

Between shots



**ASSIGN
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In Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, many elements of film are expertly used to best convey the message of the story. One of these elements, editing, is exploited by the use of its many advantageous techniques in order to create ties to the essential themes of *Modern Times*, such as Capitalism, the Great Depression, and Industrialization. By analyzing the most important types of transitions used such as fades and cuts, as well as stylistic aspects like temporality and reaction shots, it is clear that Chaplin succeeds in making the best editorial choices to nurture the setting of the Great Depression and the struggles of industrialization in society.

To begin, Chaplin mainly relies on cuts to tell the story. Specifically in the factory scene, cuts are used between the control room and the assembly line; for example, between shots one and two of clip 2. Beyond that clip and throughout the scene, however, shots of Charlie are continuously interrupted by shots of the control room. There, the Boss orders a man to speed up the line. Then, the camera cuts to Charlie, who frantically tries to keep up with the changes. These cuts are used to create an anticipation in the audience. By cutting away from the assembly line and back to the control room in the pattern that it does, it creates a sense of predictability where viewers can recognize that by showing them the controls, something is about to change on the assembly line and affect Charlie (hence, there is a criticism being made between the idea of control and being control).

In respect to the historical context of this film (the 1930s), it is clear that *Modern Times* is a satirical portrait of the working man's life during the Great Depression, and the impact of industrialization. With this in mind, one can see that these cuts between the two locations not only allow for a comedic

anticipation, but also for an emphasis on the idea of machines holding a great power over and being able to manipulate people. This is obvious as Charlie struggles to adapt to the change in speed of the assembly line, ultimately leading him to twitch and act robotically, even when he is no longer working the line. In this film, cuts like these are often shown between the controllers and the control-ee. For example, when returning to the Boss' office to reveal the "Bellows Feeding Machine". Again, decisions are made separate from the presence of Charlie (a lower-class, working man) where the Boss and the salesman decide to test the machine on him without asking for his permission. Cuts are used in *Modern Times* in order to present the working class as marionettes while revealing those who are pulling the strings on a separate platform (upper society and industrialization).

Also, in *Modern Times*, as in most classic Hollywood films of its time, uses "continuity style" editing. This entails a temporality of "real-time action" in which the shots used in the film (for the most part) follow one another. For example, in between shots two and three of clip 2, when Charlie turns to leave the assembly line, the next shot shows him leaving the assembly line, starting at the exact same point from where the previous shot ended, only now following the action from a different angle. Without compromising time and space, the story proceeds for the audience as if they were actually there themselves, experiencing second-by-second what Charlie does. Chaplin used this style not only to avoid confusing his audience, but also to allow them to better feel and understand exactly what Charlie goes through, and to that way bring them closer to his character. For example, by watching Charlie go through a hard day's work, audiences can better place themselves in his

shoes because they are forced to live through the same antic-filled day he is. Hereby, audience can better relate to the lives of the working man, and feel for themselves the impatience, stress, and pressure these men were forced to face during the Great Depression. Overall, Chaplin succeeded in creating a film that was easy to get into and to develop emotional ties to by his use of the continuity style to better portray the emotion of the times.

Interlaced with the continuity style, reaction shots are also a common element in this film. Reaction shots are a given in this film, because what better way to demonstrate Charlie's defining qualities than to contrast him to other characters in the film? Not only do reaction shots add to the comedy of the film (as seen when Charlie has a mental break-down in the factory, and the other workers panic) but they also succeed in setting Charlie apart from the rest, which is what Chaplin aimed to do in this film. From the start, it is obvious that Charlie is not like the other members of society. He continuously struggles to conform to industrialization in the shoes of a mild-mannered factory worker. Instead, Charlie is buffoonish, clumsy, naive, mischievous and child-like; all qualities that serve as a stark contrast to the world of the Great Depression. By using reaction shots, Chaplin displays this well, thus adding to the depth of his characters, and the meaning of the story.

Furthermore, the first transition seen is the fade between shots one, two, three, and four of clip 1. As the film begins with a shot of a herd of sheep walking, this fades to a shot of working men walking. This compares the men to sheep, being herded to work by a systematic oppression of freedom as they are forced to work in unappealing jobs in order to simply put bread on

the table. The use of the fade emphasizes this message by keeping the viewers focused on the central figures (the sheep) and slowly replacing them with men. Rather than using a cut and briefly taking the viewer away from the action, the fade connects the two shots in a deeper way. Fades are used to replace the lack of a main character. Because it is only the beginning of the film, and the audience could easily become lost and confused by the disruption of time and space without a main character to follow, as a cut would do. Thus, fades help guide the viewers by taking them from the central action to the next focal point. Afterwards, once the scene is contextualized, Chaplin can resort to cuts to tell the story.

To conclude, many styles and types of transitions are used in *Modern Times*. Although the above analysis provides many ideas as to how these elements are used to convey certain messages and create certain ties, it is all relative to the viewer. For instance, some may see the use of cuts as not necessarily a symbol for power dynamics, but rather as a medium used to advance the plot in a more exciting and active way. However, due to the historical context of the film, these cuts are essential in dividing the characters by social class and roles. Alternatively, some may say that the choice of continuity style was not necessarily a conscious decision based on its attributes and meaning, but rather as an unconscious choice made by default due to its popularity in Hollywood at that time. Despite this, Chaplin was an educated producer, and through his many endeavors in the film industry he pertains the creativity and innovation to treat his films as more than just slapstick comedy. Charlie Chaplin's editorial choices in *Modern Times* are made specifically to relate to certain themes in the film -

particularly as a critique on capitalism, industrialization, and the division of classes in society as seen in the Great Depression.