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**An Analysis of the Editing of the film Samsara**

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## **D e c l a r a t i o n**

I declare that I have elaborated the Master's thesis entitled

### **An Analysis of the Editing of the film Samsara**

independently, under the expert supervision of my thesis supervisor, and using only the literature and sources cited therein, and that the thesis was not used within the scope of a different university programme of study or to obtain the same degree or a different degree. I consent to the publication of the thesis in accordance with legislation and with AMU internal regulations.

Prague, August 2023

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the editing of the feature film *Samsara* (2011) by Ron Fricke. *Samsara* is not a documentary with a traditional narrative; however, the film conveys a very emotional story on a gut level where the narrator is hidden. The methodology used relies on a neoformalist approach and Karen Pearlman's insights on rhythm in film editing. Based on this, an in-depth analysis of each segment of Fricke's film is conducted, concerning not only its semantic and thematic function but also the film's rhythm in evoking the viewer's emotions.

## **Abstrakt**

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá analýzou střihové skladby v celovečerním filmu *Samsara* (2011) Rona Frickeho. *Samsara* není dokumentárním filmem s tradičním vyprávěním. Zprostředkovává velmi emotivní, niterný příběh, jehož vypravěč je divákovi skryt. Použitá metodologie se opírá o neoformalistický přístup a poznatky Karen Pearlmanové o rytmu ve filmovém střihu. Na jejím základě je provedena hloubková analýza jednotlivých segmentů Frickeho filmu, která se týká nejen jeho sémantické a tematické funkce, ale i filmového rytmu při vyvolání diváckých emocí.

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1. UNCOVERING A HIDDEN NARRATOR   ASSOCIATIONAL FORM, DIMENSIONS OF FILM EDITING</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1. Prologue.....	6
2. Sand Mandala – Creation of the Universe .....	8
3. Conflict – Human vs. Nature .....	10
4a. Nature.....	11
4b. Origin.....	12
4c. Modernity.....	13
5. Human Contradictions.....	15
6. Industrialization .....	17
6a. Cycle of Technological Production.....	17
6b. Vehicle Demolition.....	18
6c. Recycling .....	19
7. Food Production.....	19
8. Objectification and Dehumanization.....	23
9. Imprisonment / Inequality .....	24
10. Militarization .....	27
10a. Cause-and-effect.....	27
10b. Conflicts between nations .....	29
11. Religions .....	29
12. Impermanence .....	30
<b>CHAPTER 2.   RHYTHMIC RELATIONS</b> .....	<b>33</b>
2.1 Rhythm based on Duration .....	34
2.2 Rhythm based on Mise-en-scene .....	37
2.3 Rhythm for Meaning.....	38
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>Reference list</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>Appendix</b> .....	<b>45</b>

# INTRODUCTION

When we read the words, for example, "a rabbit," something peculiar happens in our mental process. These words can trigger a mental image of the animal, but it is unclear where or how this image is perceived. Furthermore, if we read the words "a hunter" and then "a rabbit," our brains try to associate the two words. Some people may think the hunter is hunting the rabbit, but it eventually depends on our previous experiences, knowledge, and beliefs. There could be other interpretations, but we will consciously or unconsciously try to create meaning.

The same principle applies to watching movies, where every image can evoke the viewer's senses, feelings, and thoughts. And by juxtaposing two different images, a new meaning can be created, just as it is done with shots, scenes, and so on to construct the entire film. The film editor's role is to choose the images and order them in a way that efficiently tells a story or a concept and achieves the director's goal.

An excellent example of the importance of editing is the nonverbal documentary *Samsara* (2011), directed by Ron Fricke and edited by him and Mark Magidson. Even though there is no narrator who speaks in the film, their presence is felt through the choice and juxtaposition of shots, inviting the viewer to construct their interpretations and meanings as the sequences unfold, guided by the hidden narration.

This film explores the contradiction within humanity and its relationship with the environment, such as the transformation of the environment by humanity, industrialization, wars, religions, the human psyche, and more. *Samsara* was filmed over nearly five years in twenty-five countries and shot on seventy-millimeter film, presenting 102 minutes of imagery.<sup>1</sup>

Ron Fricke, who gained recognition as the cinematographer and editor for the non-verbal film *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) directed by Godfrey Reggio, goes beyond his previous collaborations and takes complete control of the creative process of his non-verbal documentaries as the director, cinematographer, and co-editor along with Mark Magidson. Fricke and Magidson have collaborated also on movies *Baraka* (1992), a film of a similar vein, as well as *Chronos* (1985).

I am taking the liberty of using a subjective 'I' in accordance with neoformalism theory and its emphasis on the critic's motivation for selecting a film to analyze.

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<sup>1</sup> "About Samsara." *About SAMSARA | The Official Site for the Films SAMSARA and BARAKA*, [www.barakasamsara.com/samsara/about](http://www.barakasamsara.com/samsara/about). Accessed 29 July 2023.

I have chosen to examine the film *Samsara* because it strongly influenced me as a person and as someone interested in filmmaking. I was amazed at how I perceived different themes without a traditional story or a narrator. What impressed me the most was that I couldn't explain the meaning, but the feeling was powerful. The experience felt like meditation, and I was amazed by how the editors constructed the entire film. Before watching *Samsara*, I hadn't had the opportunity to travel abroad, but this film allowed me to virtually explore the world for the first time. The editors, Ron Fricke and Mark Magidson, have triggered my desire to deeply understand their style, exploring the principles that contribute to the functionality of editing. By examining the film's editing and its role in conveying the film's themes, this work aims to offer valuable insights into the field of film editing.

As the methodology for this analysis, the work will rely on neoformalism. It is a fairly modern approach to aesthetic analysis, based on the Russian Formalist literary theory from the 1920s and developed mainly by Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell. "Neoformalism as an approach does offer a series of assumptions about how artworks are constructed and how they operate in cueing audience response."<sup>2</sup> The main advantage of using neoformalism as the methodology for this thesis is that it emphasizes film form. Due to the lack of a conventional narrative structure, the film *Samsara* applies the associational form, and editing as part of the stylistic system plays a crucial role in shaping the overall form and functioning of the film.

In addition to cueing audience response, it is essential to acknowledge the viewer's active involvement in the viewing experience. According to Kristin Thompson, "The viewer actively seeks cues in work and responds to them with viewing skills acquired through the experience of other artworks and of everyday life. The spectator is involved on the levels of perception, emotion, and cognition, all of which are inextricably bound up together."<sup>3</sup>

Alongside the emotional impact, meaning holds a significant role in our experience of the artworks. In their book *Film Art: An Introduction*, Bordwell and Thompson have characterized four basic levels of meaning in a film to deliver a message to the viewer:<sup>4</sup>

1. *Referential meaning* refers to a specific piece of information from outside the movie that the audience is assumed to be familiar with; otherwise, they would miss the meaning cued by the film.

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<sup>2</sup> Thompson, Kristin. *Breaking the Glass Armor*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988. p 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, Kristin. *Breaking the Glass Armor*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988. p 10.

<sup>4</sup> Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Boston, McGraw-Hill, 2008. p 60-63.



2. *Explicit meaning*: refers to the themes, ideas, or messages that are directly conveyed by the film. These can be communicated through dialogue, voiceover, or other explicit means of communication within the film.
3. *Implicit meaning* refers to the deeper, underlying themes, ideas, or messages that are not directly stated by the film but must be inferred or interpreted by the viewer. Implicit meaning often requires the viewer to make connections between different elements of the film.
4. *Symptomatic meaning* in film analysis involves interpreting explicit and implicit meanings as reflections of broader cultural, historical, and ideological factors prevailing in the society during the film's creation. It signifies that elements in the film represent wider values and beliefs of that culture. To understand symptomatic meanings, one must analyze the film's formal system and narrative choices to uncover the underlying cultural and ideological aspects present during its production.

The film *Samsara* is characterized by its implicit meaning, as it lacks not only a verbal narrator but also a clear narrative, inviting strong interpretation and the assignment of general meanings to the film. Therefore, according to Thompson, the neoformalist approach is well-suited for analyzing such an unusual film, as it avoids assuming that the meanings and patterns noticed are entirely inherent in the work.<sup>5</sup>

In relation to the goal of this thesis, the focus will primarily be on examining the implicit meaning, while explicit and symptomatic meanings will not be explored as they are not relevant to the goal of the thesis. However, we will examine the referential meaning in certain scenes through philosophical and historical studies, as it provides hints and helps us understand the filmmakers' intentions.

This thesis is organized into individual chapters where the main source for this study will be the film itself, and the work also relies on literature studies. Chapter 1 is dedicated to uncovering the hidden narrator. Throughout the film, the editors suggest ideas and themes on an implicit level, which helps maintain the viewer's interest. The film's form will be closely examined using associational principles to demonstrate how the editors evoke a response from the audience. In a way to gain a deeper understanding of the editing techniques that contributes to the associational form of *Samsara*, this work will rely on the four dimensions of editing described by Bordwell and Thompson.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Thompson, Kristin. *Breaking the Glass Armor*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988. p 25-26.

<sup>6</sup> Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Boston, McGraw-Hill, 2008. p 220-231.

1. *Graphic relations between shot A and shot B* help achieve smooth continuity, maintaining a sense of coherence even though the images are unrelated in space and time. However, abrupt cuts can also be used to contrast images.
2. *Rhythmic relations between shot A and shot B* refer to the duration of shots and their relation "By making all the shots more or less the same length, the filmmakers can create a steady beat. Gradually lengthening shots can slow the rhythm, while shorter and shorter shots can accelerate it."<sup>7</sup> In the case of *Samara*, the rhythmic editing plays a crucial role to sustain and engage the viewer.
3. *Spatial Relations between Shot A and Shot B* demonstrate how editing can shape and construct the film's space. The filmmaker can either start with a single shot that establishes the whole space or choose to use several shots and combine them to create a complete spatial representation.
4. *Temporal Relations between Shot A and Shot B*, an editor can manipulate the action in the film and perception of time through editing techniques.

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, the aim is to provide insight into the overall rhythm of the film by examining its most representative parts. The focus will be on the rhythmic relations between shots. To achieve this, the entire film will be broken down into individual shots, and their durations will be identified to demonstrate their rhythmic impact on the audience. The chapter will be divided into three parts:

2.1 Rhythm based on Duration

2.2 Rhythm based on Mise-en-scene

2.3 Rhythm for Meaning

Bordwell and Thompson explain the rhythm relations between the shots: "when the filmmaker adjusts the length of shots in relation to one another, she or he is controlling the rhythmic potential of editing. Cinematic rhythm as a whole derives not only from editing but from other film techniques as well. The filmmaker relies on movement in the mise-en-scene, camera position and movement, the rhythm of sound, and the overall context to determine the editing rhythm."<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note that this examination will not focus on the role of music and sound.

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<sup>7</sup> Bordwell, David, et al. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York, McGraw-Hill Education, 2020. p 224.

<sup>8</sup> Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Boston, McGraw-Hill, 2008. p 226.

Mark Magidson, the co-editor and producer of the film, in an interview with the documentary magazine, *International Documentary Association*, described the process of editing *Samsara*, “We chose to edit the film in silence, unlike *Baraka*, and addressed the music after the film was completely edited. It was a severe process in some ways but forced us to really be efficient with the use of the footage and get the film working visually and structurally before bringing in the music.”<sup>9</sup>

Therefore this analysis will primarily concentrate on the associational principles and editing techniques employed in *Samsara*, excluding sound.

In addition to Bordwell and Thompson, Karen Pearlman's theory will also be used. Unlike Bordwell and Thompson, Pearlman considers cinematic rhythm as a whole, with a particular emphasis on the crucial role of the editor in devising its final shape and form.<sup>10</sup> Her insights provide additional considerations that editors take into account to effectively shape the cinematic rhythm.

In general, the following chapters explore the main goal of this thesis. By examining the editing of *Samsara* using the neoformalism approach, this work aims to demonstrate how to create and sustain audience's empathy and engagement in nonverbal feature films.

In the final part of the thesis, the appendix is included, which functions to recap all the images used from the film *Samsara* based on the semantic function of analyzed themes. Additionally, it provides the structural framework used to analyze the rhythmic patterns.

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<sup>9</sup> “Sound and Vision: ‘samsara’ Meditates on the Wheel of Life.” *International Documentary Association*, 20 May 2021, [www.documentary.org/online-feature/sound-and-vision-samsara-meditates-wheel-life](http://www.documentary.org/online-feature/sound-and-vision-samsara-meditates-wheel-life). Accessed 29 July 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Pearlman, Karen. *Cutting Rhythms*. New York, Focal Press, 2016. p 4.

# CHAPTER 1. UNCOVERING A HIDDEN NARRATOR | ASSOCIATIONAL FORM, DIMENSIONS OF FILM EDITING

The associational form is “A type of organization in which the film's parts are juxtaposed to suggest similarities, contrasts, concepts, emotions, and expressive qualities”.<sup>11</sup> This strategy applies to the film *Samsara* because the entire film is made along associational lines. It is important to mention that the editors intentionally avoid using captions to describe the places, contributing to the universality of the scenes. The locations of places mentioned in the analysis are based on the official website of the film.<sup>12</sup>

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson suggest segmenting a film to identify its patterns to understand how it works. They describe segmentation as a simple outline of the film that breaks it into major and minor parts, marked by consecutive numbers.<sup>13</sup> This thesis will apply this method and segment the film *Samsara* into 12 chronological parts based on changes in themes and content. Some parts may require further division, such as 1a and 1b. To illustrate the analysis, still images will be used from the film. The images used in this analysis vary in size, depending on the context of the examples, with the purpose of enhancing comprehension.

## 1. Prologue

The film opens with a fade-in into a scene with the performance of Indonesian Tari Legong dancers (shots 1-8). The dancers' eyes are highlighted with makeup, creating the illusion that they have big heads and small bodies. The continuity editing and music support the dancers' movements, creating a sense of calm and hypnotism. The editors first established this sense of harmony before juxtaposing it with the scene of the erupting Kilauea volcano, which disrupts the dancers' performance with abrupt cuts and foley explosion sound (shots 9-14). Such a strong contrast between the two scenes acts as one of the principles of associational form, evokes the viewer, and invites an interpretation.

Furthermore, in (shot 8), the close-up emphasizes the dancer's emotion and, in juxtaposition with the wide shot of the volcanic eruption (shot 9), evoke a sense of the relationship between human and nature, suggesting the unpredictable power of nature and its forces being beyond human control.

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<sup>11</sup> Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Boston, McGraw-Hill, 2008. p 477.

<sup>12</sup> “Filming Locations: The Official Site for the Films *Samsara* and *Baraka*.” *Filming Locations | The Official Site for the Films SAMSARA and BARAKA*, [www.barakasamsara.com/samsara/locations](http://www.barakasamsara.com/samsara/locations). Accessed 29 July 2023

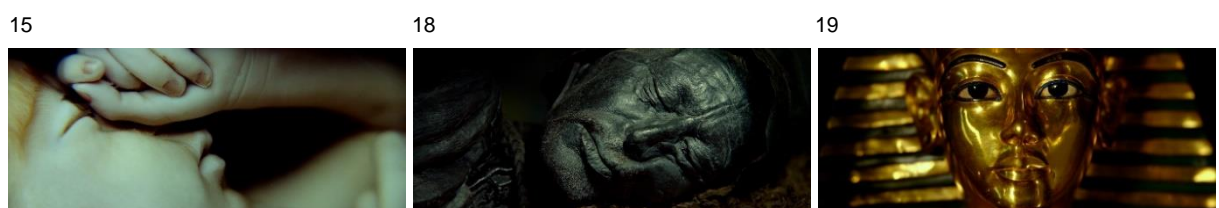
<sup>13</sup> Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Boston, McGraw-Hill, 2008. p 69.

Both scenes involve motion through the dancers' movements and the volcanic eruption. Just before the scenes transition, the dancer stops dancing (shot 8), emphasizing her awareness of the natural forces surrounding her.



After the audience experience the erupting Kilauea volcano, which can represent both the creative and destructive forces of the Earth, the section after shows three statues; first, we see images of baby statues (shot 15), symbolizing birth. Then, we see the statue of an old man, representing death (shot 18). And in shot 19, we are presented with the statue of Tutankhamun, an ancient Egyptian pharaoh renowned for his opulent tomb and extravagant lifestyle, who believed in reincarnation.

However, despite his wealth and power, he could not escape the inevitable cycle of life and death. The mask serves as a poignant reminder that all material possessions and worldly achievements are ultimately impermanent. From a neoformalist perspective, we can demonstrate how the editors, through associative connections, suggest the cycle of life and reincarnation.



At this moment in the film, the meaning is implicit and gives us some hints, but it is not until the end that we fully understand that impermanence is the main theme the film explores. The statue of Tutankhamun marks the end of the prologue. The prologue gives the viewer little context about the film but on a very implicit level, where everything will be recreated throughout the film. Additionally, it establishes the film's style but also engages the viewers. After showing Tutankhamun's golden mask, the film's title, "Samsara" appears through fade-in. Instead of using a more straightforward title, filmmaker Fricke chose the unfamiliar word "Samsara" to create an aura of mystery and intrigue the viewers.

In an interview for the documentary magazine, Magidson also explained the idea behind the film's title, which gives us insights into exploring themes and implicit meanings. "Samsara is a Sanskrit word that can be translated broadly as the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth; another way to express it is, themes related to impermanence."<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Sand Mandala – Creation of the Universe

Thanks to the referential meaning, as explained by Bordwell and Thompson, we can analyze the function of this segment in relation to the film's overall structure. The editors depict the creation of the universe by showing monks painting the sand mandala. In Tibetan Buddhism, the sand mandala painting symbolizes the universe.<sup>15</sup>

This portrayal of universe creation contributes to the perception of the following parts of the film, where the natural world and human factors will be presented. If the viewer is familiar with Buddhist culture, they will understand the significance of the sand mandala symbol in the film *Samsara*. However, even for viewers without this reference, the implicit meaning conveyed through associative images allows perceiving a sense of creation.

First, slow-paced, long aerial shots (1-6) and diegetic sound are used to create a meditative and spiritual tone for the audience. Then, in contrast, through fast pace follows the Thiksey Monastery's scene in the North of India. By employing the associational principle, changing the tempo from slow to fast creates a sense of urgency and highlights the significance of the event. In (shots 11-12), we see monks announcing something to the village, then a monk praying (shots 13-14). He looks at the camera and mumbles, which intensifies the scene. As the scene progresses, we understand that the monks prepare a ritual and paint the sand mandala (shots 16-18). Then the choice of using tighter shots (19-23) emphasizes the patience and meticulous process of the monks' painting.

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<sup>14</sup> "Sound and Vision: 'samsara' Meditates on the Wheel of Life." *International Documentary Association*, 20 May 2021, [www.documentary.org/online-feature/sound-and-vision-samsara-meditates-wheel-life](http://www.documentary.org/online-feature/sound-and-vision-samsara-meditates-wheel-life). Accessed 29 July 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Rem, Koolhaas. *Elements of Architecture*. Köln, Taschen GmbH, 2018. p 30.

1



6



11



12



13



14



16



18



19



23



The scene culminates with an image of the completed painting of the sand mandala (shot 28), which is emphasized by the music and camera tilting up, adding significant importance to this moment. Then, the sand mandala painting (shot 28) is juxtaposed with the following image of the 'One Thousand Hand Dance' in China (shot 29).

Under the scope of graphic relations between the shots, we can demonstrate how the editors achieved graphic matching to suggest a sense of creation and perfection, thanks to the symmetry and balance shown in both images. The dancers have not yet started dancing, but the camera smoothly tracks in as one of the dancers closes her eyes. This particular moment in the film intrigues the audience and creates an expectation, sustaining the viewer's curiosity about its meaning.

28



29



The following segment (3) begins with an aerial shot of the desert, representing emptiness, allowing us to sense the beginning of everything. However, the true significance of this section, including the monks' ritual, the 'One Thousand Hand Dance,' and the desert, will reappear at the end of the film to reinforce its implicit meaning.

### 3. Conflict – Human vs. Nature

Segment three suggests a conflict between humans and nature, particularly following the "creation of the universe." The editors convey a sense of confrontation, but on an implicit level and without using words. From the perspective of neoformalists, the editors have employed the associative principle to convey the theme of human versus nature. In view of Bordwell and Thompson's basic associational principle, we can examine this part of the film, where the editors grouped images into distinct sections and contrasted them, inviting strong interpretations.<sup>16</sup>

In this part, these sections can be divided into three based on their content. The first section shows nature images without human presence but with signs of human impacts, such as statues and monuments, including Mount Nemrut in Turkey, Petra in Jordan, Cappadocia in Turkey, Dogon Village in Mali, and so on (shots 1-2-7-11-13).



In contrast, the second section of this long sequence reveals environments created by humans but with trails of nature's presence. Several images show the destruction caused by sand and Hurricane Katrina on the houses, groceries, and schools (shots 17-18-22-23-25-26). Additionally, the contrast between the first and second sections is further emphasized by the change in music between them. Gradually, the music shifts from melancholy to suspenseful. This juxtaposition of these two sections creates a sense of reflection, suggesting the inherent conflict between humans and nature and exploring their complex relationship.



Finally, the third section adds another implicit meaning to this part of the film. The following images show the Palace of Versailles, a former royal residence built by King Louis XIV (shots 36-37). In contrast with the previous section showing the trails of destruction caused by nature, the editors choose luxurious decoration images, highlighting the human desire for a

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<sup>16</sup> Bordwell, David, et al. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York, McGraw-Hill Education, 2020. p 381.



material world. Through the associative principle of grouping images into distinct sections and contrasting them, the editors suggest that humans are aware of their relationship with the power of nature and may seek to resolve this conflict through an agreement with the creator of the universe to protect their material wealth.

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## 4. Transformation

After portraying the creation of the universe and suggesting the conflict between humans and nature, a sense of narration is already established. Building upon this hidden narrator follows the theme of humanity's transformation and complex relationship with the environment. This segment first presents natural landscapes, representing the planet's purest state. It then seamlessly transitions to a section of African natives, symbolizing an early form of human existence and their natural surroundings. The film then presents roads, tall buildings, and offices, illustrating modern industrialized society. This analysis will be further divided into 4a Nature, 4b Origin, and 4c Modernity to examine each section closely.

### 4a. Nature

A montage sequence shows stunning images of various natural wonders, including deserts, mountains, canyons, waterfalls, and more (shots 1-3-9-24). The montage sequence refers to a series of shots edited together to condense time, space, or information in a film. This technique falls under temporal relations between the shots. It is important to mention for Bordwell and Thompson, the term "montage" should not be confused with the theory of Sergei Eisenstein.<sup>17</sup>

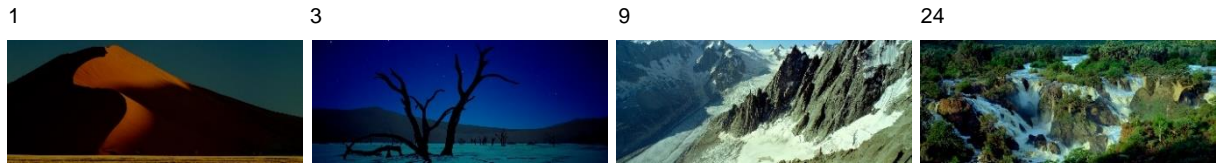
In this montage sequence, nature shots are edited together. Fricke and Magdison manipulate time using time-lapse techniques, as discussed by Bordwell and Thompson in terms of temporal relations: "Like other film techniques, editing can control the time of the action denoted in the film"<sup>18</sup>, here the manipulation of time provides viewers with a unique and immersive experience of observing the wonders of nature, an experience made through only film techniques. Furthermore, most of the shots used are wide and with long takes,

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<sup>17</sup> Bordwell, David, et al. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York, McGraw-Hill Education, 2020. p 252.

<sup>18</sup> Bordwell, David, et al. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York, McGraw-Hill Education, 2020. p 226.

the editors create a meditative tone and establish a deep connection between the images of nature and the audience.



#### 4b. Origin

Through graphic matching in transition, follow the section that presents Mursi tribes in the Omo Valley, Ethiopia. According to Bordwell and Thompson, explain “Graphics may be edited to achieve smooth continuity or abrupt contrast. The filmmaker may link shots by graphic similarities, thus making what we can call a graphic match. Shapes, colors, overall composition, or movement in shot A may be picked up in the composition of shot B.”<sup>19</sup>

It can be seen that through the juxtaposition between the wide shot of a waterfall (shot a24) and the close-up of the young man (shot b1), both images share similar colors, resulting in a graphic match that establishes the harmony between the purest form of nature and the Mursi tribes.



As the sequence progresses, in (shots 2-5), we see more portraits of people from the Mursi tribes until we arrive at a wide shot of the Himba village in Kunene, Namibia (shot 6). Many shots show the Himba people's simple clothes, houses, and tools as a representative of the earliest form of human existence and offer insights into humanity's past (shots 6-9).



<sup>19</sup> Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Boston, McGraw-Hill, 2008. p 221.

According to the book *Film Art: An Introduction*, repeating the motif is one of the fundamental principles to reinforce the associations.<sup>20</sup> In this part of the film, to reinforce the theme of transformation, the filmmakers repeated several times the juxtaposition of the close-ups of humans with long shots of the environment to suggest the mental state of humans with their surroundings.

Therefore, in the transition to the following modernity section, the motif of cutting from a close-up shot (11) to a long shot (c1) is applied, similar to the transition from the section of nature to the section of origin. This motif is also supported through graphic relations, thanks to their similar colors, resulting in a smooth continuity transition but also a clash in the content of images. By contrasting humanity's past representative with contemporary urban life, the editors convey the theme of human transformation.

11



c1



Additionally, the long duration of the shot (11), combined with the camera zooming in, creates a strong connection between the viewer and the woman. The following image of the city (shot c1) invites us to understand the shot of the Himba woman as a reminder of the natural beauty that existed before humans started shaping the world to their needs.

#### 4c. Modernity

In contrast with the nature section, a montage sequence shows contemporary urban settings and tall buildings. The use of aerial shots and fast-motion creates a sense of dynamic life. However, in (shot 14), the tempo changes from fast-motion to regular. Also, the camera becomes static, and the music stops. Through these techniques, the editors create an expectation and sustain the viewer's interest in seeing the following images.

The juxtaposition of shot 14 with shot 15 again applies the motif of cutting from a wide to a tighter shot, but now portrays a human and a robot, suggesting our mental state in a contemporary environment.

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<sup>20</sup> Bordwell, David, et al. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York, McGraw-Hill Education, 2020. p 381

In (shot 15), the man looks at the robot, creating a sense of confusion and reflection. Then, there is a close-up of the robot (shot 16); through this choice, the filmmakers offer to experience the following shots from the robot's perspective.



In (shot 17), the camera tilts down, revealing the people working in a cubical office. At the same time, the non-diegetic sound of robots becomes present – all these devices suggest humans as machine workers in contemporary society.

The following performance by French artist Olivier de Sagazan emphasizes this idea, portraying the human's mental state in contemporary society. The artist appears as a white-collar employee wearing a suit and sitting at his desk, surrounded by pens, staplers, papers, and a telephone. Initially tired, in a long take and accompanied by classical music, he begins to perform by covering and painting his face with clay and red color. Suddenly, the music stops, and he begins to tear his suit and tie. Intense music starts playing, and the 32 abruptly cuts within approximately 87 seconds, making the scene uncomfortable to watch, evoking the viewer to feel the same as the man - an employee trapped in his office attempting to escape.



Abruptly cuts



Furthermore, before and after the French artist's performance, there are two images of a female robot, shots 18 and 52. The editors show the female robot twice to trigger the audience to question something. First, in (shot 18), the female robot doesn't react. But after the performance of the French artist, the female robot shows a surprised and ironically amused expression (shot 52), highlighting the weaknesses of the human mental state compared to a robot. The assumption is that the association doesn't function only by connecting the two shots but also by separating them.

## 5. Human Contradictions

So far, we have explored how Fricke and Magidson created thematic associations between parts of the film to engage and sustain the viewer through meticulous editing. After portraying humans trapped in the office, the following part suggests people's attempts to cope with anxiety and stress through various activities.

The editors used editing techniques to suggest the contradictions within contemporary human society. Using Bordwell and Thompson's theory, we can demonstrate how the editors first created a sense of a loop through graphic and temporal relations (shots 1-3). They achieved this by using graphic relations, as the shots contain circular shapes. Additionally, by manipulating time through fast motion, they emphasized the repetitive actions within the shots, creating the impression that people are stuck in a cycle.

The fast-motion sequence continues, showing people playing golf, running, and skiing (shots 3-9). Despite their efforts to find solutions and cope with anxiety, these associated images suggest that humanity is imprisoned because all the environments shown are indoors.

1



2



3



6



9



In the following sequence of this segment, we can examine how the associational form functions by first establishing a specific motif early in the film and then repeating it.

In segment 3, the imagery of luxury life and religion has already been introduced. Initially, these images may seem disconnected, causing viewers to struggle to interpret their meaning. However, as the theme is portrayed again in this segment, the viewers' cognition becomes more aware and conscious of the underlying implicit meaning.

In (shot 10), on the left side is a mosque, and on the right side is the luxury hotel, Burj Al Arab, in Dubai. Such a juxtaposition within a shot already evokes what this section is about. The following images show aerial shots of the Burj Khalifa tower (shot 11), Palm Islands in Dubai – an artificial island shaped like a palm (shots 12-15). These images highlight contemporary architecture's modernity, luxury, and advanced technology.

As the sequence progress, in (shot 21), another aerial shot of the Burj Khalifa tower reappears as the longest shot with the longest duration in this sequence, emphasizing its significance as one of the tallest buildings in the world. It suggests the desire for luxury and the pursuit of extravagance by humans. Then juxtaposition with the image of women wearing a hijab reappears as the motif of religion (shot 22), reinforcing the complexity within human society. It reflects the challenge people face in balancing their desires for luxury with their religious beliefs or other values, a similar idea suggested in segment 3.

10



11



12



15



21



22



23



Furthermore, the contrast within shot (22) emphasizes this idea where we see the religious women's completely covering their bodies and face, and the advertising portraying men with underwear underscores the presence of contradiction. Finally, with a seamless graphic cut, the editors transition from the United Arab Emirates to Italy and present an image (shot 23)

showing two young women walking. This image of fashion dressed in Milano internally contrasts the two women wearing a hijab, adding another layer of diversity and showcasing the cultural variations worldwide. It may seem cliché to go from hijabi women to crop-topped women in Milano, but it reinforces the implicit meaning.

## 6. Industrialization

Segment 6 begins by showing imagery of mass people in the theatre, streets, and busy metro through a montage sequence. Through rhythmic cutting, the filmmakers portray contemporary life as a giant machine. This sequence will be examined closely in chapter 2 (page 35) since the chapter analyzes parts of the film through rhythmic relations between the shots.

Under the scope of neoformalism, in the following sequences, we can demonstrate another principle of associational form that helps in cueing viewers' responses. Fricke & Magidson conveyed the theme of industrialization through the principle of similarities, where three sections of images are connected thematically, including technology production, vehicle demolition, and product recycling.

### 6a. Cycle of Technological Production

In the first section, viewers can observe the production cycle shown in a Chinese factory. By applying Bordwell and Thompson's editing dimensions – temporal and spatial relations between shots – we can analyze how the filmmakers have created a distinct impression of people heading to work. Firstly, in terms of temporal relations, the use of fast motion manipulates the perception of workers' actions, making their walking appear different from how it would in real-time. Secondly, in regard to spatial relations, the choice to open the scene with long shots effectively portrays the workers as small figures entering the factory. Together, these editing techniques create an impression that diminishes the humanity of the workers (shots 1-2).

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2

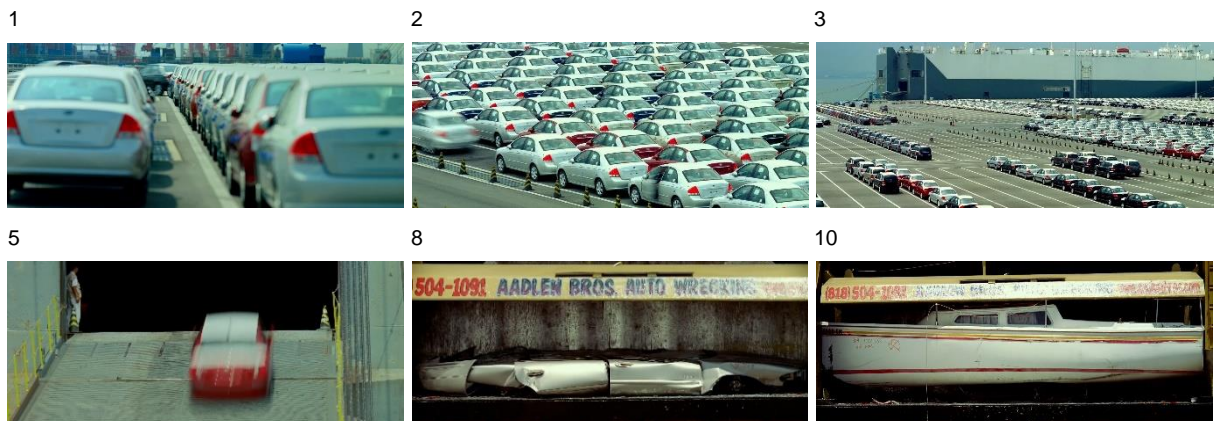


In (shot 3), many workers are engaged in their tasks. The transition from wide to tighter shots intensifies their activities through spatial relations (shots 3-8). It culminates by focusing on the hand of one worker (shot 8). The fast motion emphasizes the worker's intense adjustment of irons. Iron products continually enter and leave the frame through the mechanism. There is no iron at one moment, and the editors seem to intentionally cut this section with the action of the worker waiting for the mechanism. This signifies the worker's speed surpassing even that of the machinery itself, emphasizing the notion of humanity being compelled to function like machines in order to meet the demands of industrialization.



## 6b. Vehicle Demolition

After observing the production of irons, the fast motion continues in the following scene, which shows cars entering a garage (shot 1-3). By applying the principle of similarities, the sight of numerous cars allows us to imagine the production process without explicitly witnessing it. However, unlike the previous scene that focused on iron production, this scene depicts the demolition of vehicles (shots 5-10). This contrast evokes a sense of destruction, highlighting the notion that what is produced is subsequently destroyed.





## 6c. Recycling

The transition from the section on vehicle demolition to the recycling section is made not only due to their thematic connection but also through the use of a graphic match (shots 11b-1c). This technique creates a smoother flow and helps maintain the industrialization theme.

11b



1c



Furthermore, in this segment, we can demonstrate how the filmmakers illustrated visually, on an implicit level, the concept of the film's title, 'Samsara' as Thompson explains that "Artworks achieve their renewing effects on our mental processes through an aesthetic play the Russian Formalists termed defamiliarization. Our nonpractical perception allows us to see everything in the artwork differently from the way we would see it in reality, because it seems strange in its new context."<sup>21</sup>

Considering that, the concept of 'Samsara', representing the cycle of life, is also defamiliarized in the theme of industrialization by grouping images into distinct sections. These sections include the production of products (birth), the demolition of vehicles (death), and the recycling of the products (rebirth).

## 7. Food Production

The editors continue engaging and sustaining the viewer through the principle of similarities. In this part of the film, the complete feeding cycle is shown, including the production of dumplings, animals in various farms and factories, the slaughtering and processing of the meat, and finally, people buying and eating products in a hypermarket.

In contrast to the previous segment on the industrialization of vehicles, where the sequence began showing workers entering the factory in long shots and then gradually using tighter shots, the food production part opens with a close-up shot (1). This contrast offers viewers a different experience, suggesting the human role in industrialization rather than portraying them as machines.

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<sup>21</sup> Thompson, Kristin. *Breaking the Glass Armor*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988. p10.

Additionally, the worker looking at the camera in slow-motion creates a sense of introspection, evoking our inner feelings.

1



Then we see a series of images showing the process of making dumplings (shots 6-7), and the following shot (8) shows the slaughtering of the meat. The editors juxtaposed the meat slaughtering shot with shots of a machine gathering live chickens (shots 9-10), carelessly placed on a rack by a worker (shot 11). This contrast creates a profound sense of empathy and regret toward the live chickens. Moreover, the sound of the chickens, accompanied by atmospheric music, makes the images even more sensitive.

In (shots 9-11), the images of live chickens are juxtaposed with images of the slaughtering meat (shots 12-14). This motif is repeated, creating a stronger sense of discomfort for the viewer. In the context of neoformalism, we can observe how the filmmakers apply the associational principle to shape an impression gradually.

6



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14



In (shot 15), a shot of a worker looking at the camera in slow motion reappears as another motif, similar to a close-up shot (1). Such a repetition reinforces the implicit meaning, reminding the viewer of the human's role in the industrialization of food.

In a long shot (16), we see cows in the milking machine. Unlike shot 15, here, the editors applied fast motion and used a long shot for the transition. Through the principle of changing the tempo and spatial relations, we can demonstrate how the filmmakers emphasize the scale and mechanization of the food industry—cutting from a close-up shot (15) in slow-motion to a long shot (16) in fast-motion. The milking machine image has the shape of a circle that moves while the cows leave and enter the machine; the manipulation of time creates a sense of the infinity of the process.

15



16



As the sequence unfolds, the motif of juxtaposing live animals with the act of slaughtering meat is repeated once again, but this time even with a more violent juxtaposition. In (shot 22), we emotionally spend time observing piglets feeding from their mother as she lies down on a machine, illustrating the unnatural behavior of animals. This is followed by a stark contrast, showing the pigs being slaughtered (shot 23). This cut distresses the audience, intensifying the sequence, especially as the motif is repeated throughout this segment, which can evoke the audience to consider the ethical dilemmas associated with the food industry.

22



23



Segment 7 continues, showing images of the meat processing (shot 28). A seamless transition is maintained as the scene shifts to a hypermarket (shot 29) through a graphic match. Additionally, the editors portray the massive production scale and widespread consumption through the spatial relations between the shots, as both images are long shots (28-29).

In the following example, using the principle of changing the tempo, we can examine how Fricke and Magidson create a suspenseful build-up that significantly evokes the viewer's emotions. As David Bordwell & Kristin Thompson explained, "To have an expectation about

'what happens next' is to invest some emotion in the situation. Delayed fulfillment of an expectation - suspense - may produce anxiety or sympathy."<sup>22</sup>

After showing people buying food products (shot 29), the editors change the tempo from rapid to regular to emphasize the image of overweight children (shot 30), hinting at the negative impact of food industrialization on an implicit level.

28



29



30



To build up the suspense, the editors emphasize the food industrialization by changing the tempo again and applying a rapid pace in shots 35 and 36, where we see people buying meat and the process of fast food cooking. In (shot 37), the intensification reaches its climax. The rapid pace and the camera's tracking further reinforce this intensification by focusing on obese people eating food, emphasizing the aspect of consumption. All these elements work together to heighten the audience's expectations for 'what happens next.'

35



36



37



After shot 37, the tempo finally returns to regular in the following shot (1) of segment 8, which shows a man with morbid obesity preparing for surgery, effectively conveying the implicit meaning. The deliberate delay in fulfilling the suspense highlights the profound human cost of industrialized food production and consumption. By gradually building emotional engagement over time, the impact becomes stronger when the suspense is finally resolved.

1



<sup>22</sup> Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Boston, McGraw-Hill, 2008. p 60.

## 8. Objectification and Dehumanization

Through the graphic relations between the shots, the editors continue to connect parts of the film, sustaining the viewer while simultaneously establishing a new theme: objectification and dehumanization. In (shots 1-3), seamless transitions occur, as all the shots share a common element—the drawing process.



The following sequences examine how the filmmakers created patterns throughout the segment to convey implicit meaning by contrasting dolls with women. There are two groups of images, the group of sex dolls (shots 6-9) and then the group of young women (shots 10-13). The juxtaposition of close-ups of shots 9 and 10 through a graphic match, where a doll and young woman's eyes are symmetrically composed in the same position, creates a sense of reflection. Shot 10 emphasizes the woman's sad expression, highlighting her emotional state. While the following wide shot 11 portrays happy girls dancing with numbers nailed to their bikinis, drawing attention to their bodies. Such a contrast of emotions conveys the implicit meaning of objectification.



After a series of images showing prostitutes, in the following sequence, we can distinguish the same patterns of contrasting the images of the sex dolls (shot 20) with images of geisha (shots 21-22), but this time suggesting not only objectification but also the growth of dehumanization. Earlier in this segment, we observed sex dolls in juxtaposition with prostitutes, representing contemporary society. Here, we observe dolls dressed in juxtaposition with the geisha, known as entertainers and performing artists, representing the past. Both sequences share similarities and contrasts, which help reinforce the association of interpretation. In addition, to support the idea of the growth of dehumanization, another significant moment is the emotional expression in the last shot of this part, where the geisha is presented crying in a close-up shot (22), which mirrors the close-up shots of the sex dolls and a young woman (shots 9-10).

20



21



22



## 9. Imprisonment / Inequality

As *Samsara* unfolds, it explores several themes, allowing us to examine how the filmmakers, instead of the traditional narrator, use associational principles to gradually expose the weaknesses in humanity concerning societal issues and the environment. The following part begins by showing images of slums (shots 1-3), representing a form of social imprisonment. In (shot 2), a sense of inequality is already hinted at through its composition, the contrast between the slum in the foreground and the modern city in the background.

1



2



3



Then, the following scene of the Cebu prison captures the theme of imprisonment and freedom in a thought-provoking way. The juxtapositions of images, such as showing the inmates dancing (shots 17-18-19-22) while being watched by other inmates in their cells (shots 20-21), highlight the contrast between freedom and incarceration. The editors emphasized this meaning through contrasting the inmates dancing and inmates being in cells throughout the scene.

17



18



19



20



21



22



Then, the close-up shot (30), which shows a young man behind bars, portrays sadness and offers us introspection. This image is juxtaposed with aerial images (shot 31); the camera moves from a slum to a high-standard building, then follows (shot 32) with a specific focus on the pools porch - this choice of images produces a thought on the implicit level that the reason why the young boy ended in prison may be because of inequality in social life. Furthermore, the following images (shots 33-35) show a massive trash dump where people search for necessities to survive, highlighting the contrasts in social life.

30



31



32



33



34



35



Thanks to the similarities principle, the following scene seamlessly transitions to the Kawah Ijen sulfur mine in Java, known for being one of the toughest jobs. In (shot 43), the editors employ slow motion and diegetic sound when the man lifts the sulfur to convey the physical strain of the heavy work. We can empathetically feel the worker's pain through visual and auditory elements.

43



As the scene progresses, the title film 'Samsara' concept is portrayed visually again through graphic relations between the shots. In (shot 44), the workers carefully climb from points (a-b). Then, juxtaposing with shot 45, workers climbing from points (c-d). The filmmakers have created a visually cyclical movement, evoking a sense of the infinite process of physical work.

44



45



Then the principle of the graphic match applies to the next scene. The editors cut from the men carrying the sulfur (shot 45) to the image of women carrying various items on their heads (shot 46). The women move from right to left and vice versa, maintaining the sense of the cycle of work, even though the images are unrelated in terms of place.

46





## 10. Militarization

This segment shows various sections that portray death, the industry of arms, consequences of the war, conflicts between countries, and so on – all the images are juxtaposed to imply a cause-and-effect relationship between them which creates a sense of complexity and self-destruction of humanity.

### 10a. Cause-and-effect

In the first scene of this segment, we can analyze the referential meaning to help us demonstrate the implicit meaning. The scene begins with images of coffins in the Kane Kwei Coffin Shop in Accra, Ghana. The coffins are in unusual shapes, such as coffins shaped like fish, airplanes, and cars (shots 1-3). The occupation of the deceased often influences the type of coffin chosen.<sup>23</sup>

In (shot 5), we see a dead young man in a coffin shaped like a pistol, which represents his involvement in militarization. The following images (shots 6-7) show the young man being buried, suggesting to the viewer that his death has resulted from his association with militarization.



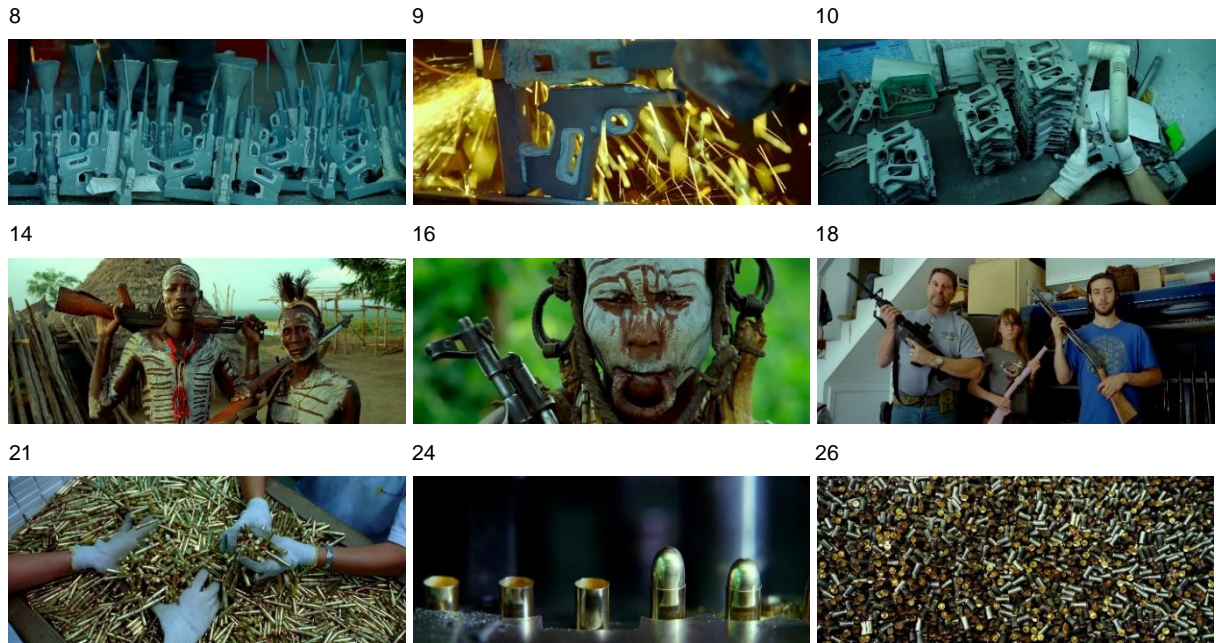
However, even though the viewer doesn't have a reference for what the coffin represents in Ghanaian tradition, the motif of cause-and-effect is repeated throughout the segment to convey its implicit meaning through associational principles and editing techniques.

After the coffin shaped like a pistol is buried, an analogical link follows to create associations and reinforce the implicit meaning. Here, the images show the production cycle of the weapons (shots 8-10). Then, the juxtaposition with images of people armed from different cultures (shots 14-16-18) creates a sense of confrontation between them.

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<sup>23</sup> "Coffins." *Kane Kwei Carpentry Workshop*, [www.kanekwei.com/past-events](http://www.kanekwei.com/past-events). Accessed 29 July 2023.

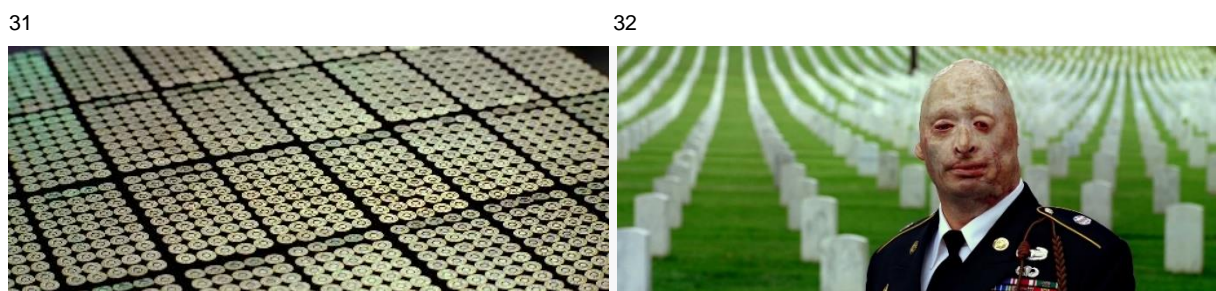
As the sequence progresses, the editors cut to the production of bullets (shots 21-24-26-31). The rhythmic cutting emphasizes the industrial aspect of weapons and creates suspense. In view of Bordwell and Thompson's theory of rhythmic relations between shots, chapter 2 examines closely the rhythm of this part (see page 38).



This sequence culminates with a long take (shot 32), showing a physically deformed American soldier standing in a war veterans' graveyard. This powerful juxtaposition (shots 31-32) highlights the complex and paradoxical emotions that can arise from the invention and use of arms. The impact is stronger as the fulfillment of suspense is delayed.

Additionally, we can observe similar graphic patterns between bullets and graves in both images.

Under the scope of neoformalism, we have demonstrated how the filmmakers employed the principles of similarities, contrasts, and graphic relations to show the consequences of war and convey the implicit meaning that portrays humans as self-destructive.



## 10b. Conflicts between nations

After the image of a physically deformed American, a thematic chain continues where images show military parades and children training in karate, evoking a sense of paradox and complexity in humanity.

Then, images (shots 1-3) suggest why such confrontations may occur by portraying contemporary political conflicts between neighboring nations, such as the demilitarized zone in Korea and the West Bank wall. Contrasting these images implies the tension and separation between these nations. Through the spatial relations between shots, the editors constructed the space to contribute to a broader sense of conflict between nations worldwide. In (shots 1-2), we see South and North Korean soldiers standing guard. The transition from shot 1 to shot 2A creates the feeling that the South Korean soldier is staring at the North Korean soldier. Then the North Korean soldier turns (shot 2B), which creates the impression that he is looking at the wall of the West Bank in Palestine (shot 3) even though it is not the same place. The manipulation of space generalizes the cause and effect, making it a universal theme.

1



2A



2B



3



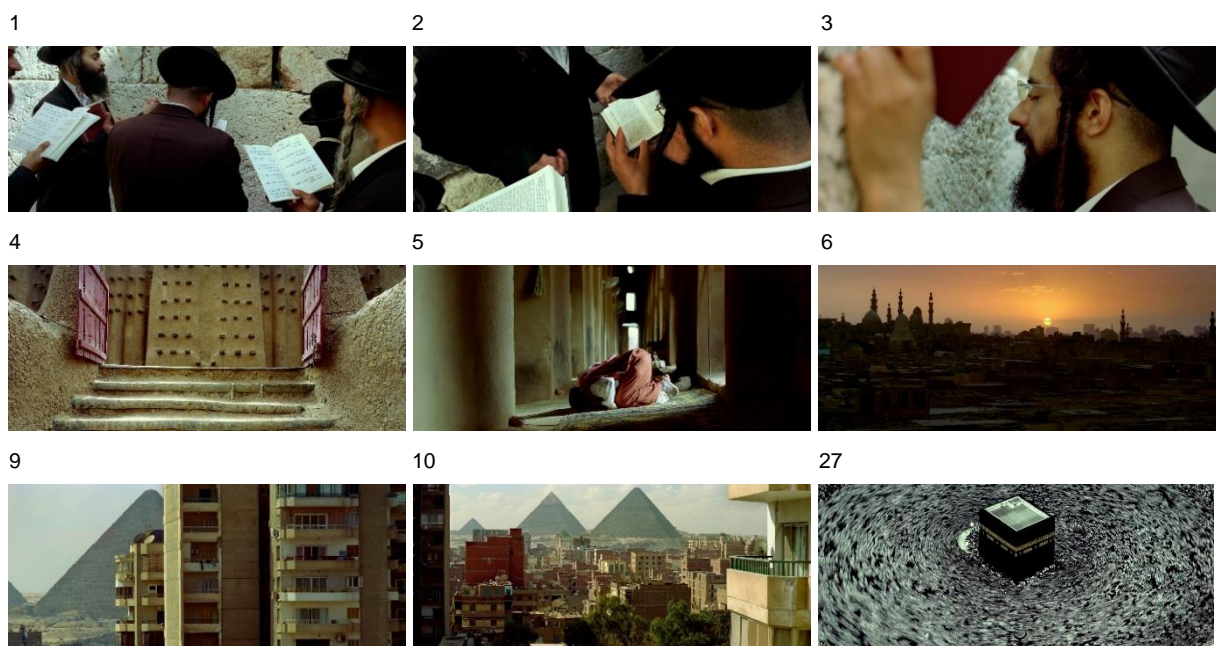
## 11. Religions

As we approach the film's end, several motifs are repeated to create new meanings, such as the theme of religion. For example, in the film's first half (segment 3), the theme of religion appears after showing images of natural disasters and the human desire for material wealth. There, images of churches are shown - suggesting that humans are attempting to find spiritual connection and harmony with the cosmos to protect their wealth.

However, in this part of the film, after highlighting the issues of war and tensions between nations like Israel and Palestine, the nations are identified by their religion.

The editors employed the principle of similarities to show imagery of Jews praying at the Wailing Wall (shots 1-3) and Muslims praying in the Mosque (shots 4-6). Here religion has the effect of dividing people instead of bringing them together.

Then, we see images of an Egyptian pyramid composed in a single shot with a tall building (shots 9-10), evoking the passage of time and suggesting the enduring influence of religion throughout history. The pyramid also symbolizes the afterlife as the pyramid is structured like a triangle and built to preserve treasure items such as gold, jewelry, and statues of the Pharaoh, which Egyptians believed he would take with him on his journey to the afterlife. The film's prologue established this motif through the statue of Pharaoh.



The following images are a long series of Muslims' hajj at Mecca in Saudi Arabia (shot 27) emphasizing the belief in the afterlife. Editors manipulated time, speeding up the motion to emphasize the movement of people around Mecca and create the cycle of praying.

While segment 3 suggested the conflict between humans and natural disasters and justified the need for spirituality and religion, in this part of the film, the motif of religion expands the conflict within humanity – representing another aspect of self-destruction while maintaining the cyclical imagery.

## 12. Impermanence

Finally, after exploring a series of themes to complete the concept of the film, the editors reappear certain scenes and motifs from the beginning of the film to convey the main theme

of the film: impermanence. In this chapter, we have observed several motifs that created a sense of a cycle, and this cycle also applies to the structure of the film, as the ending mirrors the beginning of the film. However, in the last part of the film, there is a development that conveys a new implicit meaning.

In segment two, we witnessed monks carefully painting a sand mandala as a representation of the universe. But now, they are erasing the painting and placing it in the pots (shots 1-2). This association between the beginning and ending of the film evokes the idea of the destruction of the universe, suggesting the monks' awareness that everything is impermanent.

1



2



The film then transitions to the One Thousand Hands dance scene. In contrast to the beginning of the film, now the leader of the dancers opens her eyes, and we see them dancing (shots 9-11). After finishing the performance, the leader dancer closes her eyes (shot 12). Then, in the very last shot of the film, the aerial desert shot (13) reappears to represent the idea of emptiness. The juxtaposition of shots (12-13) is the same as in segment 2, but this time with a smoother transition through a cross-dissolve cut.

By repeating these images, the editors create the feeling that after the destruction of the universe, there is a new beginning.

9



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12



13



To summarize this chapter, we have observed how Fircke and Magidson constructed the entire film using associational principles, such as contrast, similarities, repeating motifs, and changes in tempo. Through the analysis of the film's themes, we uncovered the presence of a hidden narrator. The editors of *Samsara* carefully grouped images from various times and places worldwide, and when these images were combined thematically, they evoked profound ideas about humanity and their complex relationship with nature. Though there is no explicit narration stating these themes, the power of associative links is so strong that these ideas vividly emerge in the audience's minds. Furthermore, by applying David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's editing dimensions, including graphic, temporal, and spatial relations between the shots, we have explored techniques that support the associational form, encouraging the audience to make connections between the images and evoking responses from them.

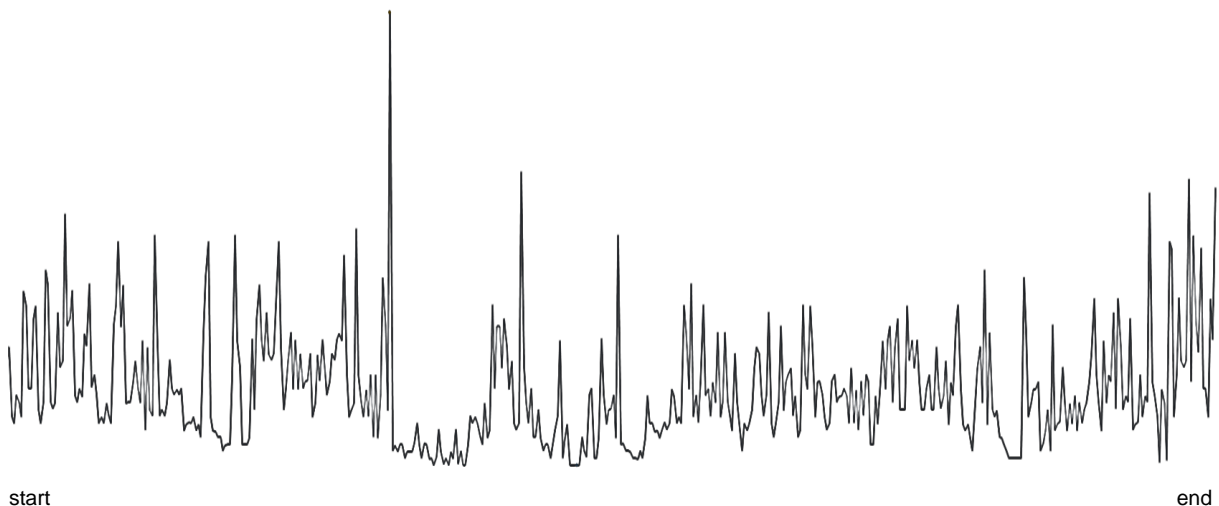
## CHAPTER 2. | RHYTHMIC RELATIONS

The aim is to explore the function of the rhythm of the film *Samsara* through the dimension of editing; rhythmic relation between the shots. This analysis will also be supported by Karen Pearlman's theory on rhythm, which provides valuable insights into the topic. The most representative parts of the film's overall rhythm will be selected for closer examination.

All the graphs presented in this chapter are created using editing software to replicate the cuts made by the editors, thereby identifying the duration of the shots. The information for each shot is then recorded in Microsoft Excel to visually represent their rhythmic patterns graphically (see the appendix on page number 51 for reference).

In the given example (fig. 2.0), we can see the rhythmic patterns of the entire film. The X axis represents shots, and the Y axis the duration of the shots. There are 501 shots, not including title cards. Through this graph, we can analyze that the rhythmic editing seems unpredictable; there is a significant contrast in the duration between the shots throughout the film.

Fig 2.0



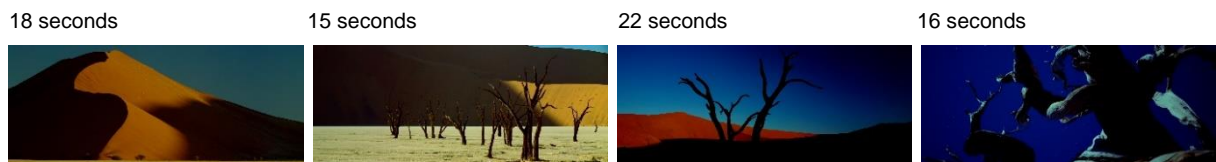
The longest take in the film is 65 seconds and 18 frames, and the shortest is only 8 frames. On average, the duration per shot is around 11 seconds. This average provides a valuable starting point for our analysis, as we can focus on parts of the film where shots have a longer duration than 11 seconds. Throughout the film, there are particular sequences where the editors create a steady beat, offering the viewer a sense of meditation and allowing them to become fully absorbed in the film without interruptions.

## 2.1 Rhythm based on Duration

For example, in a montage sequence showing images of nature (fig 2.1), the editors used long takes to immerse the viewer in the beauty of nature through prolonged observations. This effect establishes a deep connection and harmony between the viewer and the natural world. Since the *Samsara* explores the relationship between humans and the environment, this deliberate slow rhythm carries a relaxing tone that impacts the shaping of impressions in the following parts of the film.

For example, when the viewers later observe the dynamics of contemporary life through a rapid rhythm, the feeling of discomfort is intensified as they have already experienced the harmony and beauty of nature in a slow rhythm.

Fig 2.1



In contrast to long takes and a steady beat, a different principle of rhythmic relations between shots can be examined in a scene that has a clear beginning and end. The scene in question shows French artist Olivier de Sagazan performing as an employee trapped in his office, desperately attempting to escape.

The scene has a duration of around 2 minutes and 23 seconds, which begins with a very long take lasting 1 minute and 5 seconds (image A), allowing the viewer to easily observe the man's performance. However, in the middle of the scene, it changes dramatically, employing shots with much shorter durations. There are 32 cuts with an average duration of 2 seconds per shot (image B).

Furthermore, in the graphic (fig 2.2), we can witness the high contrast between the first and second half of the scene. Through the rhythmic cutting, the editors intensify the movement of the artist and the overall scene, effectively making the viewer uncomfortable while watching the performance.

Bordwell and Thompson describe rhythmic editing in ways similar to the methods of metric and rhythmic montage described by Sergei Eisenstein.<sup>24</sup> In our example of the French artist's performance, we can find similar principles with metric montage.

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<sup>24</sup> Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Boston, McGraw-Hill, 2008. p 261.



As Eisenstein explained, “The primitive form of the method: Kuleshov’s montages in three: four-time, march-time and waltz-time (3:4, 2:4, 1:4, etc.). The degeneration of the method: metric montage using a beat of complex brevity (16:17, 22:57, etc). The beat ceases to exert a physiological effect because it contradicts the ‘law of prime numbers (relationships).”<sup>25</sup>

In the second half of the mentioned scene (fig 2.2). The editors created irregular beats, joining together 32 shots based on their duration, to evoke a feeling of anxiety and entrapment in the viewers.

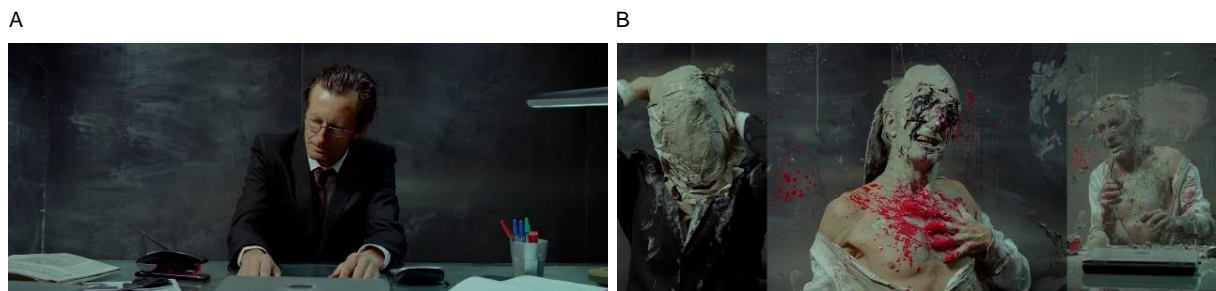


Fig 2.2



Based on the duration, the filmmakers, Fricke and Magidson, also created specific rhythmic patterns within the sequence. For example, through rhythmic editing, they portrayed modern life as a giant machine. Meanwhile, they evoked a sense of reflection on an emotional level by highlighting individuals to remind the audience that humans are part of this giant machine.

The editors achieved this by employing two variations of tempo within the sequence. On the one hand, they used a slow pace through close-up shots with long durations, showing people looking at the camera (A1-A2-A3). This technique creates a sense of intimacy between the audience and the portrayed individuals.

On the other hand, a rapid pace was created through the imagery of a mass of people and busy metros; in this case, the shots had much shorter durations (B1-B2-B3).

On the other hand, a rapid pace was created through the imagery of a mass of people and busy metros; in this case, the shots had much shorter durations (B1-B2-B3).

Mixing these two tempo variations creates parallels and contrasts that strongly evoke the viewer’s response. Such rhythmic editing has a psychological effect on the viewer.

<sup>25</sup> Eisenstein, Sergei. *Selected Works. VOLUME I. Writings, 1922-34*. Edited and translated by. Richard Taylor. London, BFI Publishing, 1988. p186.

In the illustration below, we can see the high contrast in the juxtaposition of the shots in terms of their durations. For example, the transition from shot A1 to shot B2 has a difference of 17 seconds, and so on. Additionally, it seems the filmmakers for this sequence carefully selected people with different styles to evoke a sense of identity and the human need to belong.

**A1** (18 seconds, 3 frames)



**B1** (1 second, 19 frames)



**A2** (6 seconds)



**B2** (13 frames)



**A3** (11 seconds, 19 frames)



**B3** (1 seconds, 17 frames)



Regarding the choice of duration, Karen Pearlman explains, “A 10-second shot will feel long if it is juxtaposed with a series of 1-second shots. The same 10-second shot, used in the same context, will still feel just as long if it is actually only 9 seconds and 20 frames. And the same 10 (or so)-second shot will feel quite short if juxtaposed with a series of 60-second shots.”<sup>26</sup>

Even though the shots (images A1-A2-A3) have different durations, we still perceive them as long, as they are juxtaposed with shots that have much shorter durations (images B1-B2-B3). The same principle applies to the short-duration shots in relation to the long-duration shot. Considering this, we perceive the long-duration shots as one idea and the short-duration shots as another. The editors have juxtaposed these two ideas throughout the

<sup>26</sup> Pearlman, Karen. *Cutting Rhythms*. New York, Focal Press, 2016. p 53.

sequence to create repetitive patterns, which contribute to evoking the viewers' senses and strongly inviting for an interpretation.

Furthermore, Pearlman, besides choosing the duration of the shot, emphasizes other aspects of timing that impacts rhythm in film editing: choosing a frame and choosing the placement of the shot.<sup>27</sup>

In choosing a frame, the editors have created frame-to-frame relationships between two shots by carefully selecting which frames to cut. For example, in the example mentioned above (image A1), the young woman doesn't blink in an 18-second and 3 frame shot, which creates a sense of introspection in relation to image B1. The assumption is that if the editors had chosen the girl blinking in the last frame in relation to the first frame of the following shot, it would have created a different sense of time and disrupted the emotional depth.

Pearlman also describes the role of an editor in choosing the placement of the shot: "The decision about *where* to use a shot is also called timing. This sense of timing refers to "where" as in *when* to reveal the punch line or the surprise."<sup>28</sup> This aspect of timing will be examined in the following part of this chapter as it is more relevant to the given example.

## 2.2 Rhythm based on Mise-en-scene

Another principle of rhythmic relation between shots we can examine in a physical action scene. Bordwell and Thompson describe that "the rhythm of the cutting is usually dependent on the camera distance of the shot. Long shots are left on the screen longer than medium shots, and medium shots are left on longer than close-ups. The assumption is that the spectator needs more time to take in the shots containing more details."<sup>29</sup>

We can distinguish this principle also in the film *Samsara*, particularly in the scene of kids training in karate. The scene begins with a close-up shot that lasts 2 seconds and 16 frames (shot 1). Then, the editors cut on the action of the kids moving, transitioning to a medium shot (2) that lasts longer, 3 seconds and 21 frames. In (shots 1-4), we can examine how the editors applied the duration based on the size of the shots; as the size of the shots becomes wider, the shots' duration becomes longer. This rhythmic cutting gradually emphasizes the kids' training in karate.

To build up to the climax, the editors cut from a long shot (4) to a medium shot (5), which has a shorter duration. Then follows an extremely long shot (6) with the longest

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<sup>27</sup> Pearlman, Karen. *Cutting Rhythms*. New York, Focal Press, 2016. p 51.

<sup>28</sup> Pearlman, Karen. *Cutting Rhythms*. New York, Focal Press, 2016. p 53.

<sup>29</sup> Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Boston, McGraw-Hill, 2008. p 231.

duration in the scene. The editors did this for the audience to have enough time to process the content and for a dramatic purpose. Cutting from Shot 5 to Shot 6 has a strong impact due to the high contrast in terms of the size and duration of the shots.

Furthermore, through the perspective of Pearlman on choosing the placement of the shot, we can see how the editors decided to show the longest shot (6) with the longest duration at the end of this scene to emphasize the impactful moment of seeing thousands of kids training karate.

1 (2 seconds, 16 frames)



2 (3 seconds, 21 frames)



3 (5 seconds, 11 frames)



4 (8 seconds, 18 frames)



5 (2 seconds, 11 frames)



6 (20 seconds, 16 frames)



Additionally, Pearlman emphasizes the role of the editor in considering the changes or movement within shots as "Pacing is created by the rates and amounts of movement in a single shot and by the rates and amounts of movement across a series of edited shots."<sup>30</sup>

In the karate scene, we can analyze how the editors choose the appropriate rate of cutting based on the movement of the kids. This contributes to engaging the viewer, as the perception of time feels right even though the shots have different durations, sizes, and movements within the shot. For instance, in (shot 6), which lasts for 20 seconds, the numerous karate movements feel proportional to the duration. If there were no movement during those 20 seconds, the duration would be perceived as significantly longer and might drop the viewer's interest.

## 2.3 Rhythm for Meaning

Chapter 1 examined the implicit meaning conveyed in a specific part of the film labeled "cause-and-effect," explored above in segment 10 (see page 27), where the editors suggest the idea of humans as self-destructive and the consequences of war through associational principles and graphic relations.

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<sup>30</sup> Pearlman, Karen. *Cutting Rhythms*. New York, Focal Press, 2016. p 55.

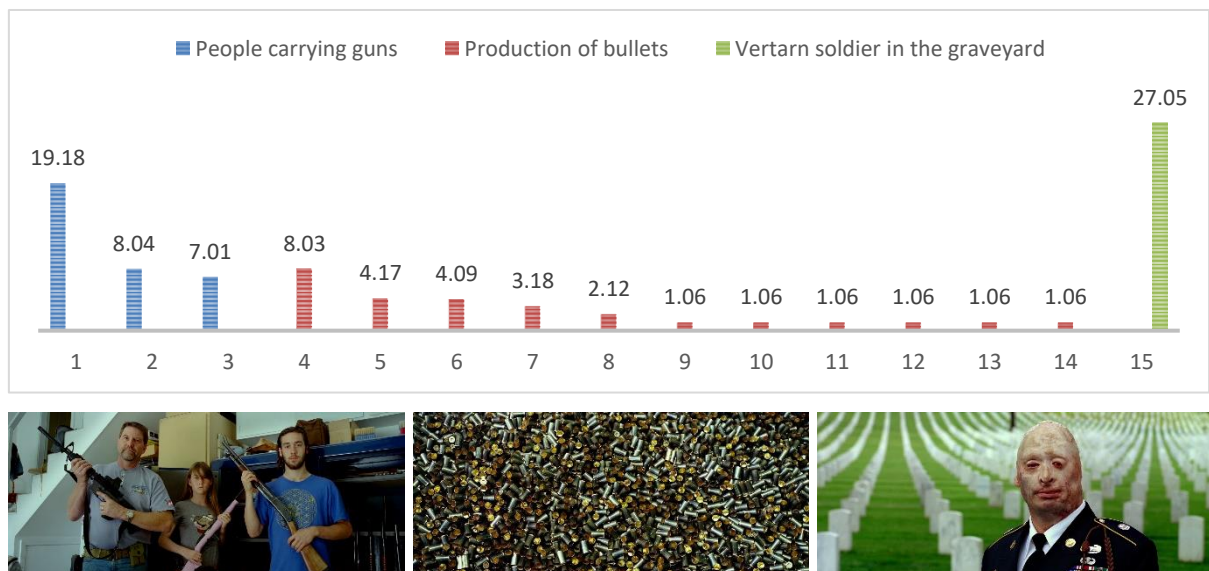
However, it is crucial to consider the role of rhythm in this portrayal. In an interview for the French film magazine *Cahiers Du Cinema in English* with Jean-Luc Godard and Michel Delahaye in the mid-1960, Robert Bresson considers rhythm the key to audience engagement with a film rather than meaning.<sup>31</sup>

In the following example, we can examine how the editors used rhythm to evoke an emotional response from viewers, establishing a connection at a gut level before finally conveying the implicit meaning.

Figure 2.3 below indicates the curve of the rhythmic cutting in the selected part of the film, which includes 15 shots. The X axis represents the shots, and the Y axis the duration of the shots. It begins by showing images of people carrying guns and looking at the camera (blue color). The duration of the first shot is 19 seconds and 18 frames, whereas the following shots (2-3) have shorter durations.

As the sequence progress, the editors accelerate the rhythm even more by making the shots shorter and shorter in images that show the bullet production process (red color). Here, the duration progresses from 8 seconds down to 2 seconds (shot 4-8), as the editors cutting faster contributes to heightening the portrayal of the weapons industry and, in the meantime, creating suspense. The intensity reaches its climax, where we see images of thousands of bullets (shots 9-14), as they have the shortest durations in the sequence. Each shot with an identical duration of 1 second and 6 frames.

Fig 2.3



<sup>31</sup> Bresson, Robert, and Jean-Luc Godard. *Cahiers Du Cinema in English*. New York, Joseph Weill, 1967. p 12.

Finally, the sequence culminates with a shot of a physically deformed American soldier standing in a war veterans' graveyard (shot 15), which, in contrast, has the longest duration in this sequence. This demonstrates how the editors first established confrontation through images of people carrying guns. Then, by accelerating the rate of cuts in the weapons industry, they produced anxiety and created suspense, resulting in a very long take to release tension and suggest the consequences of war. Such a rhythmic cutting intuitively evokes the audience's feelings before they process the meaning.

In this chapter, we have explored how editing rhythm contributes to a film's associational form. By analyzing specific film parts in *Samsara*, we examined how editors employed different rhythmic patterns based on shot duration and mise-en-scene to evoke emotions, convey implicit meanings, and enhance themes. Examples include using long takes and steady beats to immerse viewers, contrasting rhythms to intensify discomfort, and varying shot durations to create tension and impact. We have learned that rhythm plays a vital role in a non-verbal film in engaging viewers and shaping their emotional responses, establishing connections before conveying the film's intended message.

## CONCLUSION

The editors of *Samsara*, Ron Fricke and Mark Magidson, efficiently manage to create and sustain the audience's empathy and engagement without a spoken word throughout 102 minutes of imagery. The entire film is made along associational lines. The images are grouped into distinct sections, and by juxtaposing the sections and particular scenes, the filmmakers have conveyed themes. And then, through thematic associations, the entire film is constructed to show the relationship between humans and nature. It portrays how the cycle of human life mirrors the natural rhythm of the planet.

The filmmakers suggest implicit meanings using associational principles of contrast, similarities, repeating motifs, and changing the tempo. This approach engages the viewer actively, allowing them to perceive a hidden narrator at an implicit level within the film's structure. For example, after the prologue, the editors suggested the creation of the universe through the scene of monks painting the sand mandala. Then the editors created a sense of conflict between humans and nature, which is achieved through the theme of natural disasters in contrast with humans' desire for luxury. As the film progresses, the editors gradually develop this conflict and portray weakness and contradiction within humanity. This chain continues until the end of the film by exploring several themes. Finally, the end of the film portrays the destruction of the universe through the scene of monks erasing the sand mandala. The last shot in the film shows the desert image as a representative of emptiness - suggesting that after everything, there is a new beginning which also conveys the meaning of the title's film "Samsara" – birth, death, and rebirth.

Fricke and Magidson have created patterns throughout the film to make the link between humanity and the rest of nature significant. They have achieved this by cutting in between the close-ups of people with long shots of environments. For example, the close-up of the Mursi tribe in juxtaposition with beautiful nature landscapes suggests harmony before shaping the world for our needs. In contrast, the close-up of people working at the cubic office juxtaposed the long shots of the modern urban environment, suggesting stress and anxiety. In this way, the editors didn't establish only the relationship between humans and the environment but also portrayed the development of the human state throughout time. This principle is also employed in other themes; for example, the filmmakers juxtaposed a close-up of a young man in prison with an aerial shot showing slum and modern buildings, evoking the viewer's response to the diversity issues in social life.

As the neoformalism approach suggests, repeating motifs is fundamental in conveying implicit meaning. We can see this principle that is applied also in *Samsara*. The repetition of the motifs is employed throughout the film. For example, images of religions are juxtaposed with images of extravagant and luxurious. This motif appears at the beginning, middle, and end of the film to suggest the idea of contradiction in humanity. The repetition of the motifs also applies within the sequences; for instance, the juxtaposition of live animals with the slaughtering of meat is repeated many times to distress the viewer.

Thanks to the four dimensions of editing of Bordwell and Thompson, we have explored several editing techniques that make this film's associational form function. First, through the graphic relations between the shots, the scenes or sections seamlessly transitioned from one to another to maintain the audience's engagement without any distractions. Furthermore, through graphic editing, filmmakers reinforce the implicit meaning by visually creating the cycle of life, industrialization, and beliefs, highlighting the film's concept.

Secondly, through the temporal relations between the shots, the editors employed the timelapse technique on images of nature to portray the rhythm of our planet and provide the viewer with a unique experience. This technique also emphasizes the large scale of industrialization in contemporary life. Another significant aspect of this approach is that, through manipulating time, people are portrayed as machines, contributing to the fading of humanity's values.

Third, the editing dimension of spatial relations – even though *Samsara* is filmed in 25 different countries, the film's space is constructed to offer the viewer a sense of universality rather than focusing on a distinct place. Thanks also to associating links, graphic and rhythm relations, the editors seamlessly connect the places, contributing to the least possible disruption and allowing the viewer to maintain a sense of the flow of time in a discontinuous space.

Finally, the rhythm of *Samsara* played a fundamental role in supporting the associational form. The hidden narrator comes to life through associating links. However, for this principle to work, it relies strongly on gut feelings, achieved through rhythmic editing that engages the viewer. By using rhythmic relations between shots, chapter 2 analyzed how the editors created rhythmic patterns to evoke various tones and feelings, leading to associations that convey implicit meanings and themes. In specific parts of the film, the editors established a steady beat with long takes, providing an experience like a guided meditation.



In contrast, other parts of the film employed rhythmic cutting to strongly influence the audience's feelings by creating a rapid pace and different rhythmic patterns to shape impressions.

Additionally, the analysis of the film's rhythm was also supported by Karen Pearlman's theory. Thanks to her insights, we have demonstrated that an editor contributes to shaping the cinematic rhythm not only by the rate of cutting or choosing the duration of the shots but also by considering mise-en-scène elements, such as changes within shot, choosing appropriate starting and ending points of the shot, and choosing the placement of the shot.

The film *Samsara* profoundly influenced me as a person and filmmaker when I first watched it. I finally discovered how the film communicated its ideas and themes without spoken words. While breaking the film into individual shots and essentially making all the cuts the way Ron Fricke and Mark Magidson did, I found the most interesting process in working on this project. As I consider myself a more intuitive editor, it was a fascinating experience to feel every cut as the editors of the film *Samsara* did. This allowed me to be more analytical, and for every cut, I carefully analyzed their decisions, which helped me gain a deeper understanding of the approach taken by the editors. I have learned a lot from Fricke and Magidson, discovering the principles and editing techniques that make function a nonverbal film. I hope this study will be valuable in my future editing work, and I also hope the readers find the reading insightful.

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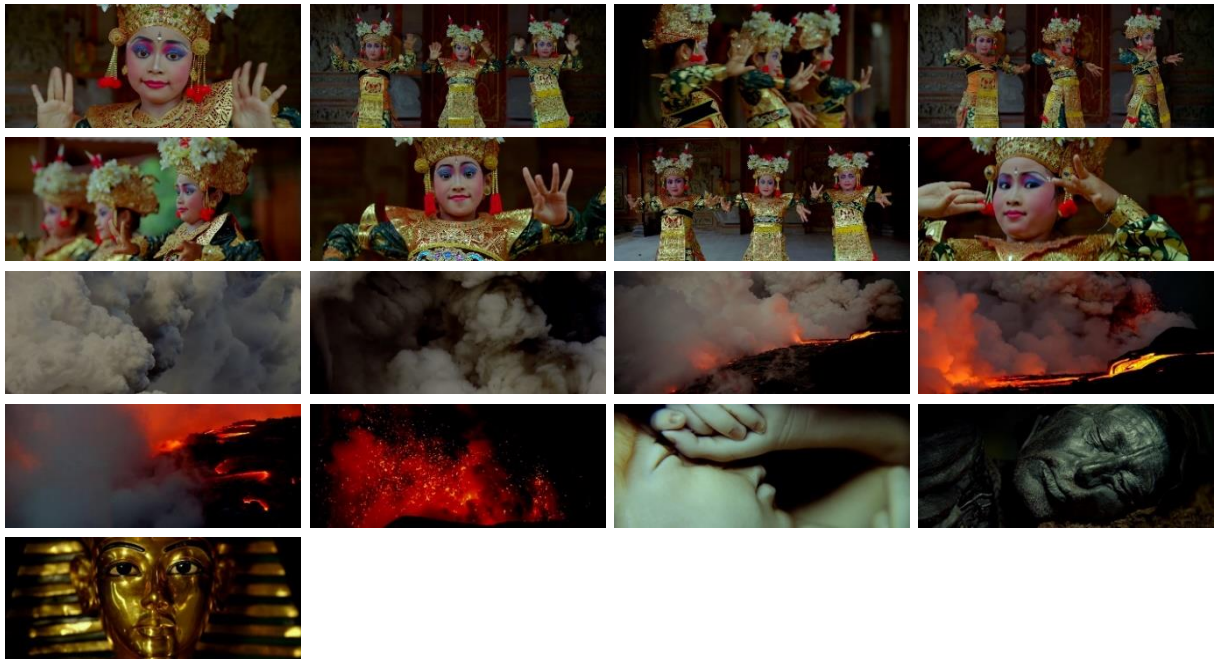
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# Appendix

## 1. Prologue



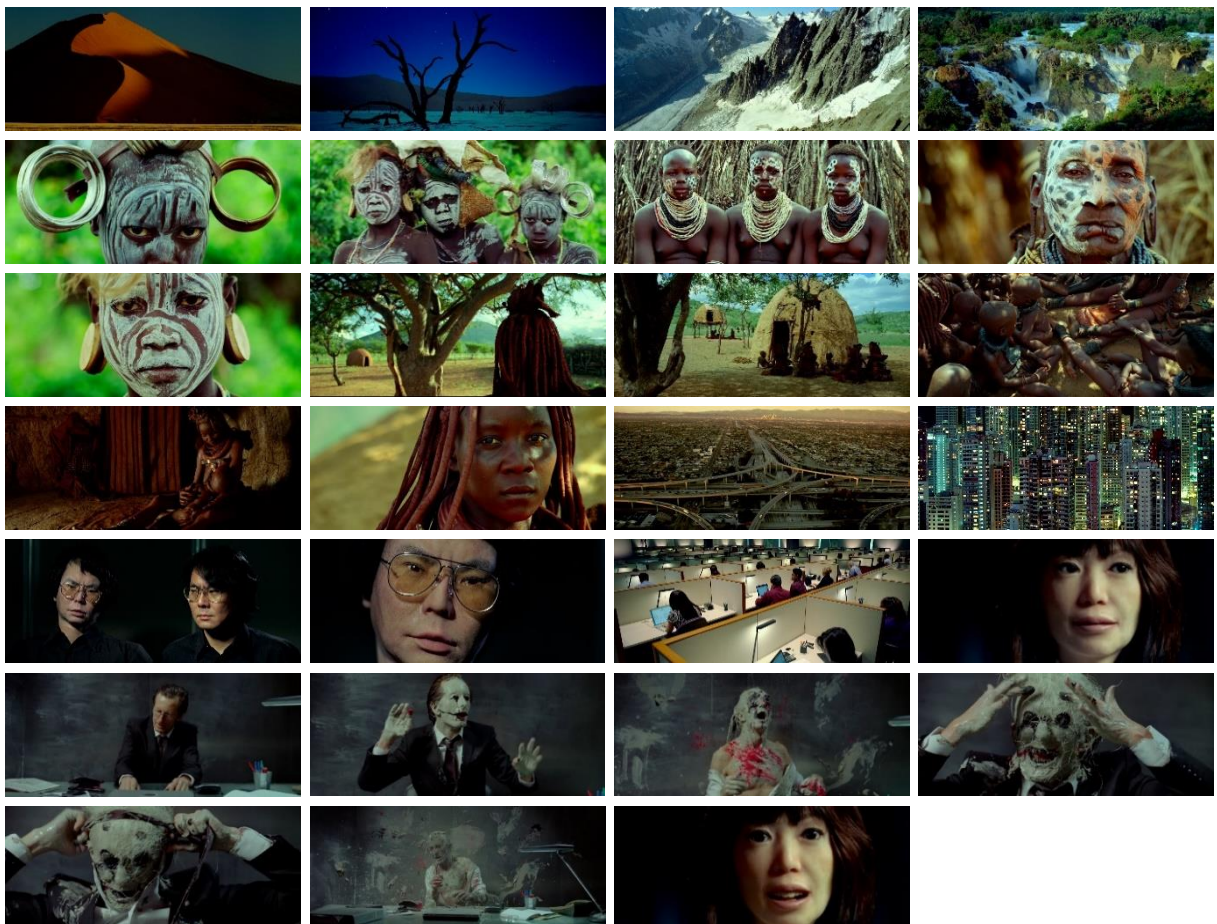
## 2. Sand Mandala – Creation of the Universe



### 3. Conflict – Human vs. Nature



### 4. Transformation



## 5. Human Contradictions



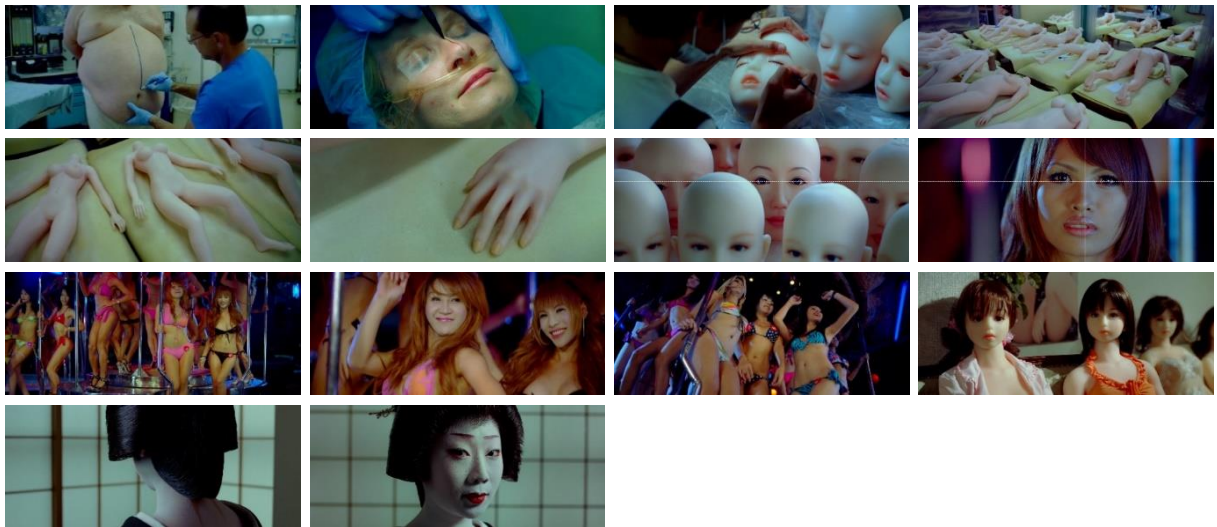
## 6. Industrialization



## 7. Food Production



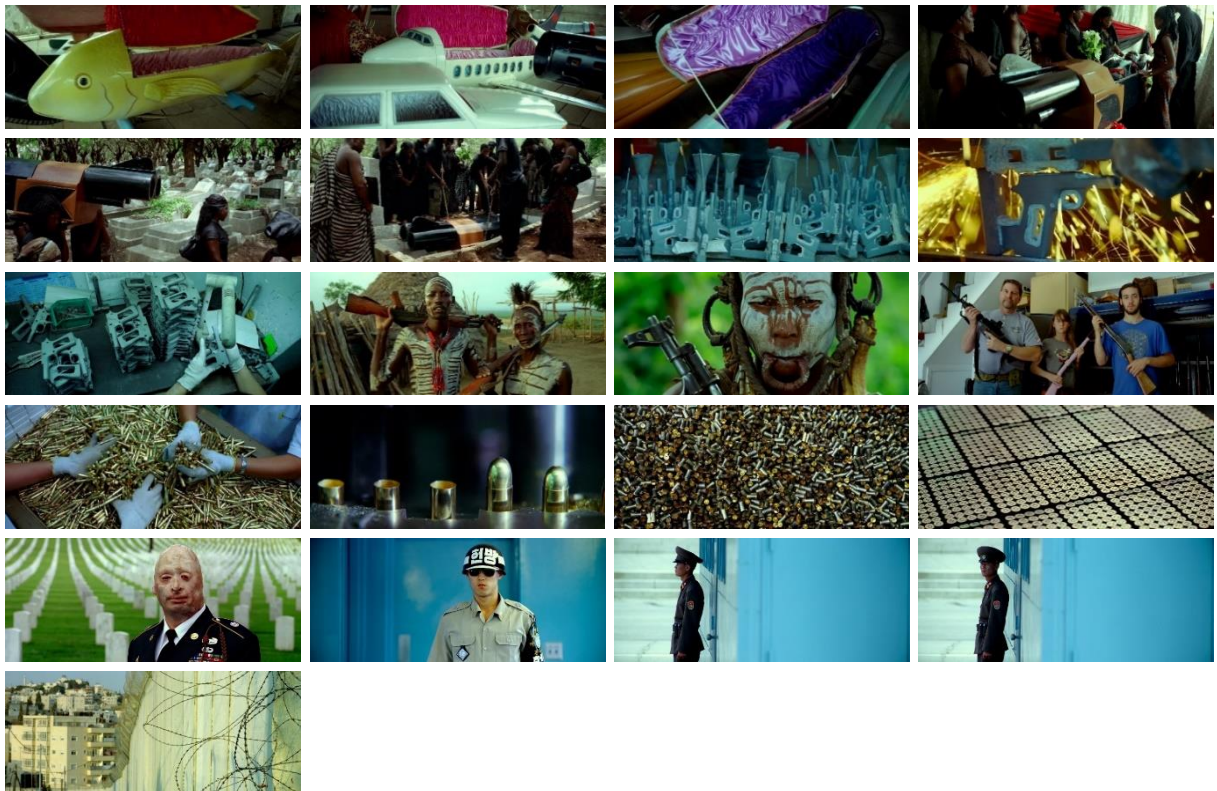
## 8. Objectification and Dehumanization



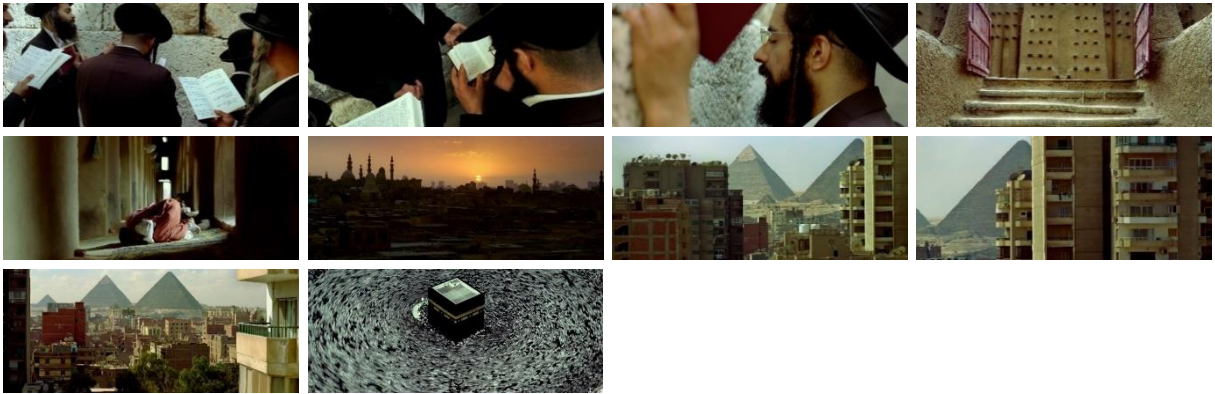
## 9. Imprisonment / Inequality



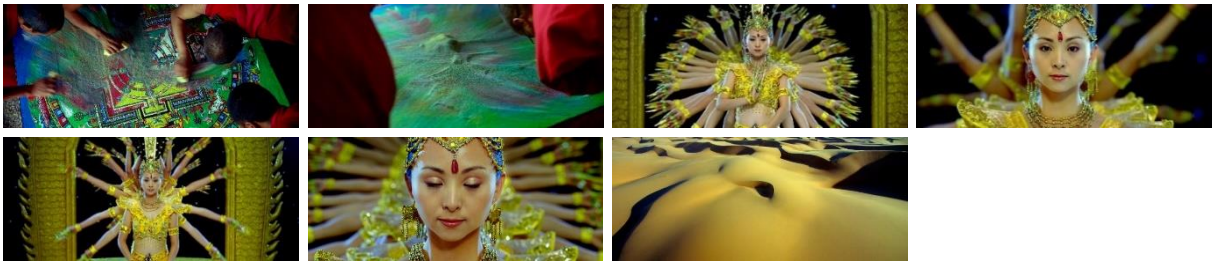
## 10. Militarization



## 11. Religions



## 12. Impermanence



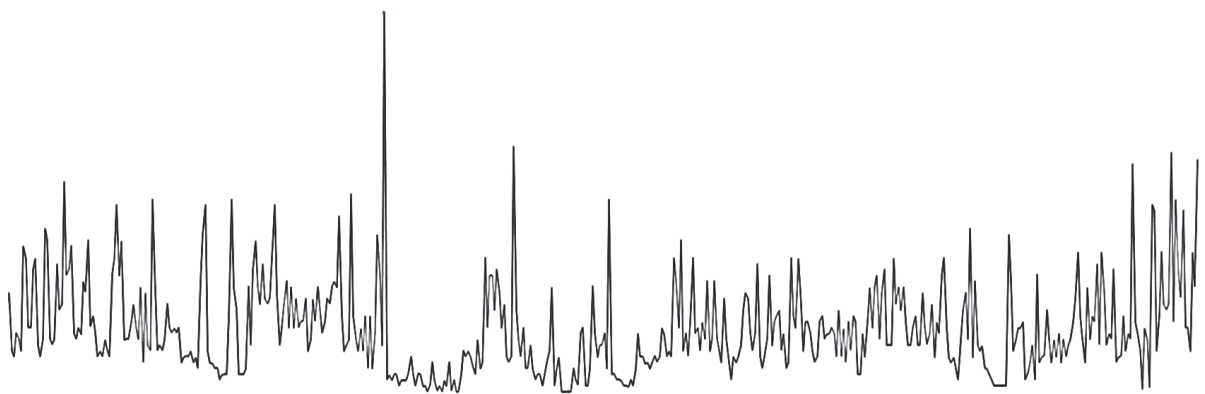


## 2.0 Rhythmic Relations



1	17.08	51	26.05	101	3.16	151	11.06	201	4.01	251	8.08	301	7.18	351	14.08	401	2.15	451	24.09
2	7.11	52	9.05	102	3.15	152	7.05	202	5.12	252	8.16	302	5.09	352	6.19	402	9	452	13.08
3	6.16	53	9.21	103	4.01	153	13.15	203	23.15	253	10.23	303	16.2	353	11.03	403	14.01	453	9.16
4	10.16	54	9.18	104	18.21	154	4.23	204	11.14	254	4.09	304	9.17	354	5.18	404	17.18	454	5.06
5	9.2	55	12.02	105	8.11	155	13.12	205	20.08	255	33.16	305	5.11	355	12.16	405	9.01	455	18
6	7.05	56	15.07	106	21	156	4.08	206	20.04	256	3.12	306	2.17	356	7.13	406	28.19	456	9.07
7	14.03	57	11.06	107	26	157	10.21	207	14	257	3.22	307	6.21	357	13.08	407	6.05	457	13.04
8	18.05	58	9.05	108	18.04	158	27.11	208	21.18	258	2.14	308	5.06	358	12.14	408	19.18	458	12.1
9	11.03	59	18.02	109	15.04	159	20.05	209	17.17	259	2.2	309	6.13	359	3.12	409	8.04	459	22.05
10	25.03	60	5.22	110	22.04	160	8.03	210	11	260	2.07	310	8.05	360	3.15	410	7.01	460	8.23
11	23.02	61	17.11	111	16.05	161	65.18	211	15.13	261	1.15	311	14.01	361	10.09	411	8.03	461	24.06
12	11.2	62	8	112	15.16	162	2.14	212	6.21	262	1.08	312	17.03	362	6.06	412	4.17	462	17.15
13	11.17	63	7.14	113	16.14	163	3	213	5.17	263	1.04	313	16.14	363	12.13	413	4.09	463	8.14
14	21.13	64	33.09	114	23.1	164	2.03	214	6.12	264	2.23	314	10.19	364	18.01	414	3.18	464	10.03
15	23.01	65	17.15	115	32.16	165	3.04	215	42.16	265	1.19	315	7.14	365	11.06	415	2.12	465	9.1
16	8.1	66	7.2	116	17.02	166	3.16	216	14.21	266	4.02	316	10.2	366	18.18	416	1.06	466	21.11
17	6.16	67	8.15	117	8.09	167	1.09	217	9.01	267	10.04	317	22.07	367	20.09	417	1.06	467	5.16
18	9.13	68	7.14	118	11.14	168	2.03	218	6.19	268	6.09	318	6.13	368	9.13	418	1.06	468	6.06
19	26.06	69	9.05	119	15.12	169	2.1	219	11.07	269	6.18	319	4.15	369	17.09	419	1.06	469	6.23
20	26.15	70	15.16	120	19.21	170	2.05	220	4.12	270	5	320	6.12	370	21.15	420	1.06	470	13.16
21	9.14	71	11.13	121	11.05	171	3.19	221	4.17	271	5.13	321	9.1	371	8.06	421	1.06	471	7.12
22	8.21	72	10.2	122	18.05	172	6.09	222	8.1	272	4.06	322	20.08	372	8.18	422	27.05	472	10.08
23	9	73	11.06	123	11	173	3.03	223	4.08	273	5.12	323	8.03	373	8.13	423	19.21	473	9.17
24	22.03	74	10.21	124	16.09	174	1.2	224	2.19	274	6.22	324	12	374	23.03	424	7.08	474	39.17
25	14.11	75	11.17	125	11.16	175	3.19	225	3.08	275	5.16	325	13.12	375	15.08	425	9.06	475	12.03
26	15.02	76	5.15	126	12.22	176	3.15	226	3.09	276	6.08	326	14.04	376	18.13	426	11.05	476	10.2
27	36.1	77	6.01	127	12.19	177	1	227	1.07	277	11.06	327	7.2	377	14.04	427	11.05	477	7.22
28	20.14	78	6.22	128	16.17	178	1.06	228	3.12	278	10.06	328	10.07	378	18.1	428	12.07	478	12.10
29	21.14	79	6.11	129	7.04	179	0.1	229	5.07	279	6.17	329	4.21	379	12.19	429	2.16	479	11.03
30	25.18	80	7.08	130	9.07	180	1.23	230	7.19	280	7.1	330	5.11	380	8.18	430	3.21	480	9.01
31	10.01	81	5.13	131	16.03	181	5.22	231	18.03	281	6.14	331	23.16	381	8.15	431	5.11	481	18.10
32	9.2	82	6.06	132	12.14	182	2.02	232	1.19	282	23.05	332	13.08	382	11.09	432	8.18	482	32.19
33	11.21	83	4.21	133	18.08	183	0.16	233	4.07	283	19.16	333	11	383	13.12	433	2.18	483	31.15
34	10	84	19.03	134	14.12	184	1.1	234	6	284	11.04	334	23.02	384	8.12	434	20.16	484	7.01
35	19	85	27.17	135	10.18	185	0.14	235	0.13	285	26.1	335	17.21	385	8.04	435	5.02	485	13.2
36	17.17	86	32.14	136	12.03	186	2.07	236	0.15	286	7.04	336	7.04	386	17.08	436	6.21	486	24.23
37	26.13	87	7.02	137	16.19	187	1	237	0.1	287	10.2	337	12.12	387	11.16	437	6.22	487	15.05
38	11.23	88	5.09	138	15.17	188	5.19	238	0.08	288	6.22	338	12.15	388	8.2	438	14.2	488	14.12
39	13.13	89	5	139	18.11	189	0.17	239	0.13	289	12	339	10.2	389	10.09	439	9.08	489	15.06
40	10.18	90	4.13	140	19.07	190	2.18	240	4.19	290	23.12	340	7.1	390	15.07	440	5.15	490	41.15
41	6.13	91	4.12	141	18	191	0.12	241	2.02	291	10.08	341	5.16	391	6.02	441	9.09	491	12.2
42	7.05	92	2.16	142	30.18	192	0.1	242	1.22	292	11.08	342	6.15	392	12.09	442	6.02	492	33.07
43	6.14	93	3	143	13.23	193	3.14	243	10.21	293	7.14	343	12.13	393	10.14	443	10.11	493	20.2
44	9.03	94	3.06	144	7.04	194	7.18	244	11.19	294	12.02	344	13.06	394	20.05	444	5.07	494	16.23
45	7.23	95	3.1	145	8	195	6.09	245	1.17	295	9.04	345	9.21	395	23.18	445	9.21	495	31.23
46	6.11	96	13.03	146	9.05	196	7	246	1.19	296	19.23	346	10	396	11.05	446	6.11	496	11.19
47	20.21	97	33.18	147	34.09	197	6.2	247	4.02	297	7.03	347	10.05	397	6.06	447	8.08	497	7.07
48	23.03	98	18.01	148	13.09	198	4.2	248	18.19	298	9.18	348	11.15	398	5.07	448	9.04	498	24.03
49	32.22	99	14.14	149	9.21	199	3.14	249	10.2	299	19.22	349	10.12	399	6.03	449	12.04	499	18.1
50	20	100	3.14	150	7.1	200	9.01	250	6	300	9.11	350	6.07	400	4.03	450	16.02	500	40.01

Fig 2.0



start

end

## 2.1 Rhythm based on Duration

Fig 2.1



Fig 2.2



A1 (18 sec, 3 fps)



B1 (1 sec, 19 fps)



A1 (6 sec)



B2 (13 frames)



A3 (11 sec, 19 fps)



B3 (1 sec, 17 fps)



## 2.2 Rhythm based on Mise-en-scene

(2 sec, 16 fps)



(3 sec, 21 fps)



(5 sec, 11 fps)



(8 sec, 18 fps)



(2 sec, 11 fps)



(20 sec, 16 fps)



## 2.3 Rhythm for Meaning

