

The use of editing in "bowling for columbine" essay sample

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Editing is the act of assembling components of a piece by cutting and splicing. As a filmmaker, and especially when making a documentary, the use of editing is very important in putting together ideas and arguments. In the case of a documentary, editing can be used to further push a thesis and prove a point which the filmmaker is trying to put across. The possibilities are endless; dialogues can be shortened, scenes can be added or cut, or even switched around to be in any order desired. By doing such things, a very plain portion of footage can be used to argue an idea.

In the movie, “Bowling for Columbine,” Michael Moore is a genius when it comes to his editing choices concerning Charlton Heston and the NRA. Using a few well placed insert shots Moore is able to bring the attention away from Heston long enough to change around parts of his speech and shorten dialogues. By means of crosscuts he is able to make it seem as if though Heston is talking insensitively to the weeping children of Columbine. All of this is an attempt to incriminate Heston by deception. Moore gives the story, but emphasizes the parts that promote his argument. By means of the numerous little editing “ tweaks” mentioned above, Michael Moore is able to use “Bowling for Columbine” as propaganda against the NRA and make Charlton Heston the antagonist villain.

A crosscut is a cut where the camera jumps from one scene to another and makes it seem like they are happening concurrently. Moore’s first use of a crosscut to incriminate Heston is during the shooting and Denver NRA

meeting scenes. At first, Moore has footage of the Columbine massacre; interviews with different people, actual footage from the school. He ends this scene with crying children outside the school. Directly after this, he cuts to Heston, who is at an NRA rally. This is Moore's use of the crosscut. Heston is holding a musket and proclaiming "I have only five words for you: from my cold, dead, hands." He put the NRA rally directly after the crying children on purpose. It's an attempt to make Heston look unsympathetic to the entire situation, and a supporter of gun violence.

He makes it seem as if Heston's comments are directed towards these weeping children. Another interesting thing to note is that Moore makes it seem as if this quote comes from a rally at Denver, however, it was not given directly after Columbine, rather a year later in Charlotte, North Carolina; He was giving thanks for the fact that he was given a handmade musket by a member of the NRA (Fritz). Clearly, giving thanks for a handmade musket in no way relates to the massacre of Columbine. But as the viewers, we have no idea where he is directing that comment, and Moore deliberately cuts to that part of the speech for this reason. In addition, Moore doesn't say that this is from the Denver convention, but he doesn't say it isn't either. If we knew that this speech was given a year later there is no way we could logically connect it to the events that occurred in Columbine that day.

Moore does in fact use footage from the NRA's Denver rally, a mere 10 days after the Columbine massacre. This time however, he relies on insert shots to achieve his desired message. An insert shot is a cut that interrupts the action of the master shot with a close up or pan of something else. The

master, or continuous, shot of this scene is Charlton Heston's speech. Throughout the scene, the camera cuts away from Heston. Whether it's to a pan of the audience, to the protests, anti-NRA rallies, or a billboard, Moore needs to bring attention away from Heston momentarily to edit out parts of his speech, or change around the order of what he said. Most importantly here, he needs to somehow switch from the North Carolina rally to the Denver rally without letting the audience see that the speeches are in fact from two different times.

If you take notice, Heston is wearing a purple tie in the first segment of the speech. When the film comes back from an insert shot of an NRA billboard, Heston is wearing a red tie. Most people aren't going to recognize this without being told, as it is a very conniving splice on the part of Moore. The billboard is a very necessary add in edit scene for this part. Without it, the viewers would see the switch in tie colors, and know they are two different rallies. This would weaken Moore's argument against Heston, as people would realize his comments were not in any way directed at Columbine, or a response to all the controversy created by it. The desired effect, making Heston look heartless, that Moore is attempting to achieve would not be accomplished.

A final editing technique that Moore uses in this scene deals with the dialogue. Moore makes it seem as though Heston said everything the way it was and the order it was in the film. However, the opposite is true. Segments are switched around, answers are put to different questions, and pieces are left out (Fritz). As stated before, he does this by insert shots (protests, rallies,

picture of the mayor, shots of the audience). It gives Moore all the time he needs to fool the viewer and make Heston into the cruel villain he envisions. With no background information, such as the original transcript of the speech, the audience has no clue of what Moore is doing. He took audio sections from five different parts of the speech, and spliced them together for this goal (Fritz). One of these edits comes in the scene when the camera's cuts to the crowd at the NRA rally. Moore needs to do this because otherwise, there is no way for him to cut out the part of Heston's speech where he says most of the NRA Denver events have been canceled due to Columbine.

By cutting out this part, the true manor of Heston and the NRA, that of understanding and sorrowfulness isn't shown to the people of Denver. Moore must, at all costs, take out any sign of human emotion shown by Heston. If not, the entire purpose of this scene is destroyed; showing Heston as a diabolical machine without sympathy. Another similar edit comes later when Heston states, " I said to the Mayor: As Americans, we're free to travel wherever we want in our broad land. Don't come here? We're already here!" This is by no means what Heston actually said. He veils this edit by cutting to a scene with protestors. Also, the part, " don't come here? We're already here!" was actually taken from another part of the speech and added to the end of his statement (Fritz). By making it seem this way, Heston looks rebellious to the mayor of Denver, and again, insensitive towards the entire situation.

In conclusion, in one five-minute section of this movie, Michael Moore makes a plethora of edits that favor his views. The reality is that this Denver rally had nothing to do with the events of Columbine. It was an annual meeting that was planned years before, and it was an unfortunate coincidence that events panned out the way they did. But as film students, you can see the overwhelming affect that certain edits can have on a scene. The deception that Moore is able to pull off between the use of cross cuts and insert shots is remarkable. He successfully places events out of order and both shortens and lengthens certain sections of Heston's words. Most importantly, he creates an image of Heston that he wants to portray to America. How did you feel towards Heston after seeing that clip? In almost all cases, people look at Heston the way Moore wants you to. Hopefully now you understand that the power editing gives to the filmmaker is of great magnitude. How else could Moore turn Heston into a merciless monster without a cause?