The Reservations of the Editor: the routine work of showing and knowing the film in the edit suite

Eric Laurier, University of Edinburgh
Barry Brown, University of California San Diego

Abstract: The editing suite is one of the hidden spaces of film. A place where complex forms of embodied collaboration around screens take place. In this paper we present video-recorded data of an editor and director assembling a short documentary. From it we begin to describe the editing work in terms of being aware of what media there are, assessing those materials and making them visible. We move on to consider the joint task of assessing clips once they are visible and making proposals about possible sequences. The editors’s reservations are the areas of film-making for which they are accountable – their characteristic role of caution around the quality of media and intelligibility of a film for its audience. Much of the work on media and interaction assumes that the media are pre-formed and that these interactions are at a distance. Here we study the place where media are still in the process of being made and while the work of editing is intimately dependent on video it is nevertheless accomplished in the local orders of the editing suite.

Keywords: video editing, media, space, interaction, visual, assessments, conversation analysis
Making the movie visible

The academic sits at their computer editing their current journal submission. They have a first full draft, rather too quickly completed and twice the length of the word limit. If one of the empirical sections can be deleted without damaging the argument then that will be a thousand words taken out. They read and compare the two sections – yes that can probably go – with that section deleted they reread the introduction realising some re-writing will be needed and some extra deletions. Similarly, the conclusion will require a few extra words now to compensate for the removal. While editing of this kind will be familiar to journal readers, editing as a practice remains relatively understudied apart from a few notable exceptions (e.g. Becker, 1982).

If we add a co-author to our initial scenario the situation is subtly changed. Sitting at the word processor they discuss what to do, they read aloud certain sections, one operates the keyboard while the other makes suggestions. At various crucial rewordings they both keep their eyes on the screen so they can see exactly how the new wording reads. The editing situation has become more complicated yet, in the requirement of both parties to remain aware of what they are doing, more accessible to an outsider. This is also the case with film-makers editing a documentary. There are more screens, yet the work of excision, addition, revision and trimming might be similar. We should be careful in our comparison that the object for film makers is a filmic object and not a textual one.

A generation ago the difference in media meant radically different machines were used in editing. Film editors worked on flatbeds with strips of negative, blade and specialist sticking tape and video editors with two video recorders and corresponding buttons and shuttles. In the succeeding thirty years digital video has brought windows, keyboards, mice and cursors. Software has converted a linear process into a ‘non-linear’ process that allows editors to cut and paste video and audio just as academics cut and paste text in word processing packages. Professional editing software like Avid, Premiere and Final Cut Pro have grown in increments out of the work of editors and the project structures of film-making (Caldwell, 2008).

Yet even with the greater ease provided by digital video, the professional editing of even short films takes takes place over several days, weeks, months or years (Crittenden, 2005; Thompson & Bowen, 2009). To assemble a feature-length film editors will draw upon hundreds, if not thousands of video and audio clips. Editors have numerous technical jobs to perform with this abundant collection of material: logging footage as it comes in, assembling dailies (the day’s footage for directors to review in the evening), repairing problems from the shooting, picture-editing, sound-editing, responding to notes, and, in

1 There a number of professional editing situations where editing happens much faster. Most obviously live editing but also a number of other TV formats such as news packages, sports highlights etc.
a general sense, assembling first cuts & numerous further versions of a film (Caldwell, 2008; Koppelman, 2005). Avid, and systems like it, collect together the bewildering array of labelling devices, specialised tools, shortcuts, viewers and playback possibilities that editors may call upon. Our aim here though is not to study the historical development of the software or the cultural practices of the production industry, important though they are, our focus is on providing a rudimentary description of what is actually involved in the lived work of video editing.

While the director’s tasks are certainly fascinating and we will attend to them in what follows, it is the hidden work of the editor collaborating with the director that we want to concentrate on. As a first gloss of what the editor’s work with the director is, it is making the movie visible and audible – this can seem an odd idea for academics used to working with documents which, aside from scrolling them on screen or flicking the pages, only seem to require reading. During the production process a film slowly emerges as an object, like the pot of the potter’s wheel: from the three-minute pitch that begins to say what a movie might be like, to two page treatments, to story-boards if they are made, to scripts, to shooting schedules etc. What is being done is shaped by what has been done and will shape what will be done later. Documentaries, in some senses, happen backwards and more than any other form are shaped in the edit (Rabiger, 1998). The documentarist has shot a lot of material on a topic and the story then has to be found in the footage. Backwards is perhaps a slight exaggeration because there is always a rough story which the film-makers are pursuing yet it serves to mark the significant differences in the editing process between documentary and other film forms. As you might imagine the editor’s task is all the greater in making a documentary visible because there is no script nor storyboard to follow or diverge from in the editing.

When a director and editor work collaborate in the editing suite there is a distribution of knowledge as much as there is a distribution of work. A second gloss is then around what the editor’s knowledge is, it is knowing what footage we have, where it is and what it is like. In the academic scenario one could imagine a paper where one author might know the empirical material better, whilst the other knows their theory. The director for their part may have supervised or directly recorded much of that footage but they may not have yet seen how the shots or sound ‘came out’. Or may not yet have scrutinised, ranked and judged the picture and sound in the manner that the editor has. When the director is collaborating with the editor they will be expected to know what the argument of the documentary is, what they were recording at the time, what they were trying to achieve in recording an event or person or scene etc. and other surrounding facts pertinent to the documentary. It is the marrying together of these two sets of knowledge of the emerging film that is the ongoing challenge.

2 Though of course quite what reading a text is outside of the editing setting is one that gives birth to huge academic enterprises as well as other more practice-based studies (Gallacher, 2010; Livingston, 1995; McHoul, 1982).
Working with and in screens

The approach we will use to describe the video-analytic work which as the heart of editing grows out of conversations (CA). Early work in the field of CA was mono-modal, having the benefit of drawing upon tapes of telephone calls or other audio recordings, for its primary data (Sacks, 1972; Schegloff, 1972). Telephone calls became the prime site for investigation because callers, like the researchers, were reliant upon entirely on what they could hear and could effectively bracket out gestures, objects, movement within the environment and the varied array of resources which constitute multimodal communication elsewhere. As scholars involved in the development of CA began to analyse a wider variety of settings, (e.g. medical consultations Heath, 1986) and turn their attention toward the importance of gaze and body movement in speech exchange (Goodwin, 1986; Schegloff, 1998), a number of aspects of communication that had been bracketed out were gradually brought back in. While the first studies tended toward considering gesture and body movement, over the longer term, various objects (Goodwin, 2003; Hindmarsh & Heath, 2000) and spaces (Haddington, 2010; Llewellyn & Burrow, 2008; Mondada, 2009a; Nevile, 2004) have, by necessity, been re-integrated into the study of talk-in-interaction.

What has been a particularly challenging area of study has been when the multimodal doubles-up; when we have people doing activities amongst, based upon and or indeed creating multimodal objects. For instance, surgeons teaching surgery while also using live video to display the surgery they are teaching (Mondada, 2003), underground railway staff using video to monitor crowds while also controlling those crowds (Heath & Luff, 2006) and school students visualising Shakespeare's Macbeth (Greiffenhagen & Watson, 2009). In each of these cases screens (and speakers) bring into play a further set of features that have to be made sense of in coming to understand what the activities in question are. This is not to say that the materiality of the screen or speaker itself is the phenomenon in question (Introna & Ilharco, 2006; Tutt & Hindmarsh, 2008) just as paper is not at the heart of most newspaper activities. What studying video editing does requires of us though is, from time to time, the double focus of following the following of courses of action. In addition because in our research we have utilised video to record activities, this results in scrutinising, on a screen and through speakers, other workplace analysts scrutinising other people, activities and events on a screen and through speakers. In trying to understand what is happening around computer, TV and other forms of audio-visual production technologies there is this double duty of following the actors (e.g. director and editor) recorded by the researcher while also attending to the course of action that they are not only following but also producing as the point of what they are doing (e.g. an interview in the documentary).

Of particular pertinence to understanding the multimodal complexities of screen work and editing are Broth's (2004, 2008, in press) studies of TV live editing. Drawing upon video recordings of a debate show Broth documented the collaboration between the live edit suite and the camera operators. Yet, while the environment was exceedingly complex the camera operators only used a mono-modal channel to communicate their proposed
shots to the editing suite: the camera feed itself. With this one mode of communication they were able to offer shots to the editors by using both zooms and sweeps of the camera to indicate they were about to select a fresh shot as a candidate camera angle for the production team to cut to. Where we depart from Broth’s work and other studies of live editing (Engstrom, Perry, Juhlin, & Broth, 2009; Mondada, 2003, 2009b) is that our editing team have several weeks, after shooting, to edit the short video they are making. Because the video they are making is not the coverage of an event while it is happening what is required to make the documentary visible and audible is of a different nature also. Not least because the camera crew have usually finished their shooting, though there may still be late requests for extra footage (which we will return to in a moment). There is time in hand to dwell upon shot selection, placement of audio, revising previous versions, overall structure of the short film and more. Unlike the rapid-fire cutting of the live event, what we will see in the next section is cutting and re-cutting in a contemplative mode.

The lived work of editing

Oscar and Jo are working on a short documentary to open a conference on young children’s involvement in the arts through the activities of a number of local arts organisations (e.g. several galleries, a storytelling centre, a mobile art studio). The documentary has been made, in large part, by a group of older young people as part of the operations of community video resource centre. Planning for the few minutes of editing we are about to examine in more detail has come about from months of previous
meetings and more recently through a number of discussions in the editing suite between Jo, the director-producer, and Oscar, the editor. Moreover Oscar, as is common editing practice, has been working by himself over a number of days re-editing some of the sequences from the first cut of the short film.

The centre they are working at is a remarkably long-running community video centre, so long-running that it now provides a video archive for local historians of the city. From its outset the centre has offered up the opportunity for film-making to those who otherwise would find it difficult or impossible to do so. Jo and Oscar themselves have been involved for several years in the centre’s youth work. Oscar growing up, and out, of their young film-makers group and, in making this documentary, graduating into the role of paid-up editor. Jo, as a youth worker, recruiting the people that shot the film they are editing while also working as producer-director.

The editing suite, which Oscar and Jo are using, is laid out in a common spatial arrangement of off-line and on-line editing suites (see figure 2) (Button, 2002; Dancyger, 2002). Its flickering CRT (cathode ray tube) screens are perhaps a little dated and a little small compared to contemporary flat screens. The studio-quality speakers (confusingly also called monitors) are placed to the left and the right (not visible in figure 2). Indeed as current flat screens have grown in size they have the space to include the windows previously spread over two CRT monitors.
To explain the geography of the three screens a little: the two in the middle and right are for the editing tools and the one on the right is a monitor for displaying and examining the final output. The latter serves an important purpose for displaying the final product of their work because it colour and aspect accurate while the other two screens are not. The former pair display both tools and the object being worked on with the editing software: the timeline, the clip viewer, the canvas, audio monitor and bins. The timeline provides an overview of the video and audio clip arrangement (we might compare it to the table of contents of an academic book). The clip viewer displays a clip that is currently being trimmed or manipulated in one way or another. The canvas displays the images wherever the playhead is on the timeline (and is thus the mirror of the monitor on the right hand side). The 'bins' are comparable to the folders where we, academics, organise and store all our documents. An AVID station is a geography of windows, tools and levels that takes most beginners several weeks to find their way around, thus we do not expect readers to take it all in, just to take away a basic sense of its layout.

A large part of what Jo and Oscar do when they are together in the edit suite (as against when Oscar works by himself) is to plan, review what they have just done and, on the basis of what they have achieved so far, further plan what they will try and do next. For the time being we want to set aside these planning conversations because they are ‘tools down’ because the editor takes their hands off the controls and the work on-screen halts. While such off-screen, tools-down discussions are a key part of the job of editing any film and shape up much of the work that follows, it is the hands-on work that we want concentrate on in this article. We want to examine a hands-on moment in more detail because these times when we have the inter-twining of talk, gesture, objects and environment with the ongoing selection, addition, removal, adjustment and rearrangement of video and audio clips.

The editing we will examine closely in a moment is in the midst of producing a second assembly of the documentary. The first assembly of the documentary was completed in the previous week and was around twenty minutes long (the final cut should be less than four minutes). Given that the director and editor have a version that is five times too long for its final purpose, making the second assembly is, thus, going to be a dramatic abbreviation process. We might imagine this will then simply be a case of a massive trimming and removal of audio and video. A curious and endemic property of editing down a movie, noted by a number of editors\(^3\), is that it requires the introduction of new clips. For those new to editing, this routine requirement for additional footage late in the production process appears odd. One explanation for this requirement for additional materials lies in film’s, as a medium, inherently sequential properties. To pull out one clip, just like pulling out one turn of talk in a conversation, will likely cause problems of, at least, intelligibility and possibly begin to endanger, what are in this case, assessable qualities of the final filmic object. Further, in looking at an assembly, the editor and

\(^3\) See for instance Stephen Mirrione’s commentaries on the special editions of the Go DVD (dir. Doug Liman, UCA, 2004) and Traffic DVD (dir. Steven Soderbergh, Criterion Edition, 2002). Also the late stages of editing of Cold Mountain in (Koppelman, 2005)
director see ways of improving the thing they are making and can only see it at the point where they have the majority of its elements in place. For instance now that they look at an assembled sequence, they will need one more close-up of this building but from a different angle which shows its recognisable roof outline. To get from the story from one location to another, they need a shot of someone leaving the building. These editorial problems are actually anticipated by professional camera crews. Directors routinely shoot exit and entrance shots of characters (amusingly explained in Mamet, 2007), they do multiple takes in interviews, they shoot numerous cutaways (e.g scenes or images from the location that can be used for wallpapering over edits or audio). For documentary, above all, they record a lot of picture and audio (e.g. 100 hours material for 1 hour documentary is a common ratio). In the editing suite, a common solution, which will see in a moment, is to trawl through the 'bins' to see if some unused clips might serve a new purpose within the assembly. We are going to join Oscar (editor) and Jo (director) as they run into just such a moment in their second assembly. It begins with the director noticing a clip in the bin that might be able to be used in the section they are working on. We are providing a video and transcript of the entire sequence to give a sense of longer course of action before then concentrating on shorter sections in detail.

---

4 There are yet more solutions for documentary editing such as library footage, stock footage as well as sending the camera crew out to record the missing sections. These can leave a documentaries temporal factuality open to defeat under conditions of opposition when this asynchronous collection is discovered. The controversy over the editing of ‘Chavez - The Revolution Will Not Be Televised’ providing a perspicuous case (Stoneman, 2008).
1. Jo: OH!
2. Oscar: What
3. J: School interior. There should be some [quite really ni’
4. +
5. O: [They’re very shake:y
6. J: Are [they
7. O: [As I recall I think it was all handheld, the school
8. interiors and exteriors
9. J: Shouldn’t be
10. O: Wait. Is it. It’s all right actually
11. I: I think some of it is handheld
12. O: It’s pretty-
13. J: I- is this bit handheld well I mean that’s classrooms so we
don’t need that anyway
14. J: This- is this bit all handheld
15. O: Looks like it. Wait maybe that bit isn’t actually no: No
you’re “right actually, it’s not”
16. J: >It’s coz I jist< I just remembered this interior being
absolutely ama:zing
17. ((some lines removed where J & O are examining a shot of a model
bus))
18. J: I think the shot of Van Gogh by P6 is perfect [obviously
+ [Yes b’
19. it’s good really good but I don’t- Where can we put it
20. J: When she’s saying I’m at the scho:ol
21. O: Mhm
22. J: Exterior shot, school sign, interior shot, into the
classroom
23. O: Hhhm
24. J: Which means that you can cut some of the front of this out
as well
25. O: Pfwoo yeah mhm

Oscar, the editor, is in the midst of another task when the director notices (line 1) a bin
of interior shots on the screen on the far right. The editor switches from his task and
brings up the interiors as requested (line 15). They watch them together and eventually the director finds a shot of Van Gogh posters on the wall (line 47) that she likes. In the face of some apparent reservations from the editor (line 49) she formulates a sequence of shots into which the Van Gogh posters will fit (line 55).

fig. 3 Asymmetry of editor–director pair

A first thing to note, before we consider the unfolding course of actions, is simply that there is an almost unavoidable asymmetry in the mutual monitoring (see fig 3). Gaze plays a significant role in the confirming or querying of understanding, in emphasizing, in attending or dis-attending, in turn-offering and requesting and more (Goodwin, 1980). In the editing suite, as in many workplaces and everyday situations where participant are not orientated face-to-face, how we pursue a response or indeed respond by a subtle move such as a raising of the eyebrows have to be adjusted and adapted. When working hands-on, the editor operating the keyboard and with their gaze upon the Avid interface cannot look extendedly at the director without stopping their work on Avid. The director who has no software tools in their hands nor direct tasks to perform can look at the editor whenever it is sequentially appropriate in terms of her conversationally and gesturally communicated tasks. From lines 51-61 we have this situation and it is a common one throughout editor-director collaboration. Having noted this common asymmetry, what we have at the outset of fragment above is both the editor and the director looking at screens, though at different screens. Let us look at this in a little more detail now:

1. Oscar: ((speaking quietly to himself))
2. 
3. Jo: OH! ((taps A’s arm and points toward the bins on the right hand screen ))
4. 
While the director is waiting on the editor to complete his current task (displayed to him on the central screen) she can of course do other things such as examining the bins which are displayed on the right hand screen. In common with a number of collaborative situations around an interface such as searching for solutions together to problems at an interfaces (e.g. Heath & Luff, 2000; Ivarsson, 2010) the person without their hands on the keyboard and mouse has to find appropriate points in the ongoing flow of the other's task to intervene. In the excerpt above, we have the initiation with the free standing ‘oh’ (line 3) of a noticing (Heritage, 1998) by the director. Meantime the editor is already busy with a task both had agreed upon and his somewhat blunt 'what' and absence of immediate cessation of his task marks what the director has done as interruptive.

However the director's awareness of interrupting and the need to secure the director's attention is handled by her breaking apart the 'oh' noticing token, from the thing noticed 'school interior' (line 9). Space is thus given for the director to find the place where he can pause and then re-orient to what she has spotted. 'School interior', is the label for a collection of clips of 'cutaways' mentioned earlier, identifiable as such by 'interior(s)' which is a member of the family of cutaway terms (along with 'exteriors').

What we should not forget, in the director Jo's reading aloud of the label 'school interior' is that it is the editor who has created the clips that fall within that label, so there is no news for him in its discovery. In a simple sense it is part of the visualisation of the movie.
through text and also part of the organisation of the movie as work project. It is available not only for himself as a resource to draw upon but also open for (over-the-shoulder) reading by the director. It thus is part of the work of making the movie as a project visible for both, but connected to different knowledge of what further knowledge is indexed by such labels. Although labels are generally available ‘School interior’ has not been brought to the director’s attention by the editor for working on at this juncture. She has picked it out because it happens to be lying open on the right hand screen rather than because it is relevant to what they are currently working on. Accordingly, of course, she goes on to provide an account of her noticing’s potential relevance for their current task. For the editor, not only is the ‘school interiors’ collection not a noticing, it triggers a long audible in-breath from him in overlap with the director’s account of its relevance (lines 11 & 13). This does several things, perhaps most significantly pre-figuring a negative assessment (that will undermine the director’s discovery even as it accounts for the school interiors’ absence). Moreover it displays hearing her noticing as consequential for the task at hand and competing it before the turn to provide his assessment of those clips. Indeed the director cuts off her turn before it reaches completion on the very assessment term ‘nice’ which only makes it to ‘ni-‘ marking it as abandoned. Quite why she might abandon on the word ‘nice’ turns upon ‘what the editor knows’ since as we have noted already, the editor collected these clips and thus has the epistemic upper hand.

In a disagreement marked in a parallel construction on overlap: we have ‘really nice’ and ‘very shaky’. Not having the space to do more than draw on the larger ethnographic work on editing this comes from (Laurier, Brown, & Strebel, 2010), we can add that ‘shaky’ is a negative assessment that brings into play editors’ professionally consequential criteria (Ivarsson, 2010; Lymer, 2009; Phillabaum, 2005). Editors in video and film take responsibility for, and in various ways enforce, certain qualities – stable shots rather than shaky hand-held ones, fixed shots rather than zooms. Through the term ‘shaky’ the editor is thus providing editorial reasoning for the absence in the current assembly of a shot selected from the interiors that the director has just noticed. The array of routine terms used by editors to formulate and assess problematic clips are not only ‘shaky’ but ‘jerky’, ‘jumpy’ and ‘whippy’ (to name a number that we have come upon during time spent in a number of editing suites).

What we will move on to now is a more detailed look at the end of the fragment where the editor does provide a positive assessment of one of the interior shots [play ‘interiors perfect b’]

31. J: I think the shot of Van Gogh by P6 is perfect, obviously
32.
33. ((Oscar leaves timeline to return to clip viewer))
34. +

5 It is hard to resist seeing a certain sound shape in these adjectives that can provide a resource in hearing an editor’s negative assessment with economy.
Jo provides a first assessment of the Van Gogh posters by P6 as 'perfect'. Moreover she provides this assessment in what Pomerantz (1984) calls a final position assessment (i.e. the assessment term comes at the end rather than the beginning). Final position assessments as Pomerantz shows prefer agreement and are thus harder to disagree with. That her assessment expects no disagreement is underlined by her qualifying her assessment with 'obviously'. This makes Oscar’s expression of his doubts 'yes but' (lines 35 & 37) all the more interesting. He provides a second assessment which “does the work of claiming to agree with the prior while marking, and accompanying, a shift in assessed parameters which partially contrasts with the prior” p63 (Pomerantz, 1984). In other words, through making a second assessment rather than simply agreeing with her, his downgrading 'good' maintains his affiliation with the director while also edging in a disagreement through the downgrading. This affiliation appears to be further developed in his delayed, upgrade on his initial 'good' with 'really good', with its 'but' problem upcoming. As Pomerantz (1984) argued, assessments are usually not done for their own sake but are lodged within other action sequences such as praising, complimenting, complaining and so on. We should thus also then examine Jo’s first assessment in terms of its place within another course of action.

The editor's overall extended response of his two assessments and question helps us see what the course of action might be. He provides an agreement through his assessment on one part of her assessment: the aesthetics of the clip. The absence of a matching upgrade to 'perfect' indicating his reservations over something else: the action that will be done with the 'Van Gogh'. 'Where can we put it' he asks at line 39 and thereby we see that overall course of action here is inserting the shot into the sequence they are currently working on. Let us move on to examine what happens next:

41. J: When she’s saying I’m at the [scho:ol ((chopping toward screen))]
42. +
43. O: [((Oscar takes playhead to school shot))]
44. O: Mhm
45. J: Exterior shot, school sign, interior shot, into the classroom
46.
47. O: Hhhm
48.
49. J: Which means that you can cut some of the front of this out as well
50.
51. O: Pfwoo yeah mhm

With the insertion problem now raised by the editor, the director formulates the insertion point using the voice-over or audio-track ‘when she’s saying I am at the scho:ol’ (line 41) to locate it. After which we have a gesturally-supported sequence of shots to which ‘Van Gogh’ is reconnected with its initial labelling by the editor as part of his stock of interiors. Moreover we have an interior located within a sequence of professionally meaningful membership categories belonging to establishing shots: ‘exterior, school sign, interior, into classroom’. The sense of why and how the shot is ‘perfect’ becomes more apparent in what it is perfect for. It is not shaky, looks good and fits into their establishing shots sequence. With no revised assessment or agreement from the editor, the director adds a final flourish which is that the sequence could be cut down slightly and thus achieve their over-riding goal here to trim the first assembly down in length.

Throughout the editor appears to be continuing to have his reservations about the three part list (e.g. 1. where to insert, 2. what video sequence is produced and 3. what additional benefit this carries). Each of these assessment which form part of the director’s overall proposal are all receipted with the minimum continuer of ‘mhm’s. At this point we might expect the editor if he is agreeing with the director to show a positive acceptance of the proposal (e.g. ‘good idea’, ‘so it will’, ‘yes will do’ etc.)? In fact as the final recommendation for the insertion of the clip comes to an end, the editor offers a distinctly tentative ‘yeah’, prefaced with a puff, concluded with an ‘mhm and marked gesturally with a furrowing of the brow.

What we have done up until now though is to overly concentrate on the talk and ignore what is happening on, and with, Avid. What is visually available to participants changes something of how we understand the import and uptake of the editor’s responses from the first assessment of the clip in question as ‘perfect’ (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992). Let us turn to the actions taking place on the Avid interface.

Returning to the ‘good’ which is upgraded to ‘really good’ the editor is also getting the actual shot they are talking about on-screen. In fact his work begins even earlier when the director says ‘I think the shot of Van Gogh by P6’ at which point he finishes deleting a clip [1] and the cursor begins to move away from the timeline to the clip viewer [2]. Once in the clip viewer he scrubs through the clips from the stairwell with its globes [3] until he has the Van Gogh shot on screen, in time for his second ‘really good’ [4]. Until the shot is on-screen their assessment of it is in an important sense limited. Or rather, the editor’s re-assessment is limited. He is able to, and can, display as a re-assessment what he
is doing by bringing the image back up on the monitor and clip-viewer. So while we still have a downgrade in response to 'perfect' we begin through examining what is happening on Avid to understand that the assessment is being re-shaped by the work of making the documentary visible for the director and editor's current purposes.
Having re-examined the sequence assessments in the light of the visual materials on Avid we can now turn to the sequence of minimal ‘mhm’s from the editor during the director’s suggested insertion. These minimal receipts also take on a different character as we watch what Sam is doing as Jo is speaking. By the close of ‘school’ the editor has brought the playhead to the point on the timeline where the interview is saying ‘school’. In itself, jumping to the relevant point so quickly so as to furnished the director with the actual materials she is talking about is a remarkable if commonplace accomplishment of an editor. As the director finishes her description of the establishing shot (line 45) the editor has moved on to running the playhead back and forth over timeline re-examining the existing establishing-shot briefly before deselecting the tracks in order to begin inserting the Van Gogh clip. In other words, when we follow his actions with Avid, - a following that the director is also doing then we see that his actions are the concrete responses to her proposals. When the director’s third and final recommendation of the insertion actually comes it is actually after the editor has followed through on her suggestions.

It thus takes on a post hoc character rather than being part of a continuing attempt to convince the editor to insert the Van Gogh clip. In turn, the editor’s ‘mhm’s then come to be seen when dealt with as a whole as expressing that he is busy already getting on with the suggested insertion. When the director says: ‘Which means that you can cut some of the front of this out as well’ the puff the editor makes comes to be understandable as one that displays the quantity of tasks piling up as he hears her recommendation as a further direction for the editing. One might puff in this way to help the person giving us more work to do appreciate that we need a little time. So rather than being doubtful about the director’s suggestion he is dealing with the work pace.

Finishing our analysis of selecting a clip in the editing suite by concentrating on what is happening in Avid (and this is where our editor and director as focused) returns us to the slightly cryptic remark at the outset that the editor’s work when working with the director is making the film, as it is now, visible. The editor is busy in manipulating footage in order to make just the right section of a clip or sequence of clips and more available for their visual analyses of these clips as director and editor. Moreover you may still be thinking that the edit was not made in the midst of this re-examination of the qualities of
this clips perfectness. Having unlocked the appropriate tracks on the timeline (at line 43) set the in and out points (line 49-51), within a few more second the clip is inserted and they move on.

Conclusions

The preceding section has provided a typical example of what decision-making looks like in film making. And there are thousands of these sorts of episodes during the editing of any film. The sheer profusion of intense thoughtfulness around these thousand cuts is not recovered by film studies. Nor should these decisions be since an overarching ambition of film studies is in the work if instructed viewings of cinema (Livingston, 1995). However point of this sort of study is not to limit the interpretative work done by film theorists with finished filmic objects. It is instead to recover the lived work of making those objects that precedes and is irretrievably lost in the final product.

Rather than treating the visual as an ‘add-on’ to the oral or textual, the aim has been to develop approaches that do not start with a separation of the field into visual and verbal/oral elements, but that approach the phenomena under investigation in a more holistic fashion, treating them as a unified contexture (Greiffenhagen & Watson, 2009: 66)

While this article did not aim to pursue a critique of multi-modality, we would like to note that Greiffenhagen and Watson’s starting point in studying visual phenomenon is distinct from the multi-modal in that they are pursuing a ‘unified contexture’. We find ourselves mentioning this in part because in analysing the materials in this article we began by breaking them apart into modals before re-assembling them into the multi-modal. Perhaps it is unavoidable in trying to make sense of complex environments when we have a video record, where the easiest and seemingly most complete feature to access is the audible and thus we started by dealing with it by itself. This tendency to transcribe audible components we would argue is an issue of the technical access that video as a recording format provides, rather than it being a theorisation of practical action as multi-modal (Livingston, 1987). If there is a multi-modality on offer, it is multi-modality of video records that capture unified contexture’s of worldly phenomena. This is hopefully all the more apparent here when in the latter part of our empirical section we bring the screen work on Avid back into the analysis of the linguistic and gestural modalities.

Working on screens and with speakers is at the heart of film and video editing in a double sense because the final object is one that is to be consumed on screens with speaker systems. This isomorphism contrasts with otherwise comparable studies of how work is assessed on screens by architects (Heath & Luff, 2000; Lymer, 2009) and photographers (Phillabaum, 2005) and prioritises the importance the importance of the object as it is seen there and then. However the essential quality of film and video is that it needs to be ‘rolled’ (as it used to be called) or played. This work of getting just what need now, to talk about that thing now, is central to the work of editing. Without being
able to see and hear what they are working on the process begins to unravel. Outside of
the particularities of film as workplace medium, the existing studies of assessments and
screen work have been based in educational settings. Here we have director-editor rather
student-teacher or tutor-tutee. Working together and on equal if distinct footings, the
editor’s reservations push in creative ways against the director’s vision. From the
unexceptional materials presented we have hopefully given a flavour of how these jobs
interweave with one another.

To successfully edit a documentary and many other film genres what the editor and
director need to know is what they have available to assemble the movie with. In the
instance we have examined the director is recalling a scene they liked during the shooting
and querying as to whether there were corresponding clips. The editor is expected to be
the one that knows whether certain shots exist or not. As we have already mentioned, the
editor’s knowledge is one that they have acquired through logging clips, categorising clips
into bins, building select shots of such things as ‘school interior’, ‘children holding up
pictures’, ‘interviews on music’ etc. All of this preparatory work over the preceding weeks
leading up to being ready and prepared to edit in collaboration with the director. In the
edit room collaboration is about bringing that distributed knowledge into dialogue with
the director’s vision for the documentary. This dialogue routinely takes the mundane
form of interruptions. Indeed we might say that interruptions are at the heart of
collaborations and workplaces. The ongoing achievement of such collaborations maintain
affiliation yet it also provides for the editing suite is notorious site for disagreements.
Bibliography


