

Edward Dmytryk

ON FILM EDITING



Introduction and New Material
by Andrew Lund

A **Focal Press** Book

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On Film Editing

In *On Film Editing*, director Edward Dmytryk explains, in clear and engaging terms, the principles of film editing. Using examples and anecdotes from almost five decades in the film industry, Dmytryk offers a veritable masterclass in the editor's craft. Written in an informal, "how-to-do-it" style, Dmytryk shares his expertise and experience in film editing in a precise and philosophical way, contending that all parties on the film crew—from the camera assistant to the producer and director—must understand film editing to produce a truly polished work.

Originally published in 1984, this reissue of Dmytryk's classic editing book includes a new critical introduction by Andrew Lund, as well as chapter lessons, discussion questions and exercises.

Edward Dmytryk (1908–1999) was an Oscar-nominated American filmmaker, educator, and writer. Over an acclaimed forty-year filmmaking career, Dmytryk directed over fifty award-winning films, including *Crossfire* (1947), *The Caine Mutiny* (1954), *Raintree County* (1957), and *The Young Lions* (1958). Entering academia in the 1970s, Dmytryk lectured on both film and directing, first at the University of Texas at Austin and later at the University of Southern California. He is the author of several classic books on the art of filmmaking, including *On Film Editing*, *On Screen Directing*, *On Screen Writing*, *On Screen Acting*, and *Cinema: Concept & Practice*, all published by Focal Press/Routledge.

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Publisher's Note

In the 1980s, Focal Press published five books on the art of filmmaking by legendary film director Edward Dmytryk (1908–1999), Oscar-nominated director of *Crossfire*, *The Caine Mutiny*, and *The Young Lions*, among many other films. Together, these five titles comprise a masterclass with one of Hollywood's most acclaimed, storied, and controversial filmmakers.

With most of these books long out of print, Focal Press/Routledge is pleased to reissue these classic titles with all new supplemental material for current day readers. Each book includes a new introduction, as well as chapter notes including exercises, discussion questions, and more.

Mick Hurbis-Cherrier serves as coordinator for the series, which includes the following titles, all available from Focal Press/Routledge:

Cinema: Concept & Practice (originally published 1988, with new material by Joe McElhaney):

On Film Editing (originally published 1984, with new material by Andrew Lund)

On Screen Acting (with Jean Porter Dmytryk, originally published 1984, with new material by Paul Thompson)

On Screen Directing (originally published 1984, with new material by Bette Gordon and Eric Mendelsohn)

On Screen Writing (originally published 1985, with new material by Mick Hurbis-Cherrier)

We are grateful to the estate of Edward Dmytryk and Jean Porter Dmytryk, especially to Rebecca Dmytryk, for their assistance in bringing these important books back into print.

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On Film Editing

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EDWARD DMYTRYK

*Introduction and new material
by Andrew Lund*

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Contents

<i>Edward Dmytryk: A Short Biography</i>	vii
<i>Introduction by Andrew Lund</i>	xvii
1 Titles and Definitions	1
2 Who Cuts the Film?	7
3 Smooth Cutting—The Ideal	11
4 The Cutter Begins	17
5 You’ve Got to Have a Reason	23
6 The Action Cut—and What Makes It Work	27
7 Keep It Fresh and Fast with the Overlap	35
8 Trying a Little Harder	43
9 Cutting Dialogue	47
10 The Reaction Is What Really Counts	65
11 If You Can’t Make It Smooth, Make It Right	71
12 Knowing Your Audience	77
13 Dissolves: Why, How, and If	83
14 Editing—Simple and Pure	89
15 More of the Same	103
16 Rescuing the Actor	131
17 Where It All Began—The Montage	135

<i>Epilogue</i>	145
<i>Filmography of Edward Dmytryk</i>	147
<i>Chapter Notes by Andrew Lund</i>	149
<i>Index</i>	181

Edward Dmytryk

A Short Biography

Within the industry and art form known as the cinema, the life of Edward Dmytryk is one of multiple journeys. Born September 4, 1908 in Grand Forks, British Columbia, Dmytryk was the second of four sons of Polish-Ukrainian immigrants. In 1915, the family moved to a small town in Washington called Northport. Dmytryk's father was frequently abusive to his family, and the death of Dmytryk's mother from a ruptured appendix prompted Dmytryk's father to move the boys to San Francisco, where he placed them in an orphan home with a promise to return. He returned a year later, by which point he had remarried.

In 1919, the family moved to Los Angeles, where Dmytryk was enrolled in Lockwood Grammar School. During his time at Lockwood, Dmytryk was tested by the Terman Group from Stanford University, in search of students with superior IQ. Dmytryk qualified for the study and became part of what was at the time the longest-running psychological study ever conducted.

Further abuse from his father drove Dmytryk to run away from home at age 14. For his safety, social workers placed him in a private home, but he was told he would need to get a job to help cover the rent. Thus, from a very early age, his was a life devoted to labor, to working hard: as a caddy or selling newspapers on street corners, or as a messenger and office boy.

It was the latter job, working evenings and weekends for Famous Players-Lasky studios (later Paramount Pictures), while attending Hollywood High School, that first brought him into contact with the motion picture industry. Through this job he first encountered the cutting room and taught himself to splice film while also becoming a cutting room projectionist. "It was in the cutting room," he would later state, "that I learned the rudiments of filmmaking."

While working for Paramount and still in high school, Dmytryk was offered a scholarship at the California Institute of Technology. He accepted the scholarship, but continued to work as a projectionist on weekends and holidays. After a year in school, Dmytryk decided he wanted to make the film business his full-time career, and returned to Paramount. Soon thereafter, Dmytryk was working as an assistant editor and, eventually, editor, cutting films for such directors as George Cukor (*The Royal Family of Broadway* and *Zaza*) and Leo McCarey (*Ruggles of Red Gap* and *Love Affair*). He made a short-lived directorial debut in 1935 with the low-budget western *The Hawk*, made for Monogram studios, but would spend the next few years directing sequences in B films without credit, while continuing to edit the films of others. It was his uncredited co-direction of *Million Dollar Legs* for Paramount in 1939 (the same year in which he became an American citizen) that led to his first director jobs, first for Paramount and then for Columbia.

A contract with RKO Radio, beginning in 1942, dramatically changed the shape of his career. In 1943, he took over the direction from Irving Reis of the low-budget anti-Nazi film *Hitler's Children*. The result was an unexpected critical and financial success. Later that year he graduated to A film budgets with the home front wartime melodrama *Tender Comrade* (1943), written by Dalton Trumbo and starring Ginger Rogers. A more significant turning point occurred with *Murder, My Sweet* (1944) one of the classic early examples of film noir, adapted from Raymond Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely*, and starring Dick Powell cast against type as Philip Marlowe. The film was produced by Adrian Scott and written by John Paxton, two men who became central to Dmytryk's career throughout the remainder of the decade. In *Murder, My Sweet* we see with a particular clarity a recurring type of protagonist in Dmytryk's work, the investigative figure who moves through a sometimes enigmatic, sometimes hostile, and sometimes dreamlike environment in which he becomes enmeshed: losing consciousness, physically assaulted, falling from great heights.

Paxton and Scott would collaborate again on another noir, *Cornered* (1945), this one with a wartime setting and an anti-fascist scenario, with Powell once more in the lead. Slightly interrupting the collaborative run with Paxton and Scott is the Dore Schary production *Till the End of Time*, adapted from Niven Busch's novel, *They Dream of Home*, about Marines returning home after the War. The film had the misfortune to open the same year as a film on a similar subject, William Wyler's masterpiece *The Best Years of Our Lives*. A comparatively "small" film, *Till the End of Time* has its own defining qualities, in particular its emphasis (in contrast to Wyler's film) on middle-class and blue-collar men (often psychologically and physical damaged) resisting the process of being integrated back into "normal" American society. After this, though, Dmytryk would return to working with Scott and Paxton, on two films, both released in 1947, *Crossfire* and *So Well Remembered*. The former was adapted from *The Brick Foxhole*, Richard Brooks's novel about the investigation into the murder of a gay man by a homophobic and racist soldier. But due to censorship issues, the murder was changed to one provoked by the soldier's anti-Semitism. *Crossfire* was made the same year as another major Hollywood film about anti-Semitism, Elia Kazan's prestigious *Gentleman's Agreement*. But *Crossfire* situates its social ambitions within a more explicit post-war environment of existential anxiety about the future of America at this particular moment in history in which, as one character states, "we don't know what to fight." A commercial success, *Crossfire* was perhaps the greatest critical triumph of Dmytryk's career and the only film for which he received an Oscar nomination for Best Director. (The film itself received five nominations overall, including one for Best Picture. It lost to *Gentleman's Agreement*.) *So Well Remembered* has been neglected compared to *Gentleman's Agreement*. Adapted from a James Hilton novel of the same name, set and shot in England with a primarily English cast and crew (the film was a co-production between RKO and J. Arthur Rank's Alliance Productions, Ltd.), its American release was delayed due to Howard Hughes (a partial owner of RKO Radio) who believed that the film, with its emphasis on the resistance of factory workers to their corrupt owners, contained Communist ideology. For many years, the film was rarely screened and, in some quarters, believed to be lost. Now widely available, *So Well Remembered* is a major example of Dmytryk's work and shows, as do all of his films of this period, signature Dmytryk touches, such as exploiting the expressive

properties of light and shadow, using highly varied camera angles, and taking full advantage of current developments in film technology, including optical effects and camera movement devices

Shortly after the production of this film however, Dmytryk came under scrutiny from the House Un-American Activities Committee. Attracted by ideals of economic justice and anti-fascism, Dmytryk had briefly joined the Communist Party in 1945, but claimed to have become quickly disillusioned with it, seeing the so called “party discipline” as a threat to the freedom of creative activity. Nonetheless, one of his earlier films, *Tender Comrade*, with its line of “share and share alike, that’s democracy” was held up by HUAC as an example of covert Communist ideology insinuating itself into a seemingly patriotic Hollywood film. Dmytryk and nine other industry screenwriters (including Scott and Trumbo), known as the Hollywood Ten, appeared before the committee but refused to testify, believing that the Constitution protected private citizens from having to disclose their personal, religious and political choices. Dmytryk was the eighth of the ten to be called to testify and, like the others before him, he refused to answer the chairman’s questions.

Charged with contempt of Congress and faced with an impending jail sentence, fired from RKO, and barred from working in the United States, Dmytryk accepted an opportunity to work abroad. Accompanying Dmytryk was his second wife, the actress Jean Porter, who he had married in 1948 and who had a supporting role in *Till the End of Time*.

Dmytryk made two films in England during this period of exile, both released in 1949. The first of these is the marital revenge drama *Obsession* (adapted from Alec Coppel’s novel *A Man About a Dog* and released in the United States as *The Hidden Room*) and an adaptation of Pietro di Donato’s acclaimed 1939 novel of Italian-American working class life, *Christ in Concrete*, released in Europe under the title *Give Us This Day*. *Christ in Concrete*’s screenplay was written by Ben Barzman, who had already collaborated with Dmytryk on the John Wayne war film *Back to Bataan* (1945). *Christ in Concrete* is a central Dmytryk achievement. Reproducing New York City in the studio and through redressed British locations, the film is one of Dmytryk’s boldest visual exercises, with its extreme high and low angled shots, low-key lighting, and the use of walls, floors and ceilings to create spaces that are at once psychological and social. It is also a major example of the tendency of Dmytryk’s protagonists to engage

in agonized social struggles that are played out through gestures of self-inflicted physical pain, resisting the limited options given to them. Like *So Well Remembered*, however, *Christ in Concrete* received limited North American release, both in the U.S.A. and the U.K.

His passport due to expire, Dmytryk returned to the United States in 1950 to face his sentence and was imprisoned for six months. This situation, combined with his belief that the Communist Party had done nothing for him, drove Dmytryk to eventually agree to appear a second time before HUAC. On April 25, 1951 he confirmed the names of people who had also been affiliated with the Communist Party, among them Adrian Scott, and Dmytryk chose to do it publicly, rather than behind closed doors. After Dmytryk's recanting, it was the producer Stanley Kramer who became central in providing him with work in Hollywood. For Kramer (whose production company was releasing films through Columbia), he would make *Eight Iron Men* (1952), a skillful adaptation of Harry Brown's play of World War II, *A Sound of Hunting*, and *The Juggler* (1953), with Kirk Douglas as a deeply traumatized Holocaust survivor (Michael Blankfort adapted his own novel here), and the first Hollywood film to be shot in Israel.

But this period in Dmytryk's career is most notable for two remarkable films, the first and the last that he made for Kramer. *The Caine Mutiny* (1954), the last, was a commercial and critical triumph for him, the second highest-grossing film of 1954, and the recipient of seven Oscar nominations, including Best Picture. Adapted from Herman Wouk's 1951 Pulitzer Prize winning World War II novel, it is the first of a number of Dmytryk films made over the next decade adapted from lengthy, best-selling novels. In comparison with Dmytryk's most notable films prior to this, *The Caine Mutiny* is restrained in its visual approach. Working in color for the second time (the first was the low-budget *Mutiny* from 1952) and for the first time with the gifted cinematographer Franz Planer, *The Caine Mutiny* employs a largely muted color palette and (unlike Dmytryk's bold black-and-white films) soft lighting contrasts. But the core of the film's formal interest are the extended sequences of meetings, conspiratorial conversations, and, most notably, the court martial sequence, with the paranoia of Humphrey Bogart's Captain Queeg reaching a point of mental disintegration memorably played out through his recurring gesture of nervously fondling the ball bearings in his hands. Throughout all of these extended dialogue sequences, Dmytryk's gift for framing and cutting among his actors in

various singles, two-shots, group shots, and then breaking up a composition by having a character suddenly rise or lower themselves into a shot, is strongly apparent.

However *The Sniper* (1952), the first of the Kramers, while not a notable success at the time, is arguably the more striking of the two films and one that bears comparison with the work of Alfred Hitchcock and Fritz Lang. In his autobiography, Dmytryk shrugs the effort off as a “piece of cake” in terms of the challenges the film presented to him. When seen today, however, the savage, unsentimental depiction of a city under siege (the script is by Harry Brown from a story by Edna and Edward Anhalt) gives the film a bold, modern quality, foreshadowing David Fincher’s serial killer film *Zodiac* (2007), both films making imaginative use of San Francisco locations. In *The Sniper*, Dmytryk repeatedly draws attention (as he so often does throughout his work) to levels, heights, and staircases, creating a cold and indifferent urban environment. In the midst of this is an anguished killer who, in an indelible moment, deliberately burns his hand on a hot plate in his apartment.

After the split with Kramer, Dmytryk’s career took a varied, but no less prolific, path. *The End of the Affair* (1955), shot in England and released by Columbia, was a simplified version of Graham Greene’s great novel of Catholic salvation. This “small” black and white film stands in contrast to his other films of the decade that find him embracing new developments in widescreen technology. Between 1954 and 1959, he shot six films in CinemaScope for 20th Century Fox, including two melodramas from 1955, both set in post-War China. *The Left Hand of God* (1955), reunited Dmytryk with Bogart, and *Soldier of Fortune* (1955) with Clark Gable and Susan Hayward. There was a remake of *The Blue Angel* (1959). There were also two “adult” westerns, *Broken Lance* (1954), the first of two films with Spencer Tracy and first of three with Richard Widmark, and *Warlock* (1959), also with Widmark, which are standouts from this period. Whereas *Broken Lance* (a remake of Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s 1949 gangster melodrama *House of Strangers* transposed to a western setting) was the more financially and critically successful of the two westerns from this period, *Warlock*, a box office failure, when seen today is arguably the stronger film.

Dmytryk had already received producing credit on *The Mountain* (1956), but he began work on that film fairly late in its pre-production schedule. *Warlock*, on the other hand, was the first film in which he exercised his production duties from the very beginning of the process,

and his firm control over the project is evident. Adapted from Oakley Hall's 1958 novel of the same name, *Warlock* eliminates a crucial aspect of Hall's novel that focused on the labor disputes of silver miners (had it been retained, this could have given the film some suggestive links with *So Well Remembered*) and instead focuses on the tensions between an ironically positioned "civilized" community and the outlaw forces that threaten to disrupt it. The moral ambiguities in the film are, typically for Dmytryk, played out through a tense conception of exterior and interior spaces and of the tortured movements of the psychologically and physically damaged characters within these spaces.

The late 1950s are otherwise dominated by two films starring Montgomery Clift, *Raintree County* (1957), Dmytryk's only film for MGM, shot by Robert Surtees in the MGM Camera 65 format (the first film to be shot in this process, which later became Ultra Panavision 70), and one of Dmytryk's favorites, *The Young Lions* (1958), shot in black and white CinemaScope for Fox. Both were based on long novels, the first by Ross Lockridge, Jr. and the second by Irwin Shaw, and both were published in 1948. If *Till the End of Time* has unfairly lived in the shadow of *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *Raintree County* has suffered a similar fate in relation to another Hollywood Civil War roadshow epic, *Gone with the Wind*. But the films are quite different in intent, the romantic and often impulsive behavior of the protagonists of *Gone with the Wind* is replaced in *Raintree County* by characters either more philosophical (and thus hesitant to take action), or marked by trauma and internalized racial anxiety. The result is a rather more somber epic, where images of fire and burning are central, and shots are dominated by Dmytryk's use of crowded, widescreen frames, with numerous primary and secondary points of interest. *The Young Lions* made changes to Shaw's World War II novel that displeased the author. The most fundamental change was in relation to the German protagonist, a ski instructor (played by Marlon Brando), who in the novel gradually transforms into a Nazi whereas in the film he is a member of the Nazi Party from the very beginning but ethically torn and ambivalent. But such a change is consistent with Dmytryk's recurring interest in characters facing ethical struggles that are often tied to specific political and historical situations, such struggles ultimately enacted through punishing physical action and confrontations with individuals who embody the forces of oppression.

By the 1960s though, the dramatic changes in the funding, production and distribution of films in Hollywood were making themselves felt on

the nature of Dmytryk's output. Such films as *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962), *Alvarez Kelly* (1966), *Anzio* (1968), and *Shalako* (1968), produced under chaotic circumstances, were less-than-happy creative experiences for Dmytryk, although all contain elements (and individual sequences) of interest. In 1964, Dmytryk directed two films produced by Joseph E. Levine for Paramount, both adapted from Harold Robbins novels, *Where Love Has Gone* (reuniting Dmytryk with Susan Hayward) and *The Carpetbaggers*. The latter of these, a fictional imagining of the life of Howard Hughes, while critically derided, was a huge commercial success and inspired the ambivalent admiration of Andy Warhol who, reveling in the film's "plastic" falseness, claimed to have seen *The Carpetbaggers* multiple times. Two films from this decade, though, stand apart. The first of these is *The Reluctant Saint* (1962), made for Columbia. A partially fictionalized version of the life of the sixteenth century saint, Joseph of Cupertino, this small, black and white film, shot in Italy and seen by very few people on its initial release, is one of Dmytryk's most unusual achievements. If in so many other Dmytryk films, the male protagonist uncertainly stumbles through treacherous, dimly lit, and often hostile environments, here he is a childlike innocent whose literal stumbling achieves a saintly comic dimension, culminating in his metaphysical act of levitating, and in which the film ends in a vision of the blinding white light of God.

The second major film of the decade is *Mirage* (1965). Working with an original screenplay by Peter Stone, two years after Stone had written *Charade* for director Stanley Donen, both films are self-conscious attempts to produce a Hitchcockian film, minus the still active Hitchcock. (*Mirage* was, like all of Hitchcock's films of this period, made for Universal.) If *Charade* attempts this exercise by referring to Hitchcock's lighter, more romantic escapades, such as *North by Northwest* (1959), *Mirage* draws upon Hitchcock's more somber films, in particular *Vertigo* (1958). Both *Vertigo* and *Mirage* link the male protagonist's trauma to the witnessing of a man falling from a tall building. (Albert Whitlock, who did the special effects for *Vertigo*, executed the recurring image of a falling man that was very similar to the one he had done for Hitchcock) Particularly memorable in the film is its opening sequence, with its striking use of light and shadow, of a New York skyscraper in which the electricity has suddenly been cut off. The cinematographer, working in black and white, was Joe MacDonald, who had shot numerous films for Dmytryk up to this point and would go on to shoot *Alvarez Kelly*.

In the 1970s, Dmytryk's output dwindled to one final theatrical film, *The "Human" Factor* (1975) and a TV movie, *He Is My Brother* (1976). *Bluebeard* (1972), though, an R-rated sex romp with Richard Burton as the title character, updated to a post-World War I setting, is marked by a tongue-in-cheek humor rare in Dmytryk and by its spirited absorption of various formal tendencies of the period in its use of zooms and fast, elliptical montage. Dmytryk once stated that editing is "the only film craft that is entirely indigenous to the cinema" and in *Bluebeard*, with its non-linear organization, he seems to be giving it his all in one final (almost) valiant effort in the midst of a rapidly changing cinematic and social landscape. For the remainder of his career, Dmytryk worked in academia teaching film production at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Southern California. In the 1980s, he wrote several textbooks on the art of filmmaking. In 1984 he published *On Film Editing*, *On Screen Directing* and *On Screen Acting*; in 1985 *On Screen Writing* was published; and in 1988, *Cinema: Concept and Practice*. During this later phase of his life and career, he also authored two memoirs, *It's a Hell of a Life, But Not a Bad Living* (1978) and *Odd Man Out: A Memoir of the Hollywood Ten* (1996) that chronicles his experiences during the Hollywood Black List era. Edward Dmytryk died in 1999, at the age of 90.



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Introduction

Edward Dmytryk's impressive career as a director spans over 40 years, and his accomplishments are reflected in such works as *The Young Lions* (1958), *The Caine Mutiny* (1954), *Crossfire* (1947), and *Murder, My Sweet* (1944). Significantly, Dmytryk actually began in the editorial departments of the Hollywood studios. He spent his teens as a projectionist and splicer during the silent era, was elevated to the role of assistant editor during the early days of talking pictures, and then worked as an editor in the 1930s for such luminaries as the directors Leo McCarey and George Cukor. Thus, Dmytryk, like Robert Wise, David Lean and other leading cinematic storytellers of his generation, "learned the rudiments of filmmaking in cutting rooms"¹ and consistently applied these lessons in his work as a director.

Since "cutting is the only film craft that is entirely indigenous to the cinema," Dmytryk believes it impacts "every other facet of the art."² Accordingly, Dmytryk views editing as one of the creative pillars of the filmmaking process, with its "power to mold, improve, and even recreate a motion picture." He recognizes that editors do far more than order shots according to a prescribed plan. Editors can "rewrite" a film by revising that plan and, through reordering and reshaping shots, essentially create a new movie. In Dmytryk's eyes, editing transcends mechanics. It surpasses craft. At its best, it reaches a level of artistry.

Dmytryk cites editing's seminal role in the development of cinematic form when the cut transformed the shot into filmmaking's primary expressive unit. The discovery that a cut "could manipulate space, time, emotions and emotional intensity" was a filmmaking milestone. With the advent of editing, cinematic language evolved, propelling movies beyond mere "filmed stage plays."

This book documents editing's persistent importance to a movie's final form as well as its crucial contribution to a film's "authorship." Dmytryk concludes by reiterating his faith in editing's power to lead filmmaking to ever greater levels of expression.

As an editor, Dmytryk joined an established trade with an inherited tradition. He rooted his editing approach in the conventions of the studio system, with its customary notions of film form and classic narrative goals. When discussing cutting craft, Dmytryk presents a distillation of accumulated wisdom—a canonical approach that provides a foundation in fundamental editing practices.

Dmytryk was not just being loyal to the system that raised him. Rather, this tradition supported his ultimate goal of audience immersion. For this reason, Dmytryk anchors his editing methodology in the dynamics of cinematic recognition—how viewers process images, experience time, and construct space when watching a movie.

He further grounds editing principles in the dynamics of the specific film being cut. He expects an editor to fully understand the story in all its dimensions (narrative, emotional, thematic) and to know how each sequence, scene, and shot contributes to its overall impact. Dmytryk demands that every edit serve a positive purpose, one that can be articulated in concrete terms. An editor shapes each shot and fashions each cut with an authorial intent that rejects arbitrary edits, incidental cuts, and flashy technique purely for its own sake.

Dmytryk's editing methodology calibrates cuts to lead the audience on the path of maximum engagement throughout the film. His editing philosophy aims primarily for an emotional audience response that encourages deeper involvement in the narrative. To help achieve this goal, Dmytryk favors filmmaking choices that provoke visceral viewer reactions instead of analytical responses. He wants editing to prompt questions about the story not inquiries about technique. His admonitions of the "right" way to edit and his dismissals of "lazy" cutting all stem from his desire for audiences to undergo the suspension of disbelief that fuels movie magic.

Reading this book feels like an apprenticeship with a seasoned professional who generously shares his personal editing observations. Dmytryk offers strong opinions that he developed contemplating countless cuts. By dissecting the craft, Dmytryk identified his essential ingredient list for a productive editing process. He presents these elemental editing propositions as “rules” that he thinks editors should follow in order to provide the viewer with an immersive experience.

While Dmytryk clearly values these rules, he also encourages us to question and even break them. One need not agree with everything Dmytryk says in order to learn from him. So, instead of approaching Dmytryk’s text as an absolute treatise on “how to edit,” treat it as an explanation of “how *he* edits.”

Dmytryk’s editing lessons provide a solid foundation upon which to build a variety of divergent editing approaches. He elucidates the range of choices at an editor’s disposal and illuminates the reasoning behind cutting conventions. He demonstrates how to see a film from a viewer’s perspective and explains how to cultivate a feel for audience attention. In whatever direction one chooses to push editing’s expressive qualities and in whatever ways one chooses to mine editing’s storytelling potential, Dmytryk’s methodology offers a useful perspective.

As reflected in his preference for the term “cutter,” Dmytryk bases editing artistry on a mastery of the medium’s mechanics. He believes creative editing builds on a foundation of cutting skills that encompass editing technology—the tools—and editing craft—the application of those tools. Rather than write an editing system manual or post production workflow treatise, Dmytryk focuses on the crucial role of cutting craft in constructing a robust editing practice.

Dmytryk predicates craft on an understanding of why audiences read continuous action into a series of shots, which, when viewed separately, reveal significant differences. Dmytryk analyzes why minimal shot variation can generate disjointed sequencing while major distinctions can evaporate with the right shot combinations; why it can be easier for us to jump across the world than move around a room; and why we can slide effortlessly from day to night when a shift of five minutes can feel abrupt.

Dmytryk’s thorough presentation of continuity conventions will help readers develop valuable editing proficiencies. He explains how to create seamlessly flowing sequences by capitalizing on viewer blind spots. He deciphers the details that distinguish a cut that clanks from

one that hums. Dmytryk delivers continuity training that refines editing touch and sharpens editing analysis.

While Dmytryk emphasizes continuity cutting, he recognizes that strict adherence to its tenets alone will not result in a well-cut film. An edit can be technically flawless without being effectively sequenced or correctly timed. Smooth cuts can fail to engage the audience. They can stifle narrative momentum. And, point viewers in the wrong direction. Therefore, Dmytryk instructs editors not to elevate the invisible cut above the impactful one. As Dmytryk notes, “The film’s dramatic requirements should always take precedence over the mere aesthetics of editing.” (Chapter 8).

Similarly, even though hidden cuts play a key role in sustaining a film’s essential illusion, Dmytryk reminds us that the illusion only exists because of where it takes the audience emotionally. Viewers go to see movies, not to admire cutting.

So Dmytryk demands that an edit do more than remain out of sight. A cut should surpass the mere maintenance of the cinematic illusion by sweeping the audience inexorably further into its world.

An edit should be judged based on what it adds to the movie. If a cut enhances audience engagement and immersion, then it accomplishes much more than just evading notice. Prioritizing edits that entice viewers to connect with characters and care about the story, rather than dwelling on continuity issues, results in a stronger film. As Dmytryk explains: “If the cut is dramatically correct, it is remarkable how often the bad match will be completely unnoticed by the viewer.” (Chapter 8).

To choose the cut that contributes the most to a movie, an editor should be guided by the values imbedded in the particularities of that film. To properly evaluate viewer experience requires fluency with the movie’s unique characteristics and specifications. Rather than by reference to objective editing standards, some editing solutions emerge from an inquiry into the mechanisms of the film itself. Dmytryk demands intentional choices in service of a specific cinematic approach to a specific story. An editor always cuts a distinct film, with its own particular strengths, opportunities, and demands.

To this end, Dmytryk sets out the factors an editor should synthesize when weighing editing options. An editor must grasp the story and comprehend how each moment sustains the film’s structural integrity. Conversance with the footage, the performances, and the film’s other production elements is equally important, as is understanding the