

What Makes The Perfect Edit?

In 1985, the blockbuster film 'Back To The Future' was released. It has since been accredited as having 'The perfect script' and was revolutionary for editing at the time. This is a film that I adore and believe that, considering the lack of technical equipment available at the time, the cinematography and editing on the film is incredibly impressive which leaves me to wonder, what makes the perfect edit? And with that, I've decided to research and discuss the teachings and ideologies of some of the most prolific minds in the creative world to get a deeper understanding of what goes into creating the perfect edit.

In terms of engaging the emotional impact of a piece, I have always been of the opinion that subtlety is key. The audience should never be explicitly told how to feel, and the emotion should simply be inferred. When editing, I often like to use dialogue of the characters to portray the emotion being displayed in a scene. As Orson Scott Card said in his science fiction novel, *Alvin Journeyman*, "Metaphors have a way of holding the most truth in the least space" and this is a principle that I also stand by as it implies that a character's motives, beliefs and emotions shouldn't be conveyed in a literal sense and instead should allow the viewer to become immersed into a scene by living through that emotion with the character. This is implemented in the editing process as well as writing simply altering the colour of a scene to indicate whether the mood is more optimistic or pessimistic is pivotal. However, this can also be used to show a viewer that everything may not be as it seems as executed excellently in the 1998 Sci-Fi/Drama, *The Truman Show*. The show is set in a town which looks absolutely perfect, joyful and even picture-esque, in post-production, shots displaying the town have been adjusted to make the town look even more bright and saturated which reveals subtle undertones as it's later revealed that the protagonist's life is a manufactured façade, so the contrast between his corrupted life and perfect home uses binary opposition to great effect. Postproduction is also crucial within the genre of horror. Most modern horror films rely on the use of "jumpscare" to frighten an audience, this is a method that can only be achieved through the means of editing as sound production is often used to create horrifying, loud noises to abruptly startle an audience. The editor must be precise with the volume, timing and execution of a jumpscare in order to exacerbate the emotion of a scene, whether that be the scream of a protagonist, an object being smashed in a room or the antagonist scaring the protagonist, the edit is crucial here. In addition, shot types have been created just for the genre so the editor can choose to show when the audience should be wary. The 'Dutch Angle' is used to make a quick cut to in the "down time" of a horror film to be a subtle and metaphorical nudge to the audience that not everything is as it seems and implies that the character in the scene may not be alone. In editing, cutting to a shot like this and then cutting back to the original shot can be used very well to keep the audience engaged and let them know that something is about to happen without making it obvious and I believe this is achieved in Sam Raimi's 2009 horror 'Drag Me To Hell'.

The aforementioned blockbuster, 'Back To The Future' remains to be a masterpiece and massively influential in filmmaking and pop-culture, which I believe is definitely aided by the avant-garde editing style for the era. Not only were small-scale physical sets used for many of the iconic scenes such as the DeLorean hitting 88 miles per hour and time travelling as a

result, but also this was the first film where editor, Arthur Schmidt, used special effects. Although some of the green screen effects have aged slightly subpar, most of the ground-breaking effects used in the film still hold up to this day. When asked “Did you have any particular influences or styles in mind” about his editing approach going into the film, Schmidt had this to say during an interview with fellow film editor, Lawrence Jordan, for ‘Master the Workflow’, “No, I just started to “dilly” with the material, which I’ve always done” explaining that he didn’t ever go into an edit looking to impose his own signature style on it and instead simply worked with what he was given and allowed the style of the edit to fit with whatever substance he was given, he continues, “I’ve always felt that the style comes out of the film” and that “The film will eventually tell you what to do if you listen to it”. Personally, I believe that this rings true for my style of editing. I don’t go into every edit with the same thought process in mind as I believe this could result in all of my work having a similar theme each time and not enough variety, so when I edit, I like to have the raw footage tell the story and from that, I can edit how I see fit. Other editors who have worked on more modern blockbusters are Matthew Schmidt and Jeffrey Ford, whom have been the main editors for many of Marvel Studio’s most recent smash hits. The landscapes and soundtracks that are created for these films I believe have become synonymous with the film franchise and definitely helped to further grow their viewership as the 3D worlds that the editors have created both feel and look so real that they immediately immerse the audience into these fictitious worlds. However, Schmidt and Ford stated in a 2019 interview with Sarah Mason that their approach to editing is the same regardless of VFX and CGI when they said that films should have “Great rhythm, really good storytelling and authentic performances” further explaining that the VFX should “amplify those great performances and don’t diminish them”. Which goes hand in hand with the fact that the editor will mostly rely on the footage provided to them to convey the editing process to be able to fully create and enhance the emotion and story of a piece.

Although, this style may be popular, film editor, Walter Murch, famously edits with his ‘Rule of 6’ which involves ensuring that each project that he edits includes this exact style as detailed in his book, “In the Blink of an Eye”; 51% emotion, 23% story, 10% rhythm, 7% eye trace, 5% 2D plane of screen and 4% 3D space in order to have the “best possible cut”. This more analytical approach allows for the edit to have a consistency of high quality across every piece, but also be unique individually. We see how Murch has laid out each factor in order of importance, focusing mainly on the emotion of a piece when it comes to weighting a decision on the exact moment to make a cut. The premise of focusing on emotion more than the story is interesting and something that I subconsciously do in my own work, however I also believe that both emotion and story go hand in hand as without any emotion, there is no story or depth to approach the edit with. I also found it intriguing that, while still including them as two of the 6 rules of the perfect cut, the 2D plane of screen and 3D space are considered so menially towards the cut, and I essentially perceive this as the actual visual content of the scene mattering the least when deciding to make a cut. Despite this, for the most part I can understand Murch’s six rules and will take this into consideration when editing from now on as being able to make a cut based on such a systematic and logical method means that this “perfect cut” in question becomes more achievable and means that when editing, I can subsequently become a better storyteller. At the moment, my favourite thing to edit is a comedic football series which documents my team’s matches and allows me to create a 10 minute piece highlighting the game for

viewers looking to enjoy on an athletic level, while also (and mainly) providing a comedic element to each video. With every cut in this series, it's usually after a big opportunity in a match which, although could be considered simply a convention of the genre, does mean that these videos often switch between being storyline driven and then emotionally driven, so in future edits, I will consider Walter Murch's rule of 6 to create a more captivating production and, therefore, continuing to further my editing style and ability.

Over the last academic year, I have only improved with each task and began to try new things to be able to step up my game in post-production and I think it shows with each new piece I make. I have tackled new effects, overlays, transitions and styles in order to be more versatile in post production. This will mean that I'll be able to take on any genre, theme or style of video whether that be a film, music video, livestream, podcast, etc. and handle the editing correctly and furthermore, develop the piece to become better.

Bibliography:

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