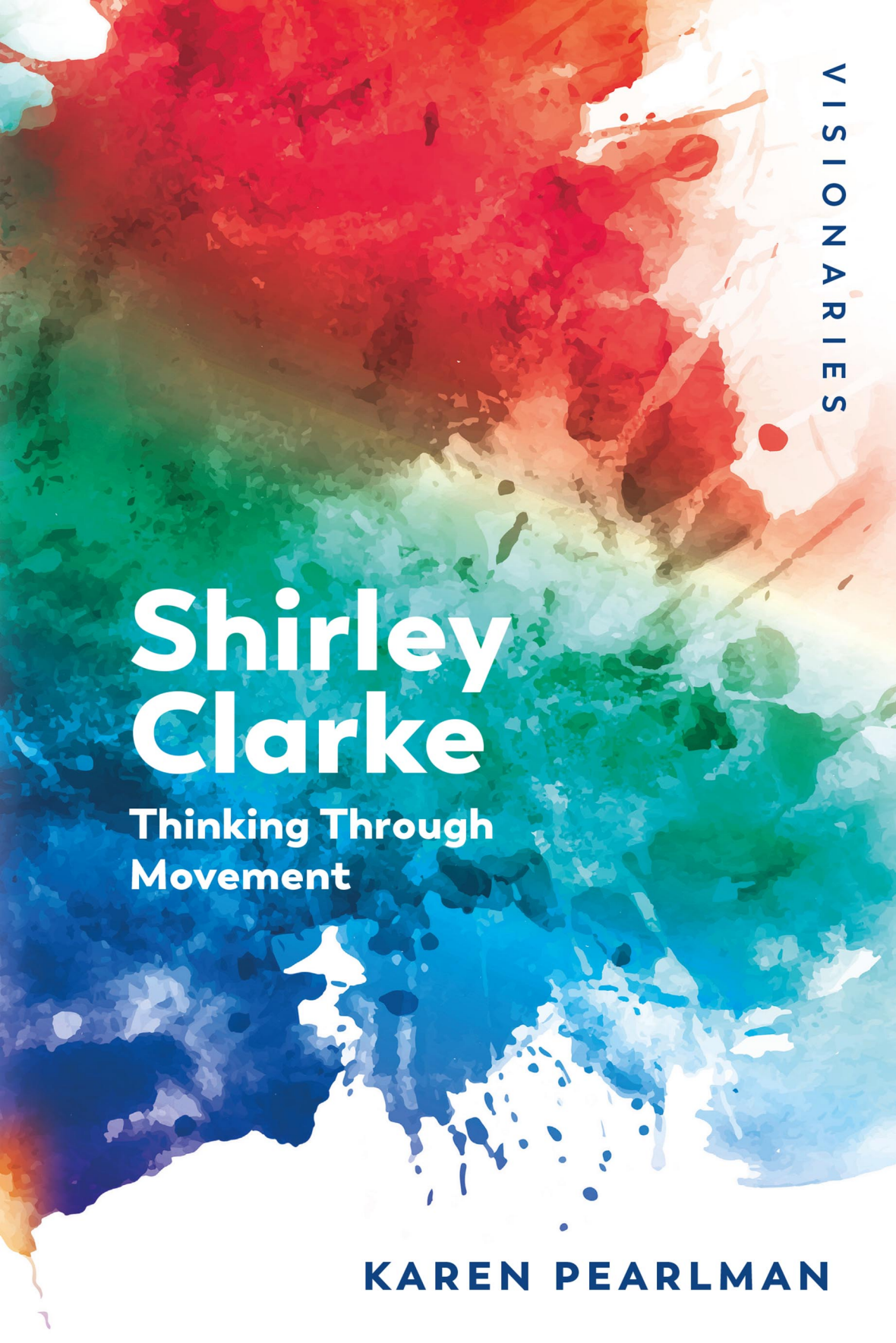

VISIONARIES
Shirley Clarke
Thinking Through Movement
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Frontispiece: Shirley Clarke circa 1960, photo by George Amberg. Shirley Clarke collection, M91-052, Box 26, Folder 4, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research

4

# Editing Thinking

'Editing – really creative part – most satisfying'
(Shirley Clarke, circa 1958[1])

'The reason film can be called an art is due to the fact that it can be edited'
(Shirley Clarke, circa 1960[2])

'I developed into a good director by becoming an excellent film editor'
(Shirley Clarke, 1975)[3]

'if you know film, you know how important editing is'
(Shirley Clarke, circa 1975)[4]

'Film is a director's/*editor's* medium'
(Shirley Clarke, 1982)[5]

'Editing is the essence of film'
(Shirley Clarke, 1983)[6]

'film is made during editing'
(Shirley Clarke, circa 1983)[7]

'I never allow anyone to ever, ever edit. To me that's what filmmaking is.'
(Shirley Clarke 1988[8])

As this long list of epigraphs suggests, editing is not just central to Shirley Clarke's practice, it is her understanding of what

filmmaking is. The film industry truism that 'films are made in the edit suite', is, to Clarke, axiomatic. Clarke understands editing to be part of directing, possibly even the most important part. In thinking of editing this way she follows her influential predecessors in the Soviet montage era, for example Esfir Shub who writes: 'A person who cannot edit should not make films at all'.[9] This approach was not the standard industry practice in mid-century America. The Taylorist "factory" model of filmmaking in Hollywood separates each 'job' so that it can be done more efficiently, and Hollywood directors rarely edit their own work as a result. Training of filmmakers tends to follow this model in the USA and Europe, where directors and editors are trained separately and the functions of the two roles are usually embodied by two different people.

Clarke, however, considered film to be 'a director's/*editor's* medium'.[10] She said:

> Most great directors also control the editing. A lot of them do it. I do both. I have people helping me, but I would never let anybody do the editing because that's really when I take all the wonderful pieces I have and create what I'm doing.[11]

What Clarke describes here is editing as part of authorship. Below I provide some key ideas about how this works before turning to close descriptions of passages in films that Clarke directed and edited. By finding language for the rhythms and phrases of Clarke's editing work, I aim to illuminate what is uniquely authorial in Clarke's editing, what her 1970s collaborator Andrew Gurian calls 'Shirley-ish'[12] about her cuts, that can not only be seen as a signature style but as a formal strategy for conveying meaning and perspective.

My look at Clarke's cuts also considers them as exemplary case studies for understanding editing as embodied and embedded cognising. By looking this closely at the edits, the ways that the movement in one shot is phrased in a rhythmic relationship to the movement in the next to create ideas and affects, I am pointing to

the generation of cinematic ideas through and with the material and machinery of editing.

My argument about Clarke's authorial editing is that in the edit suite the movement in the filmed shots becomes the raw material for a choreographic process of composing movement into 'significant form'.[13] This form is neither natural nor necessarily entirely predictable when the film is being shot. It is, however, what makes a film coherent and comprehensible: an immediate, resonant, embodied experience of narratives, ideas or patterns. As I have written elsewhere: 'A film's significance is not just "this happened and then that happened." A film's impact is in the *way* that this, then that, happened, including how fast or slow or bumpily or smoothly or forcefully or limply'.[14] These rhythms are constructed in editing.

The choreographic process of editing involves responding to the filmed material and generating ideas with it. In other words, it does not occur before editing, or outside of the hands-on process.[15] It is thinking that is embedded in process and tools. Shirley Clarke's dance thinking, as described in the previous chapter, becomes editing thinking in the suite, and her edits are her thoughts.

That she is able to 'think' these thoughts into and through film form in a context when few women had the opportunity to make films, arises at least in part from her ability to fluently embed her cognitive actions in the editing gear. As the reels move on the moviola; and the uncut material moves across her screen; and her hands move across the controls; and her body moves responsively, in a little shift of weight, or nod, or a lean in or away; she constructs the rhythms, spaces and stories of the films she is directing.

I pause briefly here to fill out the picture of how this editing thinking functions in creative process, and the significance of rhythms in understanding stories and their subtexts, before returning to specific passages that illuminate the ideas and significations generated by Clarke's cuts.



**Figure 4.1** Shirley Clarke in the edit suite. Photos by Peter Buckley, 1958. Shirley Clarke collection, M91-052, Box 26, Folder 7, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research

## Editing as part of authorship

It is not unusual to hear good editing described as 'invisible'. The American Cinema Editors organisation, for example, celebrates mastery of the 'Invisible Art' (americancinemaeditors.org). However, unless the film itself is invisible, the editing is not actually invisible.[16] We may not see edits, but what we see is the flow of movement (moving pictures, a movie). This flow of

movement of events, movement of emotions, movement of image and sound has been designed, shaped and ultimately determined by the editor.[17] It is a flow designed from fragments that could be composed into many possible rhythms and thus many variations on the nuances of subtext and affect. Editors shape these flows through a process of making decisions about which shot to use, where, and for how long, which is a deceptively simply description of the complex responsive and generative work of inflecting actions and relations between people, objects and spaces with nuanced temporal unfolding and trajectory phrasing.

Editors often describe this decision-making process with variations on the word intuitive,[18] which is a catch-all word for knowledge and ability that has been acquired through implicit learning and experience.[19] Indeed, Clarke uses the word intuitive and sometimes even instinctive, to describe how she makes decisions. Intuitive is not incorrect.[20] However, refining this generalised word by identifying the implicit knowledge and capacity for expert judgement that Clarke (and all expert editors) activate in editing processes is helpful to understanding how editors are authors, and why Clarke resisted relinquishing her own authorial presence in the editing process.

One key aspect of what editors call intuition is sensory/aesthetic expertise that is a developed form of embodied simulation[21] or what dance theory would call 'kinaesthetic empathy'.[22] It is a heightened capacity to feel with and think through movement. Editors compose movement's dynamics into forms or phrases expressive of textual and subtextual actions, pressures, responses, moods and feelings. Which is a complex way of saying editors expertly see and sense what movement means, or could mean, when timed and juxtaposed with other movement.

Clarke excels in this form of expertise. Her dance training and her immersion in jazz music build on her intrinsic proclivities, or movement feeling. They heighten her sensitivity to actions and reactions, intentions and significations conveyed in movement. Clarke perceives, or kinaesthetically empathises with, expressive possibility in movement in a specific, modern dance and

jazz-inflected way. Letting someone else edit the material she has directed would, in a sense, be relinquishing some of this direct, embodied access to the material. It would curtail the ways that she could feel with it, and thus alter the possibilities she imagines for it. This may be why she finds it strange that directors let other people edit their films. To her, this is a disruption of a key connection to the material. Clarke's connection to the material is a common experience amongst editors. As I note about the construction of rhythm by editors in other contexts:

> Some part of what they see or hear in the material's movement will provoke an empathetic response, and that part will be selected and juxtaposed with another part that also has a qualitative affect. Putting two shots together, each of which inherently has rhythm, makes a third rhythm, which is not the same, or even just the sum of the first two . . . So, the edit begins to have a rhythm of its own. At this point, editors cannot simply recognize a 'right' rhythm. Their own internal rhythms must come into play to shape rhythm through an editing process. As editors begin to do more than neurologically imitate existing rhythms, we draw on rhythms known to us through what Arnold Modell might call 'corporeal imagination' (2003), *as well as* latent rhythms in the film material, to create the finished film's rhythm.[23]

Clarke's unique editing signature arises when her particular embodied responses to the movement she sees and hears spark what neurologist Arnold Modell called 'corporeal imagination',[24] but which dance theorist Dee Reynolds might call her 'kinaesthetic imagination'.[25]

I borrow the phrase 'kinaesthetic imagination' from Reynolds to describe the thinking involved in making decisions that shape movement in editing. Reynolds is describing the ways that choreographers use their own bodies in concert with those of dancers to invent expressive movement phrases and choreograph dances. I have adopted Reynolds' idea to describe the ways that editors use their own bodies in concert with the movement imprinted on the uncut film's material, to invent expressive movement phrases.

Movement phrases are 'compositions of movement into perceptible and intentionally formed rhythmically expressive sequences'.[26] We see and hear these kinds of intentionally formed phrases of movement all the time. So frequently, in fact, that they are often mistaken for natural or inevitable compositions of the material.

For example: conversations between people. To construct a conversation's feeling and narrative idea from disparate takes, shot sizes and performances, the editor chooses a shot with the kind of feeling and dynamics to be conveyed by one speaker and then juxtaposes it, with close attention to the precise timing of the rise and fall of energy and emotion, to a shot of the other speaker. Each piece of movement with its particular accents and intentions builds on the last, and the next, to form a dynamic phrase of actions and reactions. These dynamics carry the material's affective power. They are not simply conveyed by putting the text in the order that it was written or the actions in the order they occurred in actuality. The editor is a composer of dynamics, a choreographer of the dynamic trajectory of movement that creates meaning.

Over the course of the 1950s and 60s, the work that Clarke is editing moves gradually from being abstract/expressive dance, where the movement phrasing is responsive to the movement of dancers; to poetic forms of documentary where phrases are composed from movement of pedestrians or objects; to narrative films where the movement of characters in relation to each other, their environments and their narrative challenges conveys the ideas.

Having looked closely at the phrasing of dance in the previous chapter, I turn now to look at the editing of abstract movement in *Bridges-Go-Round* (1958); the creative documentary montage in *Brussels Lops* (1958); and the opening scene of *The Cool World* (1963), in which Clarke creates an image of a dynamic community through a hybrid of continuity and thematic montage. What interests me here is Clarke's particular way of thinking with the material. What she sees and designs as phrases of movement that create rhythmically heightened impressions of ordinary gestures.

She thinks with her hands and tools and the filmed material, to create a world in unique, 'Shirley-ish' motion. She does this in film editing, not staged dance, in part because, as she says: 'The medium of film became much more intriguing and exciting than just dance in terms of action and passivity. Dance for me started to be too limited. There were too many other things that danced'.[27]

## Bridges-Go-Round

My first case study is one of the best-known films directed and edited by Clarke, *Bridges-Go-Round* (1958). Originally shot as potential material for one of the *Brussels Loops*, the composition of steel girders and spans that Clarke generated in editing was not included the Loops exhibitions at the 1958 World's Fair, possibly because the material was too abstract/non-figurative. The abstraction was embraced in the art film circuits, though, and *Bridges-Go-Round*,[28] is now often used as an exemplar of abstract/expressionist movements in film and of women's work within those movements. It is also used as a teaching tool for demonstrating the power of music to influence visual perception: because two different, complete, scores were composed, synchronised and produced for *Bridges-Go-Round,* one by Teo Macera and one by Louis and Bebe Barron. Both scores are included, one after the other, in the currently distributed version of the final film.

*Bridges-Go-Round* continues Shirley Clarke's work of making dancefilm without dancers – something well established in *In Paris Parks* (1954), but here continued into non-human realms. Clarke has, by the time of making *Bridges-Go-Round* written and spoken a lot already about this 'new kind of dance' that makes use of the 'fabulous technical devices of film and takes full advantage of the limitless dimensions of time and space offered by the film medium. This kind of dance is made for film and can exist only on film'.[29]

Writing some time after making *Bullfight* (1955), her third dancefilm, Clarke lists many things still to be explored in dance

filmmaking, including lenses, shots sizes, colour ('not representationally but for emotional and kinetic affect'), uses of space, backgrounds, props and sets, 'cutting and editing on various levels of co-existing reality and fantasy'; and, especially salient for discussion of *Bridges-Go-Round,* 'the use of sound track, as I feel sure it should be used, to make you see better' (emphasis in original).[30]

As noted, the version of *Bridges-Go-Round* that is on the Milestone collection *Project Shirley: The Magic Box* presents the whole film twice, once with each score composed for it. However, since both the scores made for *Bridges-Go-Round* responded to the visual edit, and were composed after the completion of the edit, it is useful to look first at a moment in the composition without music, to see what Clarke was seeing and how she was composing the visuals.

Taking an early sequence starting just after the titles at 27 seconds:

One strong stone vertical tower of the Brooklyn Bridge dominates the image. The tower towers. It presses towards us as the camera zooms in. The semi-opaque overlay of sparkly water softens its menace but increases its mystery. A second tower fades in, nearly meeting its twin in a softened collision. The towers start the visual melody of verticals that will be composed rhythmically, in a range of contrasts and congruences with the horizontals of the girders and the roadways, and the diagonals of the arches and suspension cables. If the towers had a sound in this visual jazz band, they would perhaps be the trumpet's long, high, sustained notes.

Diffuse patches of wavering light rain diagonally down on the towers in a semi-opaque overlay of a shot of the water's sparkling surface. Sparkles of light on water augment the verticals. Give the towers a sense that they are set in viscous space. Space that has body, is fluid, and will persist in movement, impervious to the immobile stone. The first tower's press towards us is through the Z-axis of the image (depth), an axis that will be used sparingly in the composition. Much more dominant are Y-axis verticals, X-axis

horizontals. These are the lead instruments. They are shaded or punctuated by diagonals which, like snares or bells, accent them.

But this is just how I see it. I watch the pattern with the music off and see phrases of movement that 'plays' the horizontals as voices in counterpoint to the vertical's melodic line. The bridge spans (which are still) are made into movement through the camera's glide or lift across them. The shots pick up each other's notes and carry the energy in a different direction.

When watching in silence, we see movement in shots as Clarke saw it in the edit suite. We can only see the parts of the shots that she picked out and included, not the full arc of movement available in the shot or what she excluded. However, seeing her composition in silence is nonetheless an experience of movement as she would have seen it when sensing the possibilities latent in those more extended pieces of material. She would have watched the whole shot and marked, with a grease pencil, selected segments as possible montage pieces to be used in the creation of a rhythmic phrase of movement.

The way that Clarke lines up the verticals so that they relay my attention from one shot to the next; the horizontals so that they drive me to the punctuation points the verticals make; the diagonals so that they interrupt the forward momentum, but gently, gliding or curving my eye across the image's planes; are all visible when seeing the composition unadorned by the movement of sound. Clarke seems to be almost hearing the visual movement and composing it geometrically, like music.

She is making phrases of repetition and punctuation that will develop, like a jazz improvisation, on themes and variations in collisions and connections of vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines of movement.

The verticals, horizontals and diagonals are gestures in time and space. Their movement is derived from movement of the camera, movement of the eye around the frame, and movement from shot to shot. None of these kinds of movement is in the bridge itself, but Clarke is making the bridge 'dance' with her editing.

Once Clarke has selected segments of shots and composed them into sequences, it is possible to 'hear' the movement of her composition in many ways. By ratifying two very different scores for the same film, Clarke embraced the fact that different composers see and 'sound' these rhythms differently, and in so doing create a different movement of the viewer's attention.

The presence of two scores makes *Bridges-Go-Round* excellent fodder for discussion of the relationship of images and music. The two scores each cause the viewer to see the film differently, to 'see better'.[31] My interpretation of what Clarke means, in this case, by 'see better' is that sound–image juxtapositions create a stronger or more immediate impression of patterns, dynamics and rhythms in the visuals. When seeing sound and image synchronised, we become entrained to the visual and aural rhythms combined. The synchronised score and visual movement complement each other and co-create each other's significance.

Comprehensible abstract rhythms and patterns are generally more directly apprehensible to people in music than they are in movement, and so music can perceptually shape images in a way that images cannot perceptually shape music. This is what becomes evident when viewing *Bridges-Go-Round* twice, once with each of its scores. The music directs the eyes differently in each case, and Clarke seems to enjoy the playful possibilities that the different sound/images juxtapositions offer. *Bridges-Go-Round*, with its two scores, seems to be an instruction to the audience about how we could get better at seeing and hearing the conjunction of image and sound.

## Brussels Loops

*Brussels Loops*, is a series of films first screened in the American Pavilion of the Brussels World's Fair in 1958, where they were projected on walls in continuous loops that visitors experienced from a moving platform at the centre of a vast hall. The impression would have been one of the United States in motion, and no



**Figure 4.2** Shirley Clarke editing with splicer and Moviola, circa 1966. Shirley Clarke collection, M91-052, Box 25, Folder 9, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research

visitor ever had exactly the same experience as anyone else. Clarke was one of the filmmakers, working alongside D. A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock and Willard van Dyke. She directed some of the 'Loops' and edited others. She did not edit all of them, but she did edit all the ones she directed, and her signature style is particularly visible in this moment in the *Loops*.[32]

We see a pair of men's polished leather shoes of the lace-up 1950s style. The shot tilts up to show a handshake between two white men – firm, certain and square. The momentum of the pumping hands propels a cut to another young white man. He lifts his hand to his hat and springs to his feet, as though the cut between the shots is the downbeat at the start of a tune. Which, of course, it is. But it's a visual tune, one played by Clarke's hands as she joins the frames and spins the moviola. The young man leans into the visual music he is there to make by reaching out to

shake the hand of an acquaintance who strides into view. Sunlight warms the easy-going, well-dressed white folk and the friendly connection of white hands, dark suits, white faces, dark hats.

In the embodied and embedded editing process, Clarke might have hummed along with the movement she was seeing and shaping.[33] Her mental, or possibly even vocalised, song would have been something like: *tilt-up stand-up*, a rhythm of rising inflections. Or she might have bobbed her head ever so lightly with the *up-down up-down* of the handshakes. But I think that what really makes the cut 'Shirley-ish'[34] is that it is contrapuntal, composed of two rhythms. What she made – what we see – is a phrase that goes like this: *tilt-up, pump-up-down-up-down-up-down / hat-tip, stand-up, pump-up DOWN*.

The hat-tip is also the first note of the new measure – the shot that resolves the handshake rhythm with a firm *DOWN* also starts the melodic line of hat-tipping. In the shot right after the *white hands-dark suits-white faces-dark hats*, the hat motif is carried on. An older man stands up, tipping his hat downwards and off his head to greet a woman. He and the woman lean in to converse, and another cut brings us to a scene of two white ladies doing the same. They carry on a pleasant conversation for a word or two before Clarke cuts yet again, returning to her original motion motif. As two (new) white men shake hands, the tall trees behind them underscore the vertical *up-down* of their hands, their suits and smiles.

Clarke has set up this rhythm for a purpose, as the next shot reveals. She is not just making a pleasant tune of congenial handshakes and head nods, she is creating a pattern into which she now seamlessly introduces a Black man. I think that Clarke's point, made with the continuation of the easy-going rhythms that unfurl across the screen and now include people of different shades of skin and ethnic background, is that integration could be easy and accepting. It does not need to be remarkable, unusual, or disruptive. 'There it is', she seems to say with the edit, 'integration can be an easy rhythm.'

In the context of the racially segregated, violent and oppressive USA of the 1950s this kind of statement was profoundly aspirational.

It would likely pass by unremarked in the cultural context of filmmaking of the 2020s. However, clearly the change of attitudes that Clarke was modelling with her creative rhythmic phrasings have not yet actually become the norms she hoped and worked for.

Clarke is not introducing a Black man into the rhythms to say, naively, that all is well with race in America. She knows it is not, and racial oppression and inequality are central preoccupations throughout her life. Rather, what she is doing by weaving this element into the rhythms she is constructing, is offering a rhythmic proposal to the world. This is how it could be, she says, rhythmically. These dynamics *could* be normalised. They can be created in film as flows of integrated movement, and modelled here, to be created in life.

Clarke's optimism is not normalised, however, and it would not be an exaggeration to say her edited construction of racial




**Figure 4.3** Shirley Clarke on the street in Harlem during the shoot of *The Cool World*. Photo by Leroy McLucas, circa 1963. WCFTR film title photograph file, PH 7162, *The Cool World*, Box 108, Folder 32, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research

dynamics moves from cheerful to confrontational as she moves from the 1950s to the 1960s. In five years, her optimistic editing, and the possibilities for warm and welcoming racial integration that she cuts together for the 1958 World's Fair, becomes more enraged, active and creative in making its points about race in America. I turn now to the opening of *The Cool World* (1963) for a look at how this happens.

## The Cool World (Opening)

The final case study for articulating how Clarke's editing shapes cinematic movement to generate ideas is *The Cool World,* a radical and insufficiently recognised film directed and edited by Shirley Clarke. My analysis looks closely at the opening of the film to identify how its movement phrases, as shaped in editing, convey or create experiences of community, space and subtext – experiences that cannot be created on paper or even in shots until the shots are edited.[35]

My analysis also notices that editing is the process of authoring these movement sequences that comprise what has been called the 'cinematic expressive movement'.[36] These phrases don't exist when the film is directed, although the director has actively conducted the movement of camera and performers' embodied actions that imprint their individual rhythms on the film strip. However, the significance of the movement that has been inscribed, by multiple agents, is at least partially dormant until finally choreographed in editing.

Through the close description of a scene from *The Cool World* that follows, I am aiming to describe not the cuts she makes, but the world. Clarke's mature signature as a director, her authorial style, is visible through her edited patterns of movement, her juxtapositions and associations, and her spatial and temporal compositions. Editing, in other words, *is* the generation of her film style.

*The Cool World* was Shirley Clarke's second feature film. It is often called a hybrid, because its startling look at the actual streets

of Harlem in 1963 is mixed with a fictional storyline in a method similar to that of the Italian Neorealists Clarke admired. This film was also Frederick Wiseman's first foray into filmmaking. As is evident from multiple documents held in the Clarke's archives (in the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theatre Research) Wiseman, a lawyer turned producer, and Clarke did not have an especially smooth process or trusting relationship. Since his company owns the rights to the film, Wiseman has let his animosity be known by tightly controlling screenings and blocking offers of wider distribution for almost five decades since *The Cool World's* original release and few years of distribution. I watched it on a 16mm print at the New York Public Library, but the excerpt I analyse below is available in a somewhat degraded and French subtitled version on YouTube.[37]

Nb. Unless otherwise specified, everyone in this sequence is Black. Only the cops are white.

CUT

*'And you wanna know the truth about the white man?'*[i]

The film opens on a man's face. He's yelling at us. Accusing. Berating. Calling us out.

*'The white man is the devil. The Black man is the original man.'*

Framed in isolation, an angry, vehement, righteous Black face against a blown-out white of sky or stone. Actor Richard Ward is playing the Street Speaker whose rasping shout sets the record straight.

*'. . . he is the maker and the owner of the universe and from him all others come.'*

---

[i] All text in italics in this section is the speech given by the character called 'Street Speaker' in *The Cool World*. The role of *Street Speaker* is played by actor Richard Ward. Unlike some of the other people who are seen in this sequence, *Street Speaker* is not a real person who just happened to be there. His speech is scripted, his presence planned.

A slow pull back. Shoulders, suit and tie. The corner of the building on whose steps he stands. The top of a head just below him nods.

*'Brown. Yellow. Red and White.'*

Other voices chime affirmations.

*'Brothers'*

Glaring at the right edge of the frame the Speaker growls and demands of his unseen audience:

*'listen to me.'*

CUT.

Profile, four listeners, tightly packed in a mid-shot. Black men. A street in Harlem stretches behind them. The stoop in the back looks connected – same stone, same style – to the one the preacher stands on. On the far left of the frame, the likely owner of the nodding head. Still left, but not so far, a man in a white shirt. Arms crossed. Terse nods. Unseen gritted teeth tense the muscles of his posture. Eyes intent on the speaker, who is out of frame but whose voice prevails. Foreground centre, a heavier shape. Dark head, dark suit. He nods. Shifts his weight and reveals another man behind him, same bulk, dark suit. Their nods are synchronised – they hear, believe and respond to the same thing. The man behind them, filling the right edge of the frame, nods in counterpoint, rhythmically syncopating and expanding the wave of agreement. The five of them make a crowd. Assembled around urgent words.

*'White is but the absence of colour.'*

CUT.

Four other men. Same street in reverse angle? Possibly. Probably. Behind the scenes photos suggest that it is. The colours and the

light match. The building's materials are different, but they could be in reality, since this is a reverse shot. The eyelines of the listeners clearly match, and the voice continues. So, the magic trick is set up. We are primed. The eyelines, the frame size, the composition of the crowd, the continuing sound, make the edit itself 'invisible' to us. By which I mean that instead of seeing the cuts, we see the scene compiled by the cuts. We experience it not as a shot of four men followed by a shot of four men, but a gathering of eight. And, crucially, possibly many more men are implied, shifting, listening, nodding. There is no wide shot and the two mid-shots cut together do its work. Clarke is deliberately withholding information about the size of the crowd because she has a larger point to make, which is that any- and everyone in Harlem is affected by this speech. So in two shots she makes us infer a crowd of unknown size, one that feels big and tightly compacted.

Watch closely now.

At the centre of the second shot of listeners, a tall man in a hat turns to look towards the camera.

> *'. . . hence the white man is incomplete . . .'*
>
> CUT
>
> *'. . . and imperfect.'*

A white cop.

The magic trick is done. The hat man's eyeline, the pace of his turn, are completed by a cut to a white cop standing exactly where he looks to. Which, on reflection, we know is impossible. Because that is where the camera is standing. So where is the cop standing?

The editing has just constructed a phrase of movement: Speaker–listeners–listeners–cop. If I were a better writer, I could make that phrase more palpable with syllables and words. But the clunky writing is, in a sense, my point. The editing has constructed a phrase not with words on a page, but with movement.

It is well known that editing constructs spatial continuity. That eyeline matches, and matches on action are the tools of the

conjuring trick, the misdirection that makes the disparate elements feel like a single flow. They are what pulls the eye away from the join. What convince us there is, in fact, no join. That it is 'seamless'.

We know all this from years of Hollywood films. But what director-editor Shirley Clarke does next with it is unique to her.

The cop doesn't flinch. He shifts his weight to the left and the camera slides off to the right. A tension-creating counter-move. In the crew's parlance that is just a counter-move of the camera. In a peaceful street protest, it is a *counter-move.* It counters the cop by moving off him. It counters his presence by replacing him with a Black man who looks further to the right as the speaker continues.

*'A true knowledge of black . . .'*

CUT

*'and white . . .'*

Here, in the 'crowd' (three figures in this shot, dominated by a man's face), is the first woman we've seen. She looks up. Adds her gesture to the movement phrase being composed. Think of it as an invisible ball of energy.[38] The man's look left-to-right throws the energy. She 'catches' and transforms it by looking down-to-up. That is the edit's job. Left-to-right-to-down-to-up. The movement phrase is being built. Does his 'throw' to her instigate her catch in real life, the way someone looking over at you might cause you to look up? The edit phrase instils acceptance of that belief before we ever ask ourselves that question. The phrasing of movement across the cut becomes one 'story'. The people listening become one community. Connected by this invisible ball of energy they seem to throw between them. The energy is comprised of gesture, word and frame in crafted juxtaposition. That is the editor's job. To compose the timing, pacing and trajectory phrasing[39] of movement so that the energy of the physical action in one shot appears to cause or 'launch'[40] into another.

Attend then, to where Clarke takes us next. She uses the ampliation of gesture and energy to create a bigger idea. What

we see next through the selection, limitation and phrasing of movement across shots is the work of a director composing her idea through her own embodied, choreographic, editing process.

The 'idea' here is that a whole community of people in Harlem, whether present or not, are affected by the speech. They are, and know themselves to be, described by it and connected to it. They and the speaker are in dialogue, amplifying each other. This is a big idea, that a community is connected by this incendiary rhetoric and yet still functioning as a warm and generous community. This big idea is created in a matter of seconds, by movement phrasing.

Having set in motion, through motion, the belief that the listeners and cops are all in the same place at the same time. Clarke continues to sustain the speech throughout the sequence, though the speaker is never seen again.

*'a true knowledge of black and white . . .'*

CUT

*'should be enough to awaken you to the truth . . .'*

Foreground: a listening man. Background an approaching woman. She crosses behind the foreground man and glances up towards the camera. Her glance impels the camera . . .

CUT

. . . to a whip pan blur that lands on two white cops.

*'the TRUTH about the white devil.'*

CUT

The walking woman bites her lower lip. Continues walking into the foreground. Another glance connects her to . . .

CUT

. . . profile of the two burly white cops. Someone walks in front of them. It feels like her, our walking woman. The pace the same, the direction the same. Only the top of the head is visible. Unlikely as it is to actually be her, it feels just like her. Again, belief is quicker than knowledge. The someone moves past the cop. The cop shifts and starts to look to left of frame, as though to follow, but,

*'who after a hundred years . . .'*

CUT

*'of so-called freedom . . .'*

A cop in profile, walking, toward frame left. Half his face excluded, until the shot widens out. Once we've 'bought' that the shots are connected by a single trajectory of movement, it is easy to believe that this cop is one of the same two from the last shot, and that he is escorting a Black man away from the speaker with a controlling hand pressing on his back.

*'is still persecuting. . .'*

CUT

To the sixth shot in twelve seconds. For comparison the first five shots took forty-three seconds. Before this sixth shot, though, there is an opportunity to hit pause, and reflect on what Clarke has accomplished with ten shots in fifty-five seconds, five slow, then five quick. She has constructed a crowd listening to a speech even though we never see all the listeners in the same shot. She has positioned three or four white cops in the 'crowd' of Black people even though we never actually see the cops with the people. She has doused the entire combustible concatenation with the fuel of the speaker's rage, even though the speaker may not be present at all – he hasn't been seen with the people either. And she has revealed a truth about whiteness and Blackness in America. But she is not done with us yet.

In the tenth shot of the film, the man being 'escorted' away from the camera turns. Looks over his shoulder, gestures.

*'is still persecuting . . .'*

CUT

*'Beating . . .'*

another whip pan blur and a man on a park bench reading a paper looks up.

*'jailing . . .'*

Is he looking up in response to the gesture or the word 'jailing'? Or both? In fact, on the shooting day he would have heard neither. Even if it wasn't a different day and in a different location, the direction he would have been given, if any, would have simply been 'look up'. The juxtaposition of word and gesture is made later, in editing. The energy sails across the cut to prod his response, timed so that it *feels* like a response. Which, I emphasise, it could not possibly be in actuality. What is interesting here is that we are now moving into actuality. A series of twenty-five shots that could be from any place in Harlem, any members of the community. They are clearly not in the same light, or space, or even necessarily in earshot of the speaker. These twenty-five shots mix plausible listeners with people chatting, smoking, reading, sketching. They mix what seems to clearly be actuality with some things we learn later are fiction. The scripts and notes for shooting *The Cool World* (found in many boxes of the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research Shirley Clarke collection) include notes about all kinds of shots that will be taken in different places on different days, and this sequence could have drawn its montage material from any of these places or days. These shots earn *The Cool World* its status as a hybrid. They take us later to a shot of the film's fictional protagonist, yet to be introduced, who seems to be listening too. Our easy belief in the continuousness of the first ten shots, our rising pulse with the rising

anger and pace, segues us into belief in the continuousness, the connectedness, of the next twenty-six.

CUT

*'. . . and killing our brothers.'*

A whip pan lands on a face worn with time, a cigarette burning down between his fingers. He looks right at us on the words.

CUT

*'God gave the white man the right to rule for s . . .'*

A restless, heavy man turns his head sharply left.

CUT

*'six thousand years . . .'*

A white cop, arms folded, mouth set, surveys the scene. Looking right. Centre. Left.

CUT

*'and that rule is terminating.'*

The white cop's gaze throws to a Black man in mirror image of arms folded, mouth set. Whip pan off left.

CUT

*'We should rejoice . . .'*

A Black woman, hands on hips, chats to someone left of frame, she looks straight at us as she turns her head to laugh. Her companion's head juts into frame, throwing the line of movement to . . .

CUT

*'. . . rejoice together.'*

. . . a gap-tooth man laughs in delight.

CUT

*'For the time we are living in . . .'*

A man in an embroidered kufi does not share his mirth.

CUT

*'is a time for reclaiming our own.'*

A huddled man lights his smoke and opens his posture to throw to . . .

CUT

*'. . . our own.'*

. . . a young woman's open arms, that come together with a clap and a smile.

CUT

An older woman responds with animated chat.

CUT

Shoulders of a walking figure carry us across the gaze of another man.

*'Together, we have suffered . . .'*

CUT

*'. . . at the hands of the white devil.'*

This guy's cigarette is unlit. His dark glasses opaque. Still, you feel a challenge in his stare.

CUT

*'Together, we have known the slavery.'*

The speaker's exasperated exhale on 'slavery' elides with this gaunt smoker's exhale. The smoker glances up.

CUT

A big man, with a long, curved pipe sucks inward, exudes smoke, returns the pipe to his lips.

*'Not only of the body . . .'*

CUT

*'. . . but of our very . . .'*

A tall smoker sitting on a stoop turns his head as he takes a drag. Is that glimmer of an eye roll towards the pipe smoker? Towards the words? Towards us?

CUT

*'soul.'*

An artist's arm and back curved over the sketch he is making of someone's face.

*They have . . .'*

CUT

*'taken from us our dignity . . .'*

Framed from slightly above, this woman looks good and mad. Brow furrowed; words spit through tight lips.

*'as men and women.'*

Her nod coincides. But for the different background, the different light, the implausibility of setting a camera so close to someone intent on a speaker, you'd be sure her nod was aligned with the speaker's actual words, not cut in later in a deft contrapuntal move.

CUT

Tilt down from a heavy grandmother's face to the clasp of her hands.

*'They have given us their god . . .'*

CUT

*'But they haven't given us their hands.'*

Tilt down along a poster of a pretty, white, Jesus, holding a cute white lamb. Then whip pan away to the grim lonely stare of a pot-bellied old man. He pauses. Looks down. Away.

*'Friends!'*

CUT

Someone says yes, but it is not the vibrant young woman who is as surprised by the camera as we are by the portrait studio she is in.

*'Do you hear me?'*

She turns her head to look.

CUT

*'Then join with me in reclaiming . . .'*

Children squirm and laugh.

CUT

*'what is rightfully ours.'*

Children look sceptical. One chews a string.

CUT

*'It's the devil. The white man devil.'*

A sleeping baby. Tilt up from the pram to a smiling young mother.

*'Hear you . . .'*

CUT

*'together . . .'*

Duke, the kid we'll follow from here forward, looking in the direction of the speaker. The voice fades, Dizzy Gillespie's trumpet slips in, and we're off into the film's diegesis, which will bounce deftly between what could not be real and what could not be fiction, seeing, selecting, composing and framing the movement between and through the worlds. By phrasing the gestures in relation to the words and to each other. Clarke crafts a closely connected, semi-fictional community from a loosely connected actual one.

And this is her 'director's idea'.[41] The choreography of the edit is Clarke's textual and subtextual directorial idea – what she wants to convey about Blackness in this moment, about community, about anger and acceptance. About oppression and opposition. About moves and counter-moves. These are all conveyed in this short prologue to our actual story. A montage sequence created, as the best ones are, from an idea nascent in the director and editor's head, hands and 'kinaesthetic imagination'.[42]

## Conclusion

Clarke's editing conducts and choreographs the movement imprinted on multiple discrete bits of film into the singular flow the viewer experiences. Her edited movement phrases are a source of affect and understanding for audiences. They gestate her film's

style, reveal its subtext and characters, and the significance of interactions. Because there is no intermediary between her body and her editing gear, Clarke has enormous control over meaning, nuance and ultimately reception that editing produces.

Clarke is clear on the significance and power of this as establishing a film's style and the ideas it conveys. She is bemused by industry power-brokers who don't seem to get this. As she says:

> they allow women to be editors, which has always struck me as very strange, because anyone who knows anything about film knows that the very thing a film is going to say can be changed in the editing. The whole way a film is going to go can be given a complete switch by how it is put together. And they will give that responsibility to a woman and yet would not allow her, supposedly, what they would consider the highest responsibility as producer-director.[43]

Clarke knows how much power editing has, even if the Hollywood industry does not.[44] She knows she can use her choreographic sensibility to create phrases of movement and that these will convey her ideas and meanings. She uses her technical, kinaesthetic and conceptual editing expertise to get around the barriers to entry for women in film and to convey her voice and vision. With this in mind, I turn now to a chapter on directing. However, the chapter break is not intended to split these two actions of editing and directing. What I aim to show in the next chapter is how Clarke and her collaborators generate the raw materials Clarke will cut together through an improvisational, enactive process that tessellates seamlessly with the choreographic compositional processes of editing.

## Notes

1 Clarke, S. (circa 1958–59). Handwritten notes on 'Analysis of *Bullfight* the story of this specific film' (Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Box 11, Folder 2).
2 Clarke, S. (circa 1959–60) Handwritten notes for 'Forsdale Lecture' (Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Box 11, Folder 2).

3 Shirley Clarke, as quoted in Murphy, M. (1975). 'Women in Film'. *Hollywood Reporter*, 3 January.
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7 Clarke, S. (circa 1983). Handwritten notes in ORNETTE notebook (Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Box 21, Folder 3).
8 Shirley Clarke, as quoted in Winner, K. (1988). 'A Filmmaker's Love Affair with Video'. *Chelsea Clinton News*, 28 April, p. 10.
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10 Emphasis in original: Clarke, as quoted in Bebb, 'The Many Media of Shirley Clarke', p. 7.
11 Ibid., pp. 7–8.
12 Correspondence from Andrew Gurian to Wendy Clarke (13 February 2021). For further insights from Gurian on Clarke's methods and working processes see Gurian, A. (2004). 'Thoughts on Shirley Clarke and The TP Videospace Troupe'. *Millennium Film Journal*, Fall (42), 1–13.
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15 See Pearlman, K., MacKay, J., and Sutton, J. (2018). 'Creative Editing: Svilova and Vertov's Distributed Cognition'. *Apparatus. Film, Media and Digital Cultures of Central and Eastern Europe*, 0(6). http://www.apparatusjournal.net/index.php/apparatus/article/view/122/306 and Pearlman, K., and Gaines, J. (2019). 'After the Facts – These Edits Are My Thoughts'. *[In]Transition*, 6(4), 1–7. http://mediacommons.org/intransition/after-facts.
16 See Pearlman, K. (2016). *Cutting Rhythms: Intuitive Film Editing*. New York; London: Focal Press. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780080927763/cutting-rhythms-karen-pearlman
17 See Pearlman, *Cutting Rhythms: Intuitive Film Editing*; Pearlman, *On Rhythm in Film Editing*.

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25 Reynolds, *Rhythmic Subjects, Uses of Energy*.
26 Pearlman, K. (2009). *Cutting Rhythms, Shaping the Film Edit*. Focal Press (an imprint of Elsevier), p. 30.
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29 Clarke, S. (undated) 'Notes on dance filmmaking' (Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Box 14, Folder 16), p. 2.
30 Ibid., p. 3.
31 Clarke, Handwritten notes on 'Analysis of *Bullfight*' (emphasis in original).
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33 See Pearlman, *Cutting Rhythms: Intuitive Film Editing*, Chapter 6, for a discussion of 'singing the rhythm'.
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35 A version of the discussion of *The Cool World* was first crafted for the 2021 special issue of *Textual Practice*, edited by Paul Sheehan and James Alexander Mackenzie. See: Pearlman, K. (2021). 'Editing, Directing and

*The Cool World*: Filmmaking as a Choreographic Art'. *Textual Practice*, 35(10), 1587–605. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0950236X.2021.1965291. Reprinted by permission of the publisher (Taylor & Francis Ltd, http://www.tandfonline.com ).

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37 Available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WwfGUlH7i0.

38 See Pearlman, *Cutting Rhythms: Intuitive Film Editing*, Chapter 7, for discussion of 'throwing the energy'.

39 See Pearlman, *Cutting Rhythms: Intuitive Film Editing*, Chapter 3, for discussion of timing, pacing and trajectory phrasing.

40 For more on this idea of the movement in one shot appearing to cause the movement of the next, see Carroll, N. (1996). 'Causation, the Ampliation of Movement in Avant-Garde Film'. In *Theorizing the Moving Image*:Cambridge University Press.

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