenstein, for example, would have agreed with Pudovkin that the goal of sequencing a film is to order the cognitive and affective responses of the viewer.

One must learn to understand that editing is in actual fact a compulsory and deliberate guidance of the thoughts and associations of the spectator. (FTFA, page 73)

Only Pudovkin recognized, however, that an ordering of shots could affect viewers profoundly only if they were compelled thereby to attend naturally to things, not simply to see them. To edit a film, therefore, was to create a tool by which to compel viewers to attend serially to things from the varying perspectives from which an imaginary, mobile and aware observer would have attended to them, as Pudovkin's recurrent use of the verb confirms.

[The object of editing] is the showing of the development of the scene in relief, as it were, by guiding the attention of the spectator now to one, now to the other separate element. (FTFA, page 70)

The film technician, in order to secure greatest clarity, emphasis, and vividness, shoots the scene in separate pieces and, joining them and showing them, directs the attention of the spectator to the separate elements, compelling him to see as the attentive observer saw. (FTFA, page 70)

The sequence of these pieces must not be uncontrolled, but must correspond to the natural transference of attention of an imaginary observer (who, in the end, is represented by the spectator). (FTFA, page 71)

Succinctly and unequivocally, therefore,

The guidance of the attention of the spectator to different elements of the developing action in succession is, in general, characteristic of the film. It is its basic method. (FTFA, page 71)

Pudovkin's precept thus focuses upon the phenomenology of attention by means of vision, not vision itself. He insisted that filmmakers could use the tools of filmmaking to mimic how we should attend to things naturally were we able to access them as freely as possible, rather than how we should see them. He believed that we could see things accurately enough by means of film to attend to them precisely, and that powerful filmmaking depended upon putting the former in the service of the latter. As the history of filmmaking confirms, he was right on both counts.

### **The Attending Observer**

Pudovkin suggested that one had to mimic "the conditions determining the changes of glance" of an imagined observer upon an event to sequence films powerfully, for only then could viewers, seated and stationary before a screen in a cinema, be able to attend to the event as ably as the imagined observer could have done. As Pudovkin put it succinctly,

The greater part of the methods of editing a film yet known to us can be linked to this regarding of the camera as observer. The considerations that determine changes of glance coincide almost exactly with those that govern correct editing construction. (FTFA, page 115)

Pudovkin was addressing filmmakers seeking to understand better the art of filmmaking. He wrote as simply as he could, often admonishing them, as preliminary

exercises in developing their habits of thought, to imagine to what aspects of an event an observer of limited mobility, like ourselves, would attend. His goal, however, was to introduce them, step-by-step, to the art of imagining how a freely mobile human being would attend to an event, for this was the primary skill demanded of every filmmaker.

Lest he be misunderstood, Pudovkin, summarizing his core conception in a subsequent essay on film acting drafted in 1930-31, reaffirmed what he had meant. The imagined observer was to be

... an observer ideally mobile in space and time. (FTFA, page 254)<sup>11</sup>

To filmmakers, accustomed to the practices of the day, it was obvious that the imagined observer had therefore to be spatially mobile, for

In observing the development of the action the spectator is transferred first to one place, then to another ... (FTFA, page 31)

Pudovkin nevertheless went out of his way to show how a filmmaker, acting in accordance with his principle, might intercut between events *spatially* distant from one another, as Griffith had done, describing how a spatially mobile observer might attend to the approach of two spies creeping up on a guardhouse.

If we pursue the previous analogy between the camera and the observer, we now not only have to turn it from side to side, but also to move it from place to place. The observer (the camera) is now on the road shadowing the spies, now in the guardroom recording the confusion, now back at the magazine showing the spies at work, and so forth. But, in combination of the separate scenes (editing), the former law of sequence succession remains in force. A consecutive sequence will appear upon the screen only if the attention of the spectator be transferred correctly from scene to scene. (FTFA, page 72)

It was obvious to filmmakers, as well, that Pudovkin's observer had to be *temporally* mobile, for cutting to a scene occurring later than the scene just witnessed had been the standard practice of filmmakers since THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY of 1903, and flashbacks had become commonplace soon thereafter. By 1916, Griffith had even felt free within INTOLERANCE – the very film cited by Pudovkin as his model! – to cut recurrently backwards and forwards in time between events causally unrelated to one another. By 1926, indeed, filmmakers had become accustomed to using flashbacks and

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<sup>11</sup> Montagu's translation into English of Pudovkin's *Film Acting* was published in London in 1933.

flashforwards that, if powerful and engaging, corresponded to the shifts of attention of an imagined observer moving freely in time.

To filmmakers, therefore, the unfettered mobility of Pudovkin's imagined observer in both space and time were obvious concomitants of his precept, and his examples were construed as means to that end.

Nowhere had Pudovkin implied that filmmakers should restrict their mimicry to the conditions determining the changes of glance of an *immobile* observer, locking the camera in place between or during takes, and no filmmaker, to my knowledge, ever read him otherwise, for to do so would be to deny what he said and showed, and the context of the practice within which they worked.<sup>12</sup>

To this day, however, nonfilmmakers, serious scholars among them, have persisted in misrepresenting Pudovkin's imagined observer as immobile. David Bordwell, for example, an erudite and encompassing thinker, claimed that Pudovkin envisaged an imagined observer "rooted to the spot".

Continuity editing was implicit in Pudovkin's very example of a witness who turns his attention from one detail to another; *rooted to the spot*, the witness remains on the same side of the axis of action of the '180° line'. [italics: EWC]<sup>13</sup>

George Wilson, as well, in an otherwise cautious and sympathetic account of an earlier misconstrual of Pudovkin by Karel Reisz, depicted Pudovkin's observer as "fixed or limitedly mobile".

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<sup>12</sup> Pudovkin, as evident from his examples and in company with his compatriots at the time, was uninterested in long takes photographed from moving cameras. He may even have believed that such shots, except when taken with extraordinary care to follow action, were unlikely to mimic accurately the shifts of attention of a sensitive and profound observers. If so, he would have been right: long takes without clutter are difficult to envisage, much less create. Notably, however, nothing follows from Pudovkin's precept that would preclude the careful use of long takes or moving cameras, provided the attentive mimicry is exact, contrary to the explicit prohibitions of Eisenstein within his writings of the time. See ...

<sup>13</sup> David Bordwell, "Narration and Scenography in the Later Eisenstein", *Millennium Film Journal*, #13, Fall/Winter 1983-84, page 63. Bordwell later reiterated the claim on page 9 of his *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

[Reisz's account] is a brief elaboration of the proposal that the cuts within a scene should correspond to the natural shifts of attention of a hypothetical, interested spectator who observes, on the spot, the action that we see depicted on the screen. This view, with theoretical roots at least as early as V. I. Pudovkin, was one that, at the time Reisz was writing, had many influential adherents. ... Nevertheless, despite the initial attraction of the idea, Reisz rejects it for a simple and decisive reason. He notes, in effect, that many of the instantaneous spatial transitions produced by elementary and standard patterns of editing patently do not correspond to anything that a single fixed or limitedly mobile observer could achieve.<sup>14</sup>

Wilson was correct about how Reisz had earlier misread Pudovkin enroute to suggesting that he improving upon the precept that Pudovkin had fashioned, for, as Reisz said,

... the director's aim is to give an ideal picture of the scene, in each case placing his camera in such a position that it records most effectively the particular piece of actions or detail which is dramatically significant. He becomes, as it were, a ubiquitous observer, giving the audience at each moment of the action the best possible viewpoint. He selects the images which he considers most telling, irrespective of the fact that no single individual could view a scene in this way in real life.

Reisz, however, was simply reaffirming twenty-five years later, unwittingly and less precisely, what every filmmaker had understood Pudovkin to have affirmed in his little book of 1926, namely that films should be structured to follow the natural shifts of attention of an imagined observer freely mobile in space and time, as no observer in real life could ever be.

As Bordwell suggests, the maxims of "continuity editing" were indeed implicit in Pudovkin's precept, but only because his imagined observer was free to move. Were the observer to be immobile, and the camera to be restricted to panning or tilting from a single spot rather than shifting from one spot to another, it would have been impossible, for example, for filmmakers, by photographing pairs of close-ups, to permit viewers to shift their attention naturally between the faces of two people looking into each others eyes, a practice long common among directors. Pudovkin was simply reminding filmmakers of the reason for the power of the practice.

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<sup>14</sup> George M. Wilson, *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View* (Baltimore & London: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pages 51 and 52.

The lens of the camera replaces the eye of the observer, and the changes of the angle of the camera – directed now on one person, now on the other, now on one detail, now on another – must be subject to the same conditions as those of the eyes of the observer. (FTFA, page 70)

As every filmmaker recognized, therefore, Pudovkin was here reaffirming the mobility of the observer, for, in the parlance of the trade, to shift camera angles to cover one and then the other of two persons interacting required, almost always, that one move the camera from one position to another.

The misconstrual by nonfilmmakers of Pudovkin's observer as immobile was neatly counterbalanced by their misconception of it as somehow godlike in range and awareness. Reisz, for example, unlike Pudovkin, had carelessly come to think that one could speak intelligibly of an observer attending "ubiquitously" to an event (registering at once, that is, every aspect of it), an error later compounded by Bordwell in his suggestion that the imagined observer was not only "omnipresent" but "omniscient" (that is, all knowing) as well.<sup>15</sup>

Invisible witness thus became an omnipresent one as well, endowed with a ghostly ubiquity. Yet this formulation posed new problems. ... [As a consequence] many classical theorists were suggesting a narrative film employs an omniscient narrator, but that the film should limit our awareness of that omniscience.<sup>16</sup>

Reisz and Bordwell, however, knew not of what they spoke, for, as Kant had affirmed long ago, we cannot imagine how an event would appear to a ubiquitous or omnipresent being, much less an omniscient one (how it would appear as it is itself to

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<sup>15</sup> Bordwell, having misread Pudovkin's observer as "rooted to the spot", attributes to thinkers later than Pudovkin the notion of an observer ideally mobile in space and time, citing Frederick Smith, for example, who, in 1944, had suggested that the imagined observer can attend to "an object or an occurrence from all and every side, angle, and distance". (Bordwell, page 63, citing Frederick Y. Smith, "The Cutting and Editing of Motion Pictures", included by the Society of Motion Picture Engineers in their volume *The Technique of Motion Picture Production* (New York: Interscience Publishers, 1944), page 137. Astonishingly, Bordwell quotes on the very same page Pudovkin's summary statement from *Film Acting* that the imagined observer is to "ideally mobile in space and time"! Given Pudovkin's summary statement and the copious examples that he uses in the little book, among them the description that we have noted of the observer shifting attention instantaneously *from place to place* as the spies creep upon the guardhouse, how Bordwell could then conclude that Pudovkin's observer was to be imagined as "rooted to the spot", the full conception deriving from later thinkers who "seized upon Pudovkin's hint" (page 63), passes understanding for me.

<sup>16</sup> Bordwell, page 63.

God, for example), and neither Pudovkin nor any other careful thinker has ever suggested otherwise. Pudovkin's precept requires us instead to imagine how a being would attend to an event were it capable of moving freely in space and time, but were it otherwise as finite as we are. Nowhere did he suggest omnipresence or omniscience on the part of an imagined observer. To have done so would have been to talk nonsense.

As Pudovkin recognized, his freely mobile observer had otherwise to be as human as could be imagined, for only then could its shifts of attention to aspects of events across space and time cohere perceptually into an artistic encounter with them. The constraint was Kantian, though Pudovkin hardly knew it, and we shall reconsider it as such below.

### Avoiding Misunderstandings

Pudovkin had urged filmmakers to imagine an event and then to imagine how an observer would perceive it if free to attend instantaneously to any of its aspects, near or far, past or present.

To what kinds of events could such an observer attend *naturally*? Many commentators, measuring Pudovkin's principle against his examples rather than the other way round, have concluded that the events encompassed by it could only be of a kind with which mainstream filmmakers working within the Griffith tradition are concerned, namely enacted events, spatially and temporally contiguous (or nearly so), encompassing natural things and occurrences.

Pudovkin, however, had insisted only that if we are to engage profoundly with the events we perceive by means of a film, we must be able to attend to them naturally. Nowhere had he implied that the events to which we attend *naturally* had themselves to be *natural*, much less spatially or temporally contiguous. His principle was adverbial rather than adjectival, constraining how but not what we were to perceive by means of film.

Pudovkin's precept set no limits, therefore, on the kinds of events that filmmakers could imagine and to which we could attend naturally by means of a film. Filmmakers might imagine and present to us events perceivable only by means of the tools of animation, for example, or documentary events accessible only through the use of portable cameras, or occurrences spatially and temporally disjointed for purposes of propaganda or occasions repeatedly encountered through multiple printing or sped up or slowed down through high-speed or time-lapsed cinematography.

Consider, for example, three events of different kinds: (a) animated rabbits being chased across a pastel field by an animated dog (as in *WATERSHIP DOWN*); (b) spots of colour moving within a non-natural space (as in McLaren's *MOSAIC*); or (c) the activities of the 1936 Olympic games (as in Riefenstahl's *OLYMPIA*).

Of each, Pudovkin would have insisted, the filmmakers ought have asked the same question: to what aspects of the event, in what order, from what perspective and for how long would you attend were you free to move instantaneously but unobserved to any viewpoint in space and time as the event unfolds? By using the precept, Pudovkin claimed, filmmakers could ensure the events would be encountered most engagingly, regardless of their nature.<sup>17</sup>

We may easily understand, however, how Pudovkin's precept came to be misconstrued by nonfilmmakers, and by many filmmakers as well, as applying only to films made in the style of the "classical (Hollywood) model", a denigration accruing to a careless appropriation to his theory of the restricted scope of his examples.<sup>18</sup>

Consider, for example, the kind of event to which we have been recurringly compelled to attend by mainstream filmmakers. A young woman, preparing to retire for the night, sits on the edge of her bed and takes off her shoes while being observed by a psychotic killer hiding in her closet. One can easily imagine to what aspects of the event almost any freely mobile observer would attend, in what order, from what angle and for how long as the killer emerges, knife drawn, from the closet. St. Thomas Aquinas or a Zen master would attend to just about the same aspects of it as would a conservative Federal politician or a hockey thug, for the event has been so impoverished that no credible diversity could occur among possible encounters with it. God herself could find within it nothing worthy of discrimination.

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<sup>17</sup> One must be exact, therefore, when using the word 'naturalism' to delimit the aims of Pudovkin's principle. The word fits as aptly as Pudovkin suggested, but only if we remember that his naturalism was *adverbial* rather than *adjectival*. His precept distinguishes *how* we must attend to things by means of film if we are to do so most naturally and hence profoundly, rather than what kind of things we ought to perceive.

<sup>18</sup> David Bordwell, having confused the precepts of the classical ("Hollywood") model with Pudovkin's principle, concludes that "this very anthropomorphism reveals the blind spots of the model. All staging of the material before the camera goes untheorized ..." (page 64). However true this may be of the "Hollywood" precepts with which Bordwell is primarily concerned, it is flatly untrue of Pudovkin's admonition. Constrained by his principle, one may "theorize" about things however one likes and present whichever things ones wishes as a result. Pudovkin's insight was that one must present them *naturally*, however one has thought about them, to engage viewers subtly and deeply.

By restricting their material, filmmakers had inadvertently reduced the range of observations available to Pudovkin's observer to those of a witness of only ordinary discernment, wisdom and awareness. They presumed, in short, that the question posed by Pudovkin in his precept could be restricted as follows:

To what aspects of the event, in what order, from what perspective and for how long would you attend were you to witness it, earnestly but unobserved, as would a being of only ordinary discernment, wisdom and awareness, if free to move instantaneously to any viewpoint in space and time as the event unfolds?

But Pudovkin had never said any such thing! His precept, correctly construed, *prohibited* presenting events as an observer of only ordinary erudition and sensitivity would have attended to them (see Section 2 below). Were we to restrict ourselves as filmmakers, however, to the task of enabling viewers to encounter engagingly the anxious, eroticized and simply sentimental events with which so much filmmaking has been concerned, aiming to entice viewers of no particular distinction, then Pudovkin's precept, as misread, would entail exactly those maxims of practice, seemingly independent of subject, that have defined the 'classical Hollywood style' for nearly a century; for, by design, there can be nothing in the events encountered to which observers would attend differently were they more or less discriminating. For such events, we should have little need of Pudovkin's precept: maxims suffice.

We may infer accurately from Pudovkin's precept, for example, that observers attending by means of film to an event of any kind should be enabled to encounter it, aspect-by-aspect, as if they were reacting to it rather than participating in it. From this inference, two lawlike restrictions follow.

LAW OF DETACHMENT: never view an event from a perspective that would require you to attend to it as only a participant could; and

LAW OF LEAST EFFORT: never view an event from a perspective that would require you to have moved further than necessary to follow the action as it unfolds.

It seemed to many filmmakers, therefore, encumbered by their own interests and Pudovkin's examples, that unequivocal rules of film design could be derived from these restrictions and applied to the making of any film regardless of subject. See, for example, the maxims in Appendix 2 that I have collated verbatim from textbooks, technical manuals and even notes pinned to the walls of editing houses around the world. Such maxims have served generations of mainstream filmmakers well and will

continue to do so, and we can understand from Pudovkin's precept, even as misread, why they work when they work:

the events to be encountered by means of the film have unwittingly been chosen to preclude a diversity of credible attentive responses;

lacking diversity, the maxims apply, for almost all viewers, constrained by such material, could be expected to attend to the event in similar ways; hence maxims of design apply.

Few filmmakers, having misread Pudovkin's precept, worried themselves over the obvious fact that their maxims of design, if taken seriously as rules, fail uniformly, for counterexamples abound! The customary caution against photographing characters as they peer into the camera, for example, that might seem at first glance to follow from the Law of Detachment and that indeed restricts correctly the practice of filmmaking with respect to most subjects presented in most contexts of attention, has been controverted by Bergman in many films (WINTER LIGHT; HOUR OF THE WOLF; AUTUMN SONATA); the congruent prohibition against crossing the line of action, seemingly following from the Law of Least Effort and that again correctly constrains the presentation of most subjects within most filmic contexts, was controverted early on by Stroheim (in both GREED and THE WEDDING MARCH).

Few filmmakers, as well, were to ponder Pudovkin's remarks concerning the kinds of things one ought to present by means of film, presuming that his preferences of subject matter, unexceptionally historical and political, were simple accoutrements of a Marxist bias that could be readily jettisoned without impinging on the precept. As we shall see, however, Pudovkin's preferences of subject were hardly irrelevant to understanding his precept; indeed, they were to connect through his precept into the deepest claim he was ever to make about filmmaking.

Yet we can understand why Pudovkin's precept, even as misconstrued, was to prove so incomparably useful to filmmakers. Even when misread as encompassing an observer of only ordinary understanding,

A. It is uniquely economical. Precept in mind, filmmakers may work from screenplays in master-scene form, making and correcting most of their mistakes on paper when scripting rather than later when spending money on location or in postproduction. Contra Griffith, one need photograph only what the script prescribes as interpreted through the precept.

B. It is uniquely accurate, elegant and yet encompassing perceptually, and hence maximally engaging emotionally. Only the essential aspects of an event draw attention while others are registered peripherally if at all, and hence our deepest nonconscious global responses can be naturally engaged.

C. It is generally applicable. One may use it to design films with synchronized sound as easily as without, and, as we shall hereafter have occasion to note, one may apply it to the making of films encompassing any kind of event whatsoever (and thusly to musicals, documentaries, animated films, fantastical features, experimental works, etc.).

D. It would prove historically to be uniquely refineable and extendable. Among the maxims of importance that were to be derived from it were those of continuity cutting, the distinguishing canons of cinematical lighting and composition, the constraints on nonprotagonal characterization, the proscription of 'mental images' and Capra's precepts of accelerated pacing.

E. It is testable yet unrefuted. We know neither of any serious anomalies to it nor of any even-reasonably adequate alternatives, and yet we can readily describe events that, were they to occur, would falsify it.<sup>19</sup>

What more could one ask of a precept? To that question we must now turn, and the answer will astonish, for the precept as we have addressed it, and as it has been understood and applied by so many, presuming it, if only by hearsay, to have been Pudovkin's, is hardly the precept that Pudovkin recommended to filmmakers. As commonly understood, indeed, it is a perversion of it, for, as we shall note in Part 2 of these lectures, Pudovkin was to subject the "basic method" of film design as we have discussed it to two further constraints that were to transform it beyond the recognition of filmmakers and nonfilmmakers alike, catapulting it into the philosophical centre of human recognition.

By this transformation, Pudovkin was to emulate within film theory the widest constructive postulate ever put forward for making sense of our human experience of the world. To comprehend how he did so, and why his precept was to prove uniquely advantageous to filmmakers, we shall then in Part 3 to turn to Kant.

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<sup>19</sup> Were we to take any sequence of 30 shots from a film by John Ford, for example (or alternatively from films by Maya Deren, Fred Wiseman or Chuck Jones), were we to pick 3 shots at random and scramble their order, and were the resulting sequences to be as recurrently powerful and engaging as the originals, then Pudovkin's principle would have been roundly refuted.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Excerpt from a Screenplay in Masterscene Format**

[Pages 19 through 25 of the screenplay of 1944 by William Faulkner, Leigh Brackett and Jules Furthman from which the movie THE BIG SLEEP was made, released in 1946, adapted from the novel of 1939 of the same name by Raymond Chandler.]

## 19. EXT. GEIGER'S STORE - ESTABLISHING SHOT

Sign on window: "RARE EDITIONS" etc.

Marlowe walks up and pauses to assure himself that it's the right place. The store front is narrow. Discreet gold lettering on the plate glass repeats the legend on Geiger's card:

A.G. GEIGER

Rare Books and Deluxe Editions

The windows are blanked off with Chinese screens, fronted by large Oriental urns. Marlowe puts on a pair of horn-rimmed sun glasses, adjusts his hat to a less rakish angle, and enters.

## 20. INT. GEIGER'S STORE

The room is small, dim, expensively underfurnished with leather chairs, smoking stands, and a small pseudo-Oriental desk. A few sets of tooled leather binds on narrow tables, others in glass cases.

AGNES, a hard-looking, expensive blonde in a tight black dress, rises from behind the desk as Marlowe approaches and moves to greet him. Her manner is professionally distant, her accent betrays her phony veneer.

AGNES

Can I be of any assistance?

MARLOWE

Would you happen to have a Ben Hur 1860?

AGNES

(hanging on hard  
to her composure,  
seeing that she's  
going to have  
trouble with Marlowe)

A first edition?

MARLOWE

No. Third -- the one with the erratum on page one-sixteen.

AGNES

I'm afraid not -- at the moment.

MARLOWE

How about a Chevalier Audubon --  
the full set of course?

AGNES

(with a frozen smile)  
Uh -- not at the moment.

MARLOWE

(politely)  
You do sell books?

AGNES

(dropping the act,  
pointing to the  
display books)  
What do those look like --  
grapefruit?

MARLOWE

They look like books from here,  
anyway. Maybe I'd better talk  
to Mr. Geiger.

AGNES

He's not in at the moment.

Marlowe glances up as a man enters the store; a middle-aged, important-looking person who has an incongruously furtive and nervous manner. He looks quickly at Marlowe, then at Agnes, who gives him an almost imperceptible warning nod. Marlowe remains blandly unaware of the byplay, all his attention apparently on the cigarette he's lighting.

The man walks quickly to the rear of the store. Agnes pushes a button on the desk. A door in the back wall opens on a buzzer lock. The man darts through it like a rabbit.

AGNES

(to Marlowe)  
I said Mr. Geiger is not in.

MARLOWE

I heard you. I'll wait for him.

AGNES

He won't be back until very late.

At this point the furtive man comes out of the rear part of the store and leaves hurriedly, looking at neither Agnes nor Marlowe. His face is lined and haggard. Marlowe is interested.

MARLOWE

(watching the man out)  
He must have got hold of the wrong  
title.

(to Agnes)

Well, guess I'd better blow. I'm  
already late now for my lecture on  
Argentine cera-micks.

(mispronouncing the word)

AGNES

(icily, correcting him)  
The word is cerAMics. And they ain't  
Argentine: they're Egyptian.

MARLOWE

You did sell a book once, didn't  
you? Well, even the Argentine's  
a little too far for me today.  
Guess I'll just stick to the public  
library -- or I might try that  
book store across the street.

AGNES

(freezing)

Do so.

Agnes stares viciously at his back until he is out. Then  
she goes to the door at the rear, knocks and goes through.

21. MOVING SHOT - MARLOWE

He walks across the boulevard, turns into a small  
bookstore, the second-hand variety, cluttered and dingy.  
Several nondescript people browse among the tables. At the  
rear a small, dark, shrewd-faced woman sits reading at a  
desk -- apparently she is the proprietor. Marlowe  
approaches her, and she looks up blank-faced from her book.

MARLOWE

Would you do me a very small favor?

PROPRIETRESS

I don't know. What is it?

MARLOWE

You know Geiger's store across the  
street?

PROPRIETRESS

I think I may have passed it.

MARLOWE

You know Geiger by sight?

PROPRIETRESS

I should think it would be easy enough to go to his store and ask to see him.

MARLOWE

I don't want to see him that close, just yet.

(as he gets no response)  
Know anything about rare books?

PROPRIETRESS

You could try me.

MARLOWE

Would you have a Ben Hur, 1860, Third Edition, with the duplicated line on page one-sixteen?

The woman pulls a fat volume in front of her, starts to open it.

MARLOWE

...or a Chevalier Audubon 1840...?

The woman stops, closes the book.

PROPRIETRESS

Nobody would. There isn't one.

MARLOWE

Right.

(as the woman gives him a puzzled stare)  
The girl in Geiger's store didn't know that.

PROPRIETRESS

I see. You begin to interest me -- vaguely.

MARLOWE

I'm a private dick on a case. Perhaps I ask too much.

(leaning forward to hold a match for her cigarette)  
It didn't seem much to me somehow.

PROPRIETRESS

(after a pause)

In his early forties, medium height, fattish, soft all over, a Charlie Chan moustache. Well dressed, goes without a hat, affects a knowledge of antiques and hasn't any. Oh yes, his left eye is glass.

MARLOWE

You'd make a good cop.

PROPRIETRESS

(returning to  
her reading)

Only if he wore smoked glasses.

MARLOWE

(laughing softly --  
pulling a flat  
pint from his  
hip pocket)

I shouldn't think you'd have to work too hard to start anything smoking.

He shakes the bottle up and down, invitingly. She looks up at him, searchingly, then smiles slowly.

PROPRIETRESS

It's going to rain, soon.

MARLOWE

I'd rather get wet in here.

She pulls open a drawer and stands two small glasses on the desk. Marlowe smiles, and starts pouring. Through the window behind him the front of Geiger's store can be seen.

DISSOLVE TO:

22. INT. BOOKSHOP - NIGHT (RAIN)

It is raining hard outside. The proprietress is a little tight, quite relaxed, and slightly philosophical, leaning against Marlowe, who sits on a stack of Britannicas beside her, watching the window. The proprietress picks up the bottle, which is now empty, shakes it forlornly, and sets it down again.

PROPRIETRESS

A couple of hours, an empty bottle, and so long, pal. That's life.

## Appendix 2

### Maxims of Editing

[Collated verbatim from textbooks, technical manuals and notes pinned to walls of editing houses around the world.]

#### For general editing:

Always respect the axis of interaction between persons, and between persons and things (for example, maintain screen direction when cutting between shots.

After action, show reaction.

Use pairs of matched shots of interacting objects (LS-LS, MS-MS, CU-CU), taken from reverse angles, when intercutting between them, approaching the line of interaction in a scissor-like fashion as movement ceases but withdrawing as movement impends)).

When cutting to a shot of the same subject, change either the image size or the angle, or preferably both.

Use reverse angles to re-establish scenes.

Position objects within the frame to facilitate intercutting (leave room on screen toward action, for example).

Shoot POV shots from the side, not head on, and shoot at eye-level when photographing faces in close-up. avoid cutting on blinks.

Remember that one cannot cut smoothly between objects still and moving, and that reverse angles of a moving object generally will not intercut smoothly.

Cutting from CU-LS is easy, from LS-CU difficult.

Have actors hold for counts in cuttable positions.

Show the viewer the next thing he expects to see (or hear).

Give a hint of things to come, and increase suspense by holding back the view of the inevitable.

Use image size to determine the pace of the action (for straightforward story telling, that is, establish scenes in LS followed by pairings of MSs and of CUs then re-establish with a LS; for slow pace and gradually increasing interest, use a LS then pairings of MLS-MS-MCU-CU... etc.; for fast pace and shock, use a LS then pairings of CUs; for suspense, pair CUs and only then re-establish with a LS).

**For dialogue editing:**

Match eye-lines when intercutting between shots of people talking with one another.

Use medium shots generally, saving close-ups for emphasis (that is, use close-ups only during delivery of important sentences).

Show the whole action without cutting if significant, but cut to the listener if reaction is important.

Cut on irrelevant but eye-catching movement.

Cut to the better viewpoint just before the action occurs.

Sequence cuts and actions evenly to maintain the attention of the viewer.

Lead the conversation by showing a person before he or she talks if his verbal expression would have been anticipated.

Cut in the pauses between spoken sentences or clauses, not in the middle of them.

Cut on a pause between clauses in the middle of a sentence to show reaction.

Cut back late to the interrupter after verbal interruptions.

Cut sentences tight to quicken pace, loose to slow it.