

Principles of Editing and Story Telling in Relation to Editorial Graphic Design

Melike Taşcıoğlu

Abstract—This paper aims to combine film-editing principles with basic design principles to explore what graphic designers do in terms of storytelling. The sequential aspect of film is designed and examined through the art of editing. Examining the rules, principles and formulas of film editing can be used as a method by graphic designers to further practice the art of storytelling. There are many publications and extensive research on design basics; however, time, pace, dramatic structure and choreography are not very well defined in the area of graphic design. In this era of creative storytelling and interdisciplinary collaboration, not only film editors, but also graphic designers and students of art and design should understand the theory and practice of editing to be able to create a strong *mise-en-scène* and not only a *mise-en-page*.

Keywords—Design principles, editing principles, editorial design, film editing, graphic design, storytelling.

I. INTRODUCTION

THINKING on the nature of editing, Vsevolod Pudovkin stated that there can be equality between the words “editing” and “generating ideas” [1]. The decision of which elements should take part in a piece of work and what needs to be left out is the determination of that work; these decisions are the basic ideas forming the structure of the final design. When more than two elements have to take place at the same time, the organization of that is the design. When one specific element has to be stressed to communicate more accurately, the way and the timing this is done breeds another design.

Graphic designers' role as an editor or an author in publications is getting stronger. Designers are no longer artists only responsible for page layout; they design not only the page but also the whole identity, story and the dramatic structure of that publication. Designers are co-creators of a publication, and together with creators of image and type, they compose their way of communication.

"Graphic design is a creative process that combines art and technology to communicate ideas. The designer works with a variety of communication tools in order to convey a message from a client to a particular audience. The main tools are image and typography [2]. Books and other publications contain text and images. Graphic designers organize these elements on a page to make the publication convey meaning accurately.

The art of page layout —the *mise-en-page*— is a well-explored subject in the graphic design field. There are many

books and courses on this specific matter are in the curricula of academic institutions. However, a subject that is as important as the design of a single page is the overall design and the presentation of the flow of the publication —which may then be referred to as the *mise-en-scène* of the publication—. The emphasis on the staging and direction of parts is insufficient in many books, magazines and other publications that are being published, and is a subject of investigation of the counterpoints between the moving image and the book. At this point, it is necessary to investigate the principles of editing and storytelling.

II. COMPOSITION AND EDITING

Investigating the parallel aspects of film editing and editorial graphic design is a way of defining what's beyond the page layout. Visual objects have a potential to stage the flow of the content with its elements. This is usually defined as *composition*. When talking about a single page, the term *composition* is used. The same term is also used in music, photography and other arts. Composition can be defined as the aesthetic arrangement of elements in a whole. Although there are many discussions on composition and the *mise-en-page*, the whole publication, the beginning and ending, the rhythm and pace of the publication are all usually left undefined. This dimension in graphic design is usually neglected because of the fact that "in graphic design for press and desktop publishing *composition* is commonly referred to as page layout [3].

Rethinking the term composition might help designers remember that "...the designer's task is to create an interesting experience in time; and the way to do that is by introducing tension and surprise. This is done by means that are not dissimilar to the things that make a good film or theatre production or even a piece of music work. Creating contrast. Changing speed. Varying density. Establishing a rhythm, which is maintained throughout a publication, or unexpectedly, interrupted. A good designer needs to have a sense of drama." [4].

The visual communication process starts with finding ideas to solve problems, and editing —although not a very frequently pronounced term— defines the way a story is told in many publications. "A film editor must creatively work with the layers of images, story, dialogue, music, pacing, as well as the actors' performances to effectively "re-imagine" and even rewrite the film to craft a cohesive whole. Editors usually play a dynamic role in the making of a film." [5]. This is also true for graphic designers, and designers also play a dynamic role in the making of a publication.

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Jean-Luc Godard states that "a story should have a beginning, a middle and an end, but not necessarily in that order". Graphic designers and publication designers design in order to enhance the viewer's understanding of a story. The ways of storytelling are ways of new communication ideas. One of the silent cinema's most noted directors, Pudovkin, stated in 1928 that "Editing is the creative force of filmic reality, and that nature provides only the raw material with which it works. That precisely, is the relationship between editing and the film." Pudovkin came to the conclusion that the process of editing—the selection, timing and arrangement of given shots into a film continuity—was the crucial creative act in the production of a film [6]. When designers think further on parallels between publication and Pudovkin's approach to film editing—the process of editing being the crucial act in the production of a publication—the "composition" in publications suddenly needs new principles of evaluation.

Editing is based, to a great extent, on intangibles such as taste, a sense of timing, a feeling for rhythm, poetic and musical values, an ability to improvise, a deep affinity and a good memory for things visual—and endless patience [7].

On the double page spreads of a publication a story is told, a small drama is unfolding. As a film or theatre director uses the script or play to create a multi-sensory experience involving images, human emotion and movement, the graphic designer uses visual means to keep the reader involved and entertained while interacting with the publication [8].

III. INVESTIGATION OF PUDOVKIN'S PRINCIPLES OF EDITING

Designers often work with content distributed across many pages. As in single-page composition, a sequential design must possess an overall coherence. Imagery, typography, rules, color fields, and so on are placed with mindful intention to create focal points and to carry the viewer's eye through the piece [9]. Here, the principles of editing by Pudovkin are examined on books, magazines, brochures and posters, and possible examples of composition variations are given.

A. Contrast

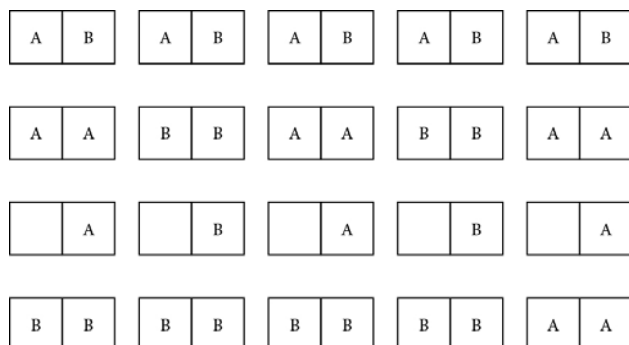


Fig. 1 Composition examples for the *contrast principle*

Cutting between two opposing subjects and showing them one after another helps create stronger contrast. "Suppose it be our task to tell of the miserable situation of a starving man; the

story will impress the more vividly if associated with mention of the senseless gluttony of a well-to-do man" [10]. In a publication, assuming A and B being two opposing ideas or subjects (A being the "starving man", and B being the "well-to-do man"), there are few ways of creating this contrast. In Fig. 1, we can see four different examples of contrasts and repetition throughout the book layout. "The editing of contrast is one of the most effective, but also one of the commonest and most standardized, of methods, and so care should be taken not to overdo it"[10].

B. Parallelism

The parallelism principle connects unrelated subject by using an object or theme together with both. By relating the constant X object to A and B subjects, the two subjects are connected. There can be many different ways of using parallelism in publications. In a book or in a series of publications, this principle can be used to connect different ideas to communicate another theme.

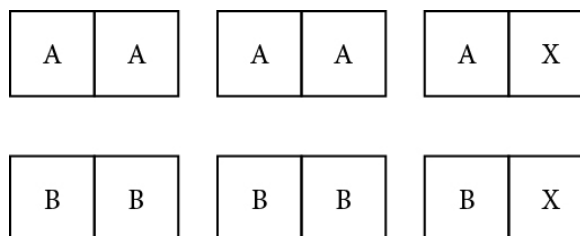


Fig. 2 Composition examples for the *parallelism principle*

C. Symbolism

The symbolism principle creates a metaphor. Pudovkin's example to this principle is the final scenes of the film *Strike*: "...the shooting down of workmen is punctuated by shots of slaughter of a bull in a stockyard. The scenarist, as it were, desires to say: just as a butcher fells a bull with the swing of a pole-axe, so, cruelly and in cold blood, were shot down the workers." [10] Here it is possible to use the same pattern as the contrast principle and to show the two subjects in relation. There are also many other ways to do this and in Fig. 3 there is another example of a vertical format in which images or text of the subject and the metaphor can be used together in a single page.

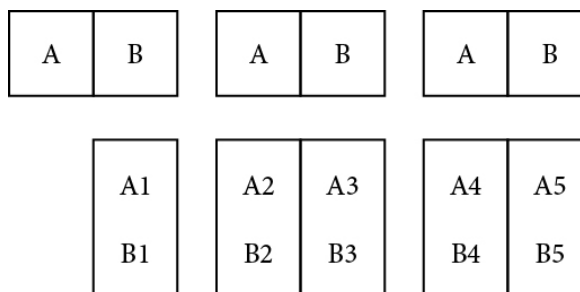


Fig. 3 Composition examples for the *symbolism principle*

D. Simultaneity

"In American films the final section is constructed from the simultaneous rapid development of two actions, in which the outcome of one depends on the outcome of the other... The whole aim of this method is to create the spectator a maximum tension of excitement by the constant forcing of a question, such as, in this case: Will they be in time?" [10] This principle can be used in books, zines or brochures. Although the excitement cannot be as strong as the film, the principle can give inspiration for layout and composition through the whole publication. A, B and C images can be used in a grid leaving spaces throughout and completing each other towards the end.

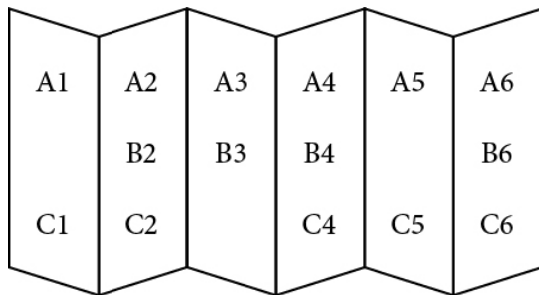


Fig. 4 Composition example for the *simultaneity* principle

E. Leit Motif

This principle creates a visual code by using a message with an image repeatedly. After being exposed to this several times, the audience starts to relate the "text X" to each new information he/she faces. This principle can be used in many publications, and is a good method commonly used in posters. With different images but same text, for example, we get acquainted to the connection of messages. Eisenstein stated the principle of intellectual montage most succinctly by comparing it with the works of hieroglyphs. "...the picture of water and the picture of an eye signifies to weep; the picture of an ear near the drawing of a door = listen; a dog + a mouth = to bark; a mouth + a child = to scream; a mouth + a bird = to sing; a knife + a heart = sorrow, and so on. But this is montage! Yes. This is exactly what we do in the cinema, combing shots that are depictive, single in meaning, neutral in content –into intellectual contexts and series." [11] This method is a very effective one that's been used in posters made by many successful graphic designers.

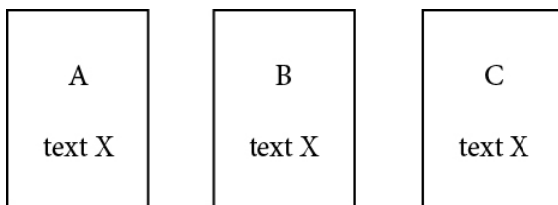


Fig. 5 Composition examples for the *leit motif* principle

IV. FREYTAG'S PYRAMID AND THE FLOW OF THE PUBLICATION

The element of surprise in literature and films is an inevitable part of storytelling. Surprise always has a part in books, novels, and many other texts. "Artists have long sought ways to represent the movement of bodies and the passage of time within the realm of static, two-dimensional space. Time and motion are considerations in all design work, from a multipage printed book, whose pages follow each other in time, to animations for film and television, which have literal duration" [12]. To express the rising action and falling action in a book can be hard and slow compared to a film. But in a book, there's a certain opening (exposition) and a closure (denouement), and the eternal flow is open to many different approaches. The designer might choose to create simultaneous flows, multi-climaxes or a very subtle and slow dramatic structure. The composition of the text and image throughout the book helps the designer decide the position and the timing of the climax, as well as the number of pages for rising and falling actions. To plan this, a macro scale storyboard of the book is used. To be able to see all the pages at once helps the designer understand the exposition, actions, tensions, climax and the closure.

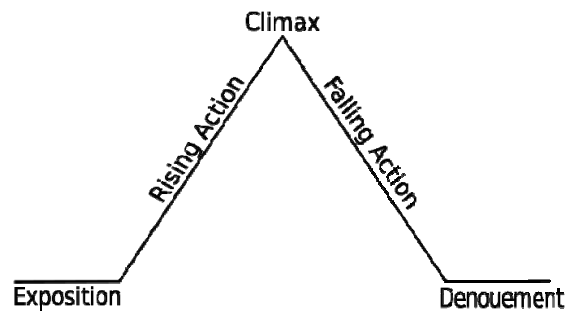


Fig. 6 Freytag's pyramid explaining the dramatic structure

V. CONCLUSION

The graphic designer is the co-editor of a publication. The story, the visuals, the dialogues between the characters, or the text and images, the music –the rhythm and the flow- and the pace of the publication must be investigated to find the accurate and creative solution. Just as it is in every area of design, the idea should be formed by brainstorming as a team and the whole process should be planned well before working on details. During this process, it is important to know the basic principles of storytelling and editing. Film editing and storytelling methods can help designers formulate the techniques of storytelling. The communication of a message on screen can be used as a basic platform to compose the whole of a publication, and not only the page.

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