THE BEGINNING

by Alan McCann, Editor

The clichés say that every picture tells a story; that a picture is worth a thousand words. Film runs at 24 pictures (or frames) per second. That's a lot of stories, and in a few seconds of film, that's practically a book's worth of words. Now let's take all those pictures, all those words, all those stories, and put one sequence of pictures next to another. What is that worth?

The answer is it's priceless.

The film editor takes all these pictures, stories and words, and weaves them into something much greater – taking hundreds of thousands of frames, moderating the clutter, mediating the voice, and telling the story with as much simplicity or complexity as the pictures warrant. He is the channel through which the footage expresses itself; the psychologist of the scene – bringing an identity to every shot, a context to every sequence.

If the film editor has done his or her job well, you'll never even notice. Is it any wonder the practice and the craft of editing are so shrouded in darkness? This volume will show you that the most blinding art can also be the most invisible.

Transitions is a torchlight into this most cloaked area of filmmaking. Open your mind to the sheer potential of the splice, and this book will open your eyes to so much more; how a simple cut from one frame to another can build character, fill a scene with emotion, or convey meaning a hundred pages of dialogue could never achieve.

The Concept

Transitions was founded out of this very simple idea – to shed light on the practical art of film and digital video editing, to open a discourse with the greatest practitioners in that field, and to put that discourse in the palm of your hand.

The Method

We gathered fifteen professional film and digital video editors together and asked them to write on the subjects that were important to them; the areas they felt needed exploring, sharing the knowledge they wished they'd had when they started out. Or maybe just passing on the knowledge taught to them by mentors and colleagues. The result is a true distillation of what the modern editor really needs to know; an engaging and quite endearing blend of solid advice, subtle wisdoms and fascinating anecdotes gathered from a career and a life in the editing room.

We then took these essays and passed them around. We asked each author to review chapters of greatest interest to them, and we incorporated this feedback into the book. So as you read about creating narrative or editing forms or how to approach an edit, you'll also be able to read the views, anecdotes or alternative angles of the other authors. Occasionally, some of our authors have suggested colleagues or mentors to comment on their chapters; again, these voices add to, but never distract from, the wisdom encapsulated in each chapter.

Also, where chapters overlap and themes intertwine we have provided cross-references which will direct you to other chapters which provide more information or just another viewpoint on that particular theme. For example, where Peter Schink talks about the importance of rhythm in editing, Stuart Bass' chapter explains how best to achieve it.

In the midst of this rich tapestry of knowledge, subjectivity and counterpoint, you'll find four special articles, a two-part chapter on the changing face of editing (written from both personal and broader viewpoints) and an interview with the Oscar-winning film editor of *Star Wars*, Paul Hirsch, A.C.E.

The Authors

Some lessons can't be learnt from distant masters, they can only be learnt from people who are where you are now; people in your shoes. Other lessons can only be learnt by the best in their field. This is why *Transitions* provides a rich mixture of voices from various backgrounds. Their commonality is their experience, wisdom and a willingness to share the lessons which have propelled them to where they are.

This volume contains a range of voices from all walks of editing life, including more than one Academy Award winner, talking on a wide range of subjects close to the editor's heart. We have the art of Hollywood animation discussed by Lee Unkrich (editor of *Toy Story*, co-director of *Toy Story 2* and *Monsters, Inc.*) and Mark Solomon (*Chicken Run*); their lessons, gleaned from years of experience at the top of their field. Dr. Melissa Wye reflects on her years of editing tv and film with the likes of Hal Ashby, Don Simpson and Steven Bochco – she currently teaches scriptwriting and film studies.

Patrick Gregston has trained hundreds of his peers in making the 'transition' from linear to non-linear (digital) editing, whilst both Erik Andersen and Stuart Bass, A.C.E. have acted as digital editing consultants to films and studios alike. With *Transitions*, the emphasis, in voices and in themes, is always diversity and authority

The Background

One chapter in this book covers how life experience can be brought to the cutting room. Indeed it is partly down to my own experience that this book was born. I studied film at University, dabbling in video production and training up on an Avid.

Each summer as my fellow students travelled back home or found themselves a summer job, I would be taking out cameras and booking time in the now-vacant Avid suites. As my course tutor Ian Mowatt once said, "you cannot study film until you know how to make one." I was determined to find out how.

Now, just two years later, as I look back there's an extraordinary sense of circularity and irony. I'm now an editor yes, but a book editor. And in what could be called the final arc in the circle, I'm editing a book on editing. Based on this experience I can tell you the two professions have much in common.

As *Transitions* was growing and material started flowing in, I found that reading these essays often by prolific Hollywood film editors, brought back parallels to my own few hundred hours' experience on an Avid. The book concept, of taking the "art" of film editing to a new generation, was underscored. Much of what I was reading I could relate to; the principles are the same, whatever the cost of your equipment or the scale of your operation.

Many of our authors have mentioned those with whom they first worked, or those whom they apprenticed under, and the profound lessons shared during the early formative moments of a long career. I was reminded of my first editing partner, Nicola Tyrell; we shared a tiny closet-like editing room for 12 hours a day for about two weeks, placing shots on a timeline … and invariably taking them off again. We had more than one disagreement, a number of technology-related traumas and more jellied sweets than is healthy, but the learning and the editing was glorious.

The point? Simply this: *discourse breeds mastery*. Only the free flow of information from editor to editor can light your path to the perfection of your craft. And this is what *Transitions* is. Fifteen editors talking to you, sitting with you in the cutting room, informing your decisions, encouraging your own flair, and then taking a step back and watching you put dreams, ambitions, wonder and magic onto the screen.

They are the voices you'll hear when the hours are long and the decisions are at their hardest; the words you'll remember when next you stare at an empty timeline.

As you turn this page, the choice is yours; read the first chapter, read the one which interests you most, or skim through until something catches your eye. My advice – pick a starting point, any of the above, and begin your journey. The book is designed to help you find your own path, through the cross-referencing, the peer reviewing, the overlapping voices, the imagery and the power of the informed word.

Transitions will change the way you edit, for sure. It might even change the way you watch a movie. Above all, it will make you think, make you wonder, make you question and even make you laugh.

You'll know you've reached the end when you put it down.