The mediated work of imagination in film editing: proposals, suggestions, re-iterations, directions and other ways of producing possible sequences

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Extended abstract

In this chapter we will examine the work of editing a feature length documentary. Drawing upon existing ethnomethodological studies, predominantly of architectural practice (Murphy, 2004) we will pursue imagination as the intersubjective task of seeing the film—that-is-to-come through what is currently completed, what is missing and what can be added. The routine feature of the editing suite that this turns upon are cycles of reviewing sequences and proposing what should be done next with each sequence. The relationship between review and selection in editorial work has previously been studied in newspaper offices (Clayman and Reisner, 1998) but not documentary production.

We will present one of these film editing cycles in detail, where the editor and director are discussing the transition between two scenes. Their work begins by reviewing the sequence which the editor has recently completed editing. During their review both editor and director provide assessments of the sequence as it currently stands. Moreover in doing their expert editorial assessment of the sequence they delaminate it into the audio and the picture. Some of the problems raised by the director entail technical solutions which in turn make relevant the workplace identity of director and editor.

As the cycle shifts forward to its next stage the editor makes the first proposal through subtle shifts in tense from what the sequence currently ‘is’ to what it ‘will be’. As part of this same shift what the filmic object is is also formulated explicitly (e.g. an ‘intro’). With this in mind the editor then brings to bear other parts of the Final Cut Pro’s (editing software) interface to help him propose the appropriateness of the smaller sequence within the larger structure of the film as a change of scene.

The fixed interface of Final Cut Pro’s layout is less central however to the collaborative workplace editing of film than video’s properties as an animate and audible medium. Video/film is play-able which means that it is also cue-able, roll-able, loop-able, interruptible, extend-able, scrub-able and so on. These properties are realised in, and are constitutive resources, for the analysis and production of sections, clips and sequences. The centrality of the manipulation of video to editing is demonstrated through how both director and editor assess, propose and select what footage to add (and remove) for the next edit of the documentary.
There are hosts of widely divergent sorts of behaviour in the conduct of which we should ordinarily and correctly be described as imaginative. The mendacious witness in the witness-box, the inventor thinking out a new machine, the constructor of a romance, the child playing bears, and Henry Irving are all exercising their imaginations; but so, too, are the judge listening to the lies of the witness, the colleague giving his opinion on the new invention, the novel reader, the nurse who refrains from admonishing the ‘bears’ for their subhuman noises, the dramatic critic and the theatre-goers. Nor do we say that they are all exercising their imaginations because we think that, embedded in a variety of often widely different operations, there is one common nuclear operation which all alike are performing, any more than we think that what makes two men both farmers is some nuclear operation which both do in exactly the same way. (Ryle 2009: 233)

Exercising our imagination

Gilbert Ryle warned against the mistake of treating imagination as if it were formed out of a gallery of mental images that persons then see inside their head. Imagination as an inner process that is a correlate of the seeing that we do in the outer world. Ryle’s attack on the ‘ghost in the machine’, like Wittgenstein’s, is a ground clearing exercise for philosophical work on imagination and thus necessarily destructive. Our ambition in this chapter is in the positive programme we might take from Ryle's re-description of imagination in more worldly terms. We find the beginnings of such a programme in the counter-examples he uses to refute the idea of imagination as based on one mental process (his ‘common nuclear operation’ in the quote). While the places we find imagination are varied, the examples are, at first, lone persons such as the “the mendacious witness” but then Ryle adds the other social actors we find in these places. In the courtroom, this being “the judge listening to the witness”. Quite quickly, then, in Ryle’s turn toward the exercise of imagination we have worldly settings with speakers and hearers involved in testifying, inventing, flirting, playing, writing.

In what follows we pick up another instance of the exercise of imagination, that we expect Ryle would also find germane, in the editing of a feature length documentary film. But why pick out documentary film editing, rather than witnesses and judges in the courtroom? For those judges, a study showing that they are not only objective and principled but imaginative and how they are so, would indeed be a worthwhile one. Our warrant for studying editors and directors at work rather than the court-room is what Garfinkel (Garfinkel & Wieder, 1992) called ‘Sacks’ gloss’. To paraphrase Garfinkel, this is locating a group whose routine business it is to deal with the phenomenon that the analyst wishes to learn from and teach themselves about their topic. The editing of a documentary is concerned with the analysis of video and, in common with the other contributors to this collection, we are trying to teach ourselves more about the analysis of video from other groups whose routine business it is to analyse video. Perhaps surprisingly, documentary editing is considered by film editors to be the practice that requires the greatest exercise of their imagination because more than for any other genre of film the documentary is created in the edit.

By comparison fictional features usually work from a script and news packages or sports highlights work from highly conventionalised formats. While we would not want to argue that there is a nuclear mental operation we can find perspicuous settings for the exercise and thus also the investigations of, imagination that will teach us as much about editing as it will about imagination.

It might still seem as if we ought to be presenting a setting scorched by lightning bolts of inspiration and flashbulbs of imagination in action. The editing suite is often a cause for complaint by film directors, compared by the French director Renoir, to washing the dishes after the feast that
was shooting the footage (Orpen, 2003). Slow, repetitious, fiddly labour in stuffy rooms usually without windows. Ryle’s concept of imagination already helps us to anticipate and understand that it could consist of as much scrubbing brushes as lightning bolts. For the exercise of imagination in the editing suite to be productive requires patience and endurance. As time spent in any artist’s studio reminds us, imagination is about toiling with tools and materials over and upon a thing that is emerging, appearing, materialising, surfacing, verging, folding, happening, clarifying, integrating and a host other practices that run through creating a thing-to-come. This then is a domain of human activity that is not the discovery nor invention that the social science have become familiar with through studies of science and technology, it is fabrication (or making, or, indeed, production). In exercising their imagination, the makers of documentaries are pursuing a transformative relation toward formulaic practices of documentary production.

For these creative practices to continue there has to be an object-to-come to be worked on, to be seen for its relationship with a final object where that object is, itself, constantly changing. During the weeks, months or years that a feature film is in the edit there is a seemingly perpetual cycling through, and over, of the audio-visual sequences that comprise the emerging film. The editorial cycle is not simply the repetitive work of french polishing a chair, it is the profoundly reasoned process of drawing the plans, cutting the wood and joining the parts. Then taking the chair apart and building it in a different style; then throwing the original legs away and turning a new set; then after a miserable week of arguing, deciding that it has to be a table. In each editorial cycle there are more or less complex progressions of planning, assembling, assessing, proposing, formulating and more. In circling through these interlinked and dependent practices the current assembly of the film is being related to in terms of what more it might need. In making sense of a proposal, for how any part of the film could be, its recipient will be required to imagine what this newly proposed cut or sequence or scene might be like in order to be able to accept or reject it.

**Editorial cycles**

Apart from being complained about by certain directors, editing is usually thought of as the overlooked and forgotten element of film production (Ondaatje, 2002; Vaughan, 1983). While many of us can name a number of film directors few of us can name even an Oscar-winning editor. This all the more curious because editing is the only aspect of film production that is distinctive to film when compared to the other performative arts. Alongside a wider unfamiliarity with editing there have also been relatively few studies of it by the social sciences. Recent work has begun to reveal what is involved in the live editing of talk and sports shows on television (Mathias Broth, 2008; M Broth, 2009; Perry, Engstrom, & Juhlin, 2010). As we have noted already, the exercise of imagination in these formulaic settings is less perspicuous than it is in the struggles to produce original works in the post-production of fiction and documentary. The length of time spent in the edit suite is one index of this: hours for the live compared to weeks (or more usually months) for the feature documentary. The workflow in live-editing departs from other forms of post-production because live-editing lacks the editorial cycle that we will examine in more detail below.

Howie Becker is one of the first sociologists to touch on the nature of editing in his study of the social worlds of artists (Becker, 1982).  Therein he explores the ‘editorial moment’ (Becker, 1982) p198 that involves artists making choices, amongst the tools and materials they have at hand, in order to add, remove, amend, revise and transform what they have created so far. Using mimeos of T S Eliot’s poems and Becker’s own contact sheets from his photography practice, Becker thinks about the editorial moment as an internal dialogue with absent others from the art world. One that can be recovered to some extent from the traces left on the mimeo and the annotations on the
contact sheets. What he reminds us of is that artists’ assessments and formulations (e.g. ‘it swings’ for jazz music) are frustratingly vague for the sociologist and yet felicitous for the artists involved. Indeed it is competence in the practice that provides for the reliable, appropriate and meaningful use of the assessments. While they remain open to disagreement from other practitioners, their application to this or that element of the artistic medium is understood. What Becker also alludes to, and we will return to later, is that the medium itself resolves the ambiguity of the assessment that is being provided of it.

What Becker called the ‘editorial moment’ is extended into the ‘editorial cycle’ by Clayman and Reisner (Clayman & Reisner, 1998) in their study of newspaper editorial meetings. Where Becker’s description of the editorial moment remained one of the individual in the studio, the newspaper editorial meetings bear a closer resemblance in their routine structurings to the editing of feature films. No longer an internal silent debate between the artist and the absent others of his art world, this is a talkative, institutional and potentially lengthy series of practices for establishing what will go into the newspaper and in what order by page, and on the page. On the basis of observing a number of such meetings in different newspaper office, Claymen & Reisner break the meeting into four stages:

1. preliminaries,
2. story review,
3. story selection,
4. aftermath

Managing editors have their department editors present their stories in summary one by one with reactions to each until they are complete and the next editor takes the floor. Clayman & Reisner (Clayman & Reisner, 1998) show how presenting the story is actually closer to “pitching” the story. The section editors have to promote their stories to get them to the front page and, equally, for what will head their individual sections. Even though they pitch for the front page they do this with a shared sense of what is newsworthy about any story (as distinct from the facts of the story itself) and thus it is not an unfettered bidding system. Instead what Clayman & Reisner make clear is that their pitches orient toward a norm of ‘mildly favourable assessments’ (p187) which can be offered without further account. When either stronger or negative assessments of a story being pitched they are done so ‘with justificatory accounts, markers of subjectivity and distinct forms of mitigation’ (p191).

Clayman & Reisner’s work is useful in providing a sequence of practices echoed in film editing and a sense of how any particular suggestions is tied into the evaluation of the story in question. Where the film editing workflow departs from newspaper editing is around how long and how many times each sequence of the film is put through the cycle. In examining how the director and editor look at a film, it departs from newspaper editing also through the medium itself. For the editor and director there are sometimes whole stories being dealt with but, as often, they are reviewing and selecting amongst much more varied qualities of the medium (e.g. quotes, clips, colour, transitions etc.) In other words the media that come together in making the film shape not only the final film itself but shape, even as they are being reshaped, by the very making of that final film. This is not to say that similar questions do not arise in newspaper editorials, they are missing from Clayman and Reisner’s study because as they note with some dismay in their article that with only audio recordings they miss ‘the photos, graphics, written story lists and other materials commonly introduced in such meetings’. p180.
Media for imagination

When treat imagination as an innate capacity of the individual, as many theorists of creative practice that draw upon neuroscience do, it becomes part of Ryle's 'ghost' in the machine. Even without the cognitivist's view of imagination as mental process it leaves a residual image of the person alone conjuring up what they might do to their garden, or the plot of their novel or what it might be like to prime minister and so on. While Ryle never quite set aside those quiet moments when, like a sunbather on the beach, we might try and imagine the documentary we would make, he constantly reminded us that we should be far more interested in those workplaces and studios stocked with materials for its exercise. Consequently we should attend to the fact that the director and editor are editing digital video (rather than digital photos or text), using Final Cut Pro, tacking screen grabs onto the editing room wall, talking around a large screen, are amidst nine months in the edit and so on. Then, we have a sense of place and of a medium that is worked upon in this place, like familiar image of the pottery with clay on a wheel or the architect's studio with its plans and models.

Taking up that last example, from a study of architectural studios, Murphy (K. Murphy, 2004; K. M. Murphy, 2005) provides a sustained critique of imagination as confined to a mental realm he offer us a definition of imagination built out of that critique:

It [imagination] is the ability to creatively and actively make talk, gestures, and objects stand in for things that are not immediately perceived, and in the processes treat them as if they were.” (K. M. Murphy, 2005) p118

Murphy shows how the reflexive relationship between plans and the project members' individual and shared imagination is made intersubjectively available. The obvious problem, posed by the building’s plan, is that it is flat. It thus requires the exercise of imagination to see project-relevant elements of the building—that-is-to-come, such as corridors, doors and stairs. What Murphy brings out are how architects and designers bring the plans to life for still more specific purposes. He also brings our attention to bear on the varied tasks for which the exercise of imagination is required: animating parts of the building (e.g. a sliding or swinging door), locating processes in in the larger operation of the building and developing the jobs it will produce and how they are done (e.g. who operates the large sliding door of a goods bay). Murphy makes it abundantly clear that working on and around the plan is a joint production between the three members of the project designing the new building. Features inscribed on the plan are made relevant through hands tracing movements along them, referring to them and more (Luck, 2010; Luff, Heath, Norrie, Signer, & Herdman, 2004). The building project team exercise their imagination in establishing what can be left as it is and what might require further amendment.

While Gustav Lymer’s recent research (Lymer, 2009, 2010) does not address imagination directly he is also concerned with how architectural plans are made sense of collaboratively. His work was based in educational settings where students are either trying complete architectural assignments or, the greater focus of his study, where their work is being assessed by their tutors and lecturers as critics. As with Murphy's work he helps us to understand the centrality of the media to the work of critique. Plans but also CAD software, digital slideshows and posters that have particular features made relevant in and through their presentation, review and assessment. The routines practices of the crit' (presentation, review and criticism) bear productive similarities with Clayman and Reisner’s studying of newspaper editing, though Lymer bring close attention to bear on how the visual
materials are assessed for their displays of the students’ developing architectural competence and imaginative reach.

The third body of work that is pertinent to this chapter is Monika Büscher’s (Büscher, 2001) doctoral research, again on architectural practice but this time landscape architecture. In her studies, while the plans remain central to the work, she captures how other media are brought into the exercise of imagination in seeing the landscape-to-come. In one of her examples two architects are laying out samples of paving blocks so that they can select amongst them for designing an urban square. Büscher points out that the language and gestures around the samples are vague and that it is the block in their comparable details of texture, colour, dimensions within the gestalt of the speech situation that provide the otherwise missing exactness. Quite how the bricks are to be appreciated is accomplished through, not only what is said about them, but also how they are “picked up, turned, held or placed to be compared with others or with pictures in the product information catalogues” (Büscher, 2001)p123. From, Murphy, Lymer and Büscher’s work we can then begin to draw how imagination is required to find in the current media of plans and samples, the building-yet-to-come and the potential for those media to provide resources central the joint exercise of imagination.

Given we have used three studies of architectural practice to help us realise the centrality of media, we have to remind ourselves briefly of what differentiates the media of film from that of the architectural plan and the block. Video is an animate and ‘sounded’ medium, that is, anyway, a bringing together of other media. An assembled video can combine, camera shots, text, graphics, animations, CGI, foley, voice-over, music, and more. Those multi-media aspects of video are of less relevance to our purposes here than that video is, for lack of a better phrase, play-able. As a play-able medium, video provides for a variety of actions; it can be cued, played, replayed, paused, looped, interrupted, scrubbed, rewound, moved through frame-by-frame. In and through playing further characteristics of video are realised: its duration, its sequencing and its lamination of multiple media. The centrality of montage to understanding editing that dominates the work of Deleuze (Deleuze, 1992, 2005) and others, emerges from the study of finished (for practical editorial purposes) films. That focus on the edit has eclipsed our understanding the practice of editing as the manipulation and configuration of playable media. Perhaps because the video is viewed after one touch of the play button, these qualities of video have been more apparent in studies of video data sessions (Dylan Tutt & Hindmarsh, 2011; D Tutt, Hindmarsh, Shaukat, & Fraser, 2007).

Three and sometimes five buttons are central to video’s manipulation, (on a keyboard they are usually ‘j, k & l’) and around these editors have quite a few more keyboard shortcuts at hand. The allow video to be played forward , backward , speeded up or and stopped . With the in mind, what we will borrow from the studies of Büscher, Lymer and Murphy mentioned above, then, are the resources provided by the materials themselves. How the detailed appearances of the bricks are central to securing proposals, assessments and suggestions and more, here, will become how the detailed appearances of any part of the emerging film secure and are secured by proposals, assessments and decisions about what to edit next. What we will also borrow from those previous studies is the understanding of the work that needs to be done around the plans and the posters for architects or the teacher to make available for architects or the student what might be wrong with it now and, indeed, to see what the building might become later. As it was with those studies, in film editing this animation and sound-

1 Noting though at the same time that architects themselves may draw upon video in their practice too as a research tool, in animations for modelling and presentation and indeed for projecting onto buildings.
tracking is unfinished. The film is still in construction and still being formulated. The animate medium requires animating in skilful ways by, and through, playing it, while then also, talking and gesturing in, around and over it. For conversation analysts there are intriguing parallels between how talk and video are both constructed sequentially and that indeed video editing utilises the sequential properties of talk in constructing its dialogue. For the media that we will watch as an assembled filmic object it has been built through editing: this goes after this, this is before this. When these two things (clip+clip) are paired, a relation is created for the viewer/hearer (Jayyusi, 1988). Moreover the assembling that is done in editing puts audio to picture, laminating one to the other. Later they will be watched and heard as a gestalt, however while in-the-making the gestalt can be broken into its parts to consider, as imaginative work, other possible assemblies.

Proposing the film-to-come

We have noted already the centrality of the proposal and its acceptance to imagining the film-to-come together. In conversation analysis, Davidson (Joyce Davidson, Bondi, & Smith, 2005) identified the socio-logical pairing between making a proposal (invitation, offer, request) and that proposal being accepted or rejected. In looking at friends, acquaintances and family making invitations she identified that the preferred outcome was acceptance. This gave rejections a distinctive shape in that they tended not be done immediately or prefaced in some way (e.g. ‘well I’d really like to come but’). The presence or absence of a delay in responding was also something that invitations might design for by using tag questions, or an elongated final component, ‘providing the inviter or offerer with a monitor space in which he or she can examine what happens or what does not happen there for its acceptance/rejection implicativeness.’ p117 (Judy Davidson, 1984)

Weak acceptances would also give rise to a fresh version of the invitation because they were heard as rejection-implicative. A key additional feature of the subsequent version brought out by Davidson was that they display a concern with making their invitation, offer or proposal better in some way. Her work was extended by Houtkoop-Streenstra (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 1987, 1990) by taking into consideration the placement of accounts-for-proposal before and after those proposals. When preceded by accounts, invitations, proposals and requests appeared to be more likely to be immediately accepted, because in this form they were also more demanding requests. Their pressure to accept was being signalled in the pre-request. Post-proposal accounts being more frequently used during, because also being constitutive of, more trivial requests. In a further classic study, Drew then dealt with how speakers rejected invitations, ‘instead of saying that they did not or are not going to do something, speakers commonly assert an inability to do it.’ (Drew, 1984) p129.

This early work on invitations, requests and proposals, when it has been taken up in institutional settings, has tended to be in medical settings in terms of requests for anti-biotics, health advice-giving and treatment proposals (Heritage & Sefi, 1992; Stivers, 2002) In editing the ‘treatment’, if you’ll pardon the pun, is directed toward the media rather than to a patient receiving the proposed treatment. What is more comparable for the editor and director are settings where there are two institutional members offering, rejecting and accepting proposals. Maynard’s studies of real estate agents and misdemeanours court trials (Maynard, 2010) do provide us comparable negotiation between peers. He delineates a set of responses (the snappily titled ‘defer, demur, deter’) arising in negotiation. His work provides us with a sense of how proposals can be met, not only with deferring, demurring and deterring but also with counter-proposals. The counter-proposal connects with the findings of Büscher’s studies of imagination-in-action though with the crucial difference that negotiations are between opposed parties from different teams. By contrast for Büscher’s landscape architects and here for the editor and directors as part of the same production team, with
a shared project, they are not trying ‘to develop the most advantageous positions they can relative to each other’ (Maynard, 2010) p140. Counter-proposals will still arise in discussions between members of the same time though as Büscher’s studies show there are as likely to be alternative proposals, new proposals, amended proposals, supplements to proposals and so on.

Of most direct relevance to this chapter in terms of the media and workplace, Broth (Mathias Broth, 2004, 2008) examines the ‘proposal’ acceptance sequence in live editing in television production. He shows how camera operators propose shots by swinging their camera, zooming and then bringing into stable focus a particular person during a live TV debate. These are inherently visual proposals because the camera operators remain silent throughout broadcast using only the movements and actions with the cameras to offer shots to the director. At some points there will be competition between camera operators though these features only tend to emerge in larger scale coverage of sports events (Perry, forthcoming). Live broadcast is cut once and it all happens within the timeslot of the programme (if we exclude the packages made in advance, during and afterwards) (Mathias Broth, 2008; Engstrom, Perry, Juhlin, & Broth, 2009). Live editing brings us close to the organisation of editing we find in feature films not least in the fact that editors will usually work in both fields, the equipment, media and workplaces are shared. What we might want to say is that it is the very exercise of imagination in editing that results in the nine months that the documentary, that we will examine in a moment, is in the editing suite. What takes that time is the patient review of clips, sequences, scenes, transitions and their assessment. The careful consideration of alternative clips, sequences, transitions, soundtracks, animations and more that might yet become the finished film. It is here then that we reconnect with Clayman and Reisner’s newspaper editorial cycle (though even that cycle seems like the life of a mayfly compared to the editorial life of the feature film).

A tiny note on methodology

For the editing practices that we will turn to in a moment, the media have grown ever more familiar to the editor and director. Relatedly, the cyclical nature of cutting means that there is a shared and evolving awareness of where we are now in the process of making the documentary. For the ethnographer (Laurier) studying the production this presented a number of challenges in following the work, though his training in film editing helped in terms of understanding what was happening. For the reader of this chapter coming to this nine month project from the outside it is all the harder to appreciate the intimacy with the footage, structure, argument, tone and more, of the film-to-come.

A further difficulty in analysing and presenting this material is in following the sequences of action that are being assembled in the documentary and the courses of action in, of and around which they provide resource and object of and for. For example, we have to understand the transition between scenes that the director and editor are reviewing and understand the reviewing of that transition as it unfolds. To help delimit the courses of action that we have to follow we will work through one revolution of the editorial cycle, from the review of a recently completed sequence to the agreement on what to do to this sequence next. This will then provide a more easily understandable description of editing practices while also offering a detailed description of how imagination is exercised in the editing suite.
1. Reviewing, interrupting and defending a sequence as a proposal

As a first remark about the typicality of what we will examine: by the far the majority of proposals of how any sequence should be cut were made by the director either through written instructions on Powerpoint slides or in the sorts of joint sessions in the editing suite we will examine here. As part of the organisation of the workplace almost all of the actual cuts are made by the editor. Yet while such a broad description gives us a sense of who makes initial proposals and who then transforms them into edited media, we do not have a firm grasp on how they are reviewed once they are completed and how new proposals emerge from the current sequence (that is in itself a form of proposal) for further revisions, additions, deletions and so on.

As we join them in their editing suite, the editor and director have been working for about six months editing the documentary. To put it very broadly the documentary is on the dangers of celebrity culture to the individuals that become celebrities, to journalism, to charitable work, to other members of society. The director and editor have collected and assembled most of the material for the film, though there are still several more months of editing ahead. During the morning of this particular day they have already had one preliminary discussions earlier in the morning about the day’s work ahead. After working for an hour or so separately, the director suggests they work on a transition into one of the documentary’s experts on the history of journalism and the rise of quotes in newspapers that are ‘made up’. In making his suggestion to work on this section the director expresses a concern that the current opening to this section of the documentary will ‘take us out of the thread of thought, which is: anonymous [newspaper] quotes are made up’. The editor has made an early defence of the opening of the new scene ‘it'll be very quick’. Because of equipment problems there is a gap of a couple of minutes before the editor is able to bring up the sequence for their review.

The editor and director only watch twenty four seconds of the footage before stopping to begin their assessment and review. This brief viewing takes us from a member of the paparazzi sitting in a van to an expert on journalism showing the director newspapers in his shed, it continues with the same expert sitting at his desk in his study, standing by the study door and finally, talking over a newspaper headline at which point the director interrupts with an ‘eh’:
A typical feature to note here is that the editor is playing back a sequence for the director that the editor has last worked on. Because it is his work the editor is actually sitting back sipping his tea waiting for the director to provide an assessment or intervene in some way. This is an abiding organisation of their workplace roles, the editor assembles and the director assesses those assemblies. Abiding, yet it is more complex in its accountability because the editor has made the changes proposed by the director and editor during their last review of the two sequences and their transition. Earlier proposals are also not of an owner-less nature and can often be attributed to one or the other parties. As our pre-transcript contextual remarks hinted, the current sequence has been one favoured by the editor while the director has already expressed his reservations over its existence in the current edit.

When the director intervenes in the playback with ‘eh’, to raise a critical assessment, this happens when a newspaper image is on screen (see frame 1 of fig 1). There is a delay of around three seconds before the editor pauses the playback. The editor’s initial response to the director’s ‘eh’ was to look across to the him. By continuing to orient toward the monitor as a response to the editor turning toward him, the director re-orients the editor toward the monitor. Rather than talking over the ongoing playback (Gehrhardt, 2008) the director is seeking for the sequence to be paused. When he does get the pause it is no longer adjacent to the part of the film he wanted to comment on, it is a shot of the newspaper expert at the door (see frame 3, fig 1). Moreover, as we learn later, even his initial ‘eh’ (frame 1, fig 1) did not match the clip he wished to talk about (being the shot of the shed (frame 4, fig 1)). Interruptions are thus made sense of in relation to what in the play-through has immediately preceded them as providing an initial cause for their interruption. Interruptions by the director are complicated by the fact that although the director verbally interrupts he is then reliant on the editor pausing the playback and thus completing his interruption for him. Once the interruption has been completed, the director then provides the account for his interruption in terms of a visual problem with the sequence.
With an interruption and a problem with the video launched by the director, we come upon an aspect of ‘playable’ media: when the video is paused all that is visible is the frame where the playhead currently lies (and the audio is silenced). To try and help understand the significance of this, a comparison with books or paintings is useful. If this were an editor and author editing a paragraph of a book then when the author interrupts their reading together the paragraph remains visible to them both and the author need only point with their finger or read aloud the beginning of the sentence to locate the area where he would like make an assessment (or similarly for paintings (Heath & vom Luhn, 2004)). In video and film it as if when the author and editor stop reading together the book disappears leaving only the last word they read visible. It is thus not surprising that the editor has to seek clarification ‘see what, what news’ (frame 3, fig 1) when the clip the director’s commenting on has been several shots back and inbetween there have been two further clips showing newspapers.

Having identified the clip in question the editor then brings it up and they re-watch it with the editor providing a capability question with a tag question pursuing it: ‘you can see lots of boxes can’t you’ (frame 4, fig 1). The question does more than inquire into the capacity of the director of course, it is a form of instructed-seeing, allowing the editor to then replay the clip having directed the director’s attention to the boxes:

![Fig 2: muffled](image)

Having played the clip that he is asking the director to accept, the editor only gets a non-committal wave of the head. It is not the full disagreement of a shake of the head nor though is it an agreeing nod. The editor continues with a second attempt to secure the acceptability of the opening clip by now directing the director’s attention to the dialogue ‘he says they’re newspapers’ (fig 2, frame 3). The director then provides a second, if also mitigated, negative assessment ‘a bit muffled’ (fig 2, frame 4). In fact this does double-duty because it is also accounting for the director not having heard what might have redeemed the clip (hence the ‘sorry’) and ‘muffled’ begins a shift toward technical problems with the sound.
The editor discounts the director’s negative assessment of the clip in terms of the sound. He does so with an ‘oh’ prefaced solution and a professionally meaningful action (Phillabaum, 2005). ‘Lift’ means being able to ‘lift’ the speech out of the surrounding background noise, thus making it less ‘muffled’ and whether such a thing is possible turns on an editor’s knowledge of the technical problem that leads to the audio problem. The ‘oh’ also serves to ‘involve the second speaker’s epistemic priority in the matter being assessed, these turns also involve some qualification or disagreement’ (Heritage, 2002)p204. This turns on the editor-director standardised-relational-pair, where the editor has ‘epistemic priority’ with reference to production jobs such as sound and colour correction. It also provides an agreement with the immediate problem of poor sound even as it forms part of the ongoing disagreement and defence of the walk-around section being reviewed.

Having defended the opening clip the editor can then replay it. On this playing of the clip, it is to be re-heard and re-assessed with the muffled audio to be accepted as to be ‘lifted’. Here there is some workplace divergence from how assessments are done in everyday settings (Heritage, 2002; Pomerantz, 1984) because the editor is providing the sequence for a third assessment. If we think about this in terms of a guest at a BBQ being asked to taste the barbecued chicken for a third time, setting aside its lack of spice because that can be fixed later. A situation that makes sense in the production of the chicken but not in eating it at the BBQ.

In replaying the clip the editor resets and equates their experience of the clip. This replay thus equalises their authority to judge by sharing their access to the experienced thing which is under assessment. The distinctiveness of the play-able media is, as we noted earlier, that they need to be played again for their re-experiencing (unlike paintings or paragraphs where they would require being looked at again or read again). The editor can provides what becomes, an assessment, built
upon, the instructed seeing and hearing of the replay, ‘it’s quite a nice…’ (fig 3, frame 4). The
director is nodding just as the editor gets to the assessment term showing that he is now coming
into alignment with the assessment of the clip’s qualities. By providing the assessment of his own
work the editor reverses the more common pattern where the director will provide a first assessment
of the sequence because, of course, he has not seen the latest edit while the editor has both seen it
and made it. What the director did still provide though was the first response to the play-through,
though it was one identifying a problem rather than providing an assessment.

The unfinished formulation -‘it’s quite a nice…’ - is another routine feature of editor-director
collaborations: to project a formulation and then pause their turn where the formulation should
come, leaving it to the director or editor. When sentence completing formulations are provided, and
they frequently come in latched to the previous turn, then they do they are a binding and
economical way of showing agreement (Silverman, 1997). Here by not providing a formulation the
director shows that, while not in a disagreement they are not yet on-board with the clip being
anything for the film. What they provide instead is a limited ‘okay’ acceptance with an
accompanying two-part nod. Its first part providing agreement in overlap with the editor’s turn and
the second faster nod being a mild upgrade on the assessment which further demonstrates
agreement.

![Fig 4 It'll be a](image)

Having failed to get a formulation from the director, the editor continues to show the clip (fig 4,
frames 1 & 2) this time talking and gesturing over it in order to re-shape how it is perceived by the
director. Having been on the defensive earlier, and pointed the director’s attention toward the
newspapers in the shed and the dialogue, the aspect of the video he emphasises this time is the
sequential one. Where the first clip is ‘just a few’, as the second clip comes up he sets up a contrast
‘and then it…’ where what is playing on screen, at just that time, is the expert’s desk awash with

![Image 52x225 to 544x511]
newspapers. As with Büscher's slabs, it is the media here that provides the details of what is visibly piles of newspapers contrasting with ‘just a few’ of the shed.

From examining the reviewing work that is done around the clip we begin then to get a sense of how the media is both providing the resource for and is yet is also configured through the director and editor’s actions. How on being shown by the editor to the director, the latter has first rights to interruption given they are then being position as its audience (much as on showing an article we have just re-written to our co-author they become its reader). Because the video is being played through we also saw how that interruption was made sense of through its timing in relation to where the video was currently at and then required work to re-establish where the director’s concern was. With the director’s concerns established we then followed through on how the editor sought to reshape the director’s reception of the opening sequence through technical solutions and emphasising qualities of the media that the director might have missed.

2. Proposing changes with, and to, the audio-visual media

In the previous section we briefly mapped out the assessments and responses to a newly edited sequence that is being reviewed by the director and editor. What that review establishes is then a local context that can be drawn upon for providing what, as we noted in the introduction, are then proposals, suggestions, ideas, instructions and more based upon the review, that become the ‘directions’ the editor will follow when they return to editing the sequence. To remind ourselves here, proposals have acceptance or rejection as their relevant response whereas assessment have agreement/disagreement as their relevant responses. This does not rule out agreement or disagreement occurring on the way to accepting or rejecting proposals (Judy Davidson, 1984) and as we saw the director and editor have only secured a passing agreement. In everyday conversation when invitations are not immediately accepted, subsequent versions are then provided. Here, we have the edited sequence itself forming the medium of the proposal for how the opening sequence should be. In classic conversation analysis studies of subsequent versions, they may add further ingredients, incentives, reasons for coming and so on.

Whoever does propose how the film might be edited here, then becomes the one that searches for acceptance from the other and equally the other one is then expected to provide that acceptance or rejection, though as Maynard showed there are other possibilities in deferring, demurring or deflecting. Direct or indeed directive proposals, like complaints, are seldom made in that fashion but are more likely and appropriately done as ‘suggestions’, ‘requests’, ‘musings’ (Wasson, 2000) or as is common in creative settings as formulations (Büscher, 2001). To return to what happens when a proposal is not immediately accepted, the initial proposal or suggestion is thus being treated as, either the source of some as yet to be revealed trouble for its recipient, or insufficient to be accepted by the other. What the second or third versions provide is a place for either belated acceptances or actual rejections. In editorial work (as with other creative studio practices) this elegant and economic method for dealing with one proposal is intertwined with the generation of further proposals that may undo, delete, revise or accept the current video assembly.

Reviewing the existing assembly of each section of the film is not neatly divided from working out what the editor should do with that assembly next, because suggestions and ideas can, and do, emerge in the midst of assessing (or before the assessing even begins). If we return to our actual editorial cycle now we can see how neatly a switch between the two occurs. If we recall, that with a go-ahead nod from the director, the editor had added the final sequential qualities by talking through the opening sequence (fig 4, frames 1 & 2). These then account for the editor’s completion
of the formulation that recycles the format of the editor’s previous uncompleted formulation: ‘I think it’ll be a really nice little intro’ (fig 4, frame 3). Again, it’s not completed by the director but it did have the director nodding in agreement. What the editor also did was to switch tense from the present to the future. The ‘it’ll be a really nice little intro’ presages a shift from reviewing to accepting the clip as an agreed part of the documentary-to-come. But the director has not yet provided either a strong agreement or indeed acceptance of what is now more clearly becoming a proposal to take forward. The editor does then offer further reasons for accepting the proposed opening sequence by shifting to the preceding scene to reconsider the opening section now only in relation to its internal sequential qualities but through analysing the closing of the preceding scene:

"Fig 5: his music will end"

At this mid-way stage in the editing process neither the closing nor opening sequence has music and the editor is thus asking them both to imagine a change in music between clips (fig 5, frame 1 & 2). They are imagining the underlining effect of hearing a quote after music ends and its appropriateness to clearly mark a transition sequence. Being able to imagine how that would be emerges from their long experience in production that has involved using just such shifts in background music. Because his hands are on the controls and as part of his skills in handling Final Cut Pro (the software editing package) the editor can artfully insert the earlier scene into his elaborated account. This is what he is doing when he goes from music over merely the still image of the paparazzo, brought up by shifting the playhead, to then quoting the paparazzo before he then plays that quote. A quote that is also after the music had ended because it would be just this way in the final edit. With only some of the media assembled, the director is being asked to hear its clarity after the imagined background of accompanying music. This elegant presentation is not so much what has been previously analysed as ‘reported speech’ (Clift & Holt, 2006) but rather directly re-quoted as part of formulating with actual materials for the purposes of building their imagining of what the final edit would be like (Büscher, 2001).
At this point we come upon another routine feature of editor and director agreements (in our study at least) the use of ‘yeah yeah yeah’ (fig 5, frame 2) by the director to accept a suggestion, proposal or idea from the editor. Waring’s (H. Z. Waring, 2009) preliminary studies of multiple yeahs in a classroom setting show how while they provide a powerful display of local agreement they also appear when a speaker’s prior assessment is being resisted by their co-participant. Multiple sayings in general (e.g. ‘wait wait wait’) are also used to form a stance that the other speaker has continued overly long and should really halt (Stivers, 2004). All three of these uses of ‘yeah yeah yeah’ could be in the air for this specific instance: the director is providing a strong display of local agreement, his negative assessment has been resisted by the editor and the editor’s proposal is already being treated as over-extended. However the editor is not quite finished with his elaboration of presenting the reasoning that supports the opening clip. With the audible qualities that provide an account for this proposal in place the editor slips in some further thoughts about the documentary-to-come here. This is established for the director through the editor gesturing toward the timeline on Final Cut Pro. The timeline standing for, by contrast with the monitor (displaying the image) the structure of the film. His division of the screens becomes still more apparent for us when he then follows this up by gesturing toward the monitor to provide a third recommendation for his proposal:

![Fig 6: that’ll work](image)

The final part and third part of securing the proposed opening is thus to leave the paparazzo’s image on screen after hearing his quote in the clear, when his music finishes (fig 6, frame 1). The parking of the playhead leaving the image as leaving this closing section for consideration by the director. There are hints here of a lack of acceptance by the director as he shifts stance, leaning back from the monitor (Goodwin, 2007). The editor meanwhile has gone off on his own, furnishing the approval for his proposal ‘that’ll work’ (fig 6, frame 2). It is not quite such a blunt remark though since the assessment of the proposal is softened with ‘I think’ and the criteria are as to whether it will ‘work’ (versus won’t work) rather than whether it is good or not. It is followed up by turning
away from the screen toward the director and thus marking the end of his proposal while also looking toward the director to examine what his stance might be on the work. To that end he finds the director sitting back in his chair.

There has been an elongated inserted examination of the closing of the previous scene here because if we recall how this began, the editor was launching his proposals for the end of the pap section on the basis on accounting for the shed and boxes clips opening the next scene. The director targets that original clip with a conditional ‘if-then’ acceptance on the basis of the earliest suggested technical fix. A fix that is an editing job. The ‘if-then’ is around the audio not the opening clip’s sequential and transitional relationship internally nor with the previous scene. The editor accepts the condition and then attempts to bring their attention back toward the uncompleted proposals he has ended up making over how the paparazzo clip can be transition from (fig. 7 frame-1-4). The crucial difference here is that the media in its current form is no longer the focus but rather the editor has shifted toward proposing what could be done to the closing sequence of the previous scene. The editor marks this shift ‘I mean we could even’ before he proposes another editing device - fade to black - that he also provides an account for, in terms of indicating a temporal shift. The lowering curve of his intonation further emphasizing the tentative nature of his conclusion and also providing a response for confirmation from the director. This he gets in the clipped form of ‘yep yep’ that does seem to do some pacing work in terms then of hinting that the editor’s proposal might have gone on too long. However it is launched late when the editor has used the extended ‘day:::’ as a ‘monitor space’ (Judy Davidson, 1984) for acceptance from the director.

Fig 7 - Leave him

In the ongoing environment of only mild local agreements and potential hurrying along, the editor holds onto his position of the proposer by firstly, going for the controls and, secondly, replaying the a tiny part of the section that closes the paparazzo, where the fade to black would actually be, to thereby offer one further proposal. This time suggesting as an alternative to the fade-to-black (fig 7,
frame 3) that the paparazzo is left in his van. These brief bursts of playing of those section ground
the two of them back in the ending of this sequence. The editor’s finely timed gestures across Final
Cut Pro again animate this section and help visualise his proposal. ‘Leave’ gesturing towards the
timeline and, thus, the overall structure of the film and then, on the very next word, gesturing
toward the monitor to orient them both toward the visual. If we recall his earlier proposal we can
see that the gestures here have the same pattern though this time there is no musical aspect to how
the clip will end. The editor is still outlining possibilities around how this sequence might finish
when the director then makes what seems to be request ‘could we go back to the quotes’ (fig 7,
frame 4) but might also be a counter-proposal. If we add a little more of the hearable emphasis:
‘Could we GO- could we go BACK to the- the quotes’. What this request does seem to be doing
is requesting that the editor located and bring-up (see similar work between surgeon and camera
operator in (Mondada, 2003)). In hearing this phrase the editor does indeed search and then display
the quotes.

Fig 8 ‘extra emphasis’

Once again it is the on-screen presence of the quotes that secures them now as another possible
element of the transition added to the growing collection amongst which the editor and director
will eventually have to select. We see the reversal of roles between editor and director now of how
the proposing is collaboratively achieved. Certain actions cannot be switched however: it is the
editor that brings up clips to the screen, in this case to provide a resource for the director to make
his proposal. Before the quotes appear on screen the director provides a first account of his proposal
- ‘to give it extra emphasis’ (fig 8, frame 1). Once the image is visible to them both he provides the
dialogue ‘an onlooker said’ (fig 8, frame 2) and then he goes on to gesture over the image of the
newspaper text that also has that classic ‘an onlooker said’ justification of a quote in it. Rather
though than picking out any of the details of the text, the director is beginning to provide a further
proposal visually with his hands motioning across the text – animating the static text. His talk providing the sense of the gestures ‘just go in’ & ‘go back and go in’.

What happens is next is that there is an almost orchestra conductor-like raising of the hands by the director which the editor provides the orchestral response to, of rolling from the newspaper clip to Kev’s quote:

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**Fig. 9 then go to James**

The director’s unfinished formulation ‘as though that’s our’ (fig 9, frame 3) is left unfinished by the editor. Instead the editor rubs his chin (doing ‘thinking’ (Streeck, 2009)) while the clip plays through the short section of Kev the paparazzo. What we can note is that the newspaper clip has been played out of sequence here and both are imagining it as following and perhaps appear as Kev says ‘there some quotes from somewhere’ (fig 9, frame 4).

When the editor replays the clip this time though it is not slotted in to illustrate and enhance a proposal he is making but rather for him to re-inspect the clip. Having considered the newspaper text again he provides a definite negative assessment of the visual qualities of the newspaper text as a filmic object (fig 10, frame 1). Visual qualities being one of abiding concerns of both the editing process and thus primarily the editor (Murch, 2001; Reisz & Millar, 1968). The director’s proposal is not getting a straightforward rejection then editor does then providing a question ‘how will we’ (fig 10, frame 2). The director has previously provided a solution but the editor then is thus pursuing more detail and does not provide a quick editorial animation solution.
The editor repeats his question around what could be done, perhaps withdrawing further from being the agent that could provide the solution as an editor from ‘how will we’ to ‘how’s that going to be treated’. This ‘we’ also orienting to the larger team they work with, where there also animators and other forms of expertise available. A widening of the search for a solution is presaged by the director having said ‘we could do something, not now’ several turns earlier.

In shifting from reviewing to proposing we have seen how, echoing Büscher’s (Büscher, 2001) studies of architects, a flurry of formulations arise as the filmmakers compare amongst alternative possibilities for what the documentary will become. The current opening clip of the shed preceded by a fade-to-black, or by a long shot of the paparazzo’s van, or by an animation of newspaper text. These do not sit as three completely separate options in that various aspects of what might be done may be shared such as ending the music as one scene ends. Central to our interest here is how the editor and director use the media to present their proposals and indeed how their orientation is shifting between dialogue and picture, and their combination. The editor playing the paparazzo speaking just before he then quotes his lines, using his paused image of the paparazzo exhaling cigarette smoke for its quality as an image to fade-to-black from, using the timeline to index the overall structure of the section. For his part the director with only indirect access to the media via the editor, again voicing for the paparazzo and then using gesture to animate a static image.

3. Formulations as acceptances and providing future editorial tasks

Houtkoop (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 1987; H. Waring, 2007) breaks acceptance into two sequential elements, firstly confirmation of the proposal and, secondly, what will or can be done to accomplish the proposal. As we have argued earlier in the article the proposal-acceptance conditions in the editing suite are in some ways distinct from the friend-friend, mother-daughter etc. relationships of
earlier proposal-acceptances studies, or those of either advice-giving, medical treatments or bargaining or even live-editing. In the long project of editing a feature film together, the sequences will be revisited, removed, adapted, built-upon and more. In the workplace relationship of director-editor, it is the editor that will then act upon this proposal, moreover they have the epistemic authority in establishing what can be done to accomplish it.

From the extended series of proposals offered by the editor and director an environment for rejection and acceptance are now pressing upon them. As ever, the ongoing requirement of video as a media for having it jointly attended to is that the editor has to play it through (fig 10, frame 3). Playing the whole transition through does more though, it works locally to re-establish the sequential context of the documentary and then their joint examination of the entire transition in relation to which the pre-existing proposals can be imagined in relation to the longer sequence of the transition. In running through the transition from beginning to end the editor is doing a visual pre-acceptance playback. In other words, the editor is using the playthrough to make an acceptance of one of the proposals relevant.

What we are then seeing is the local realisation of the director providing a last word (for the time being). In this case 'no no no' (fig 10, frame 4) is used to interrupt the playthrough, reject the director’s previous proposal and begin the closing of this review cycle. The interruption at just that point also secures what part of the transition they are dealing with - the end of the previous scene rather than the opening clip of the next scene that was where they started their reviewing work. What also arrives here which does the work of making this the 'last word' is a clear formulation of what both proposals were. The first was going through the cutting and the second is 'saying goodbye to Kev' (the paparazzo). Indeed the formulations precede the editorial directions (fade-to-black) which is in tune with formatting proposals with preceding accounts when acceptance is preferred (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 1990).
The format for acceptance in fig 11 is to put it briefly:

1. accept through comparison
2. editorial action selected (which is also directions for the editor)
3. extended justification of accepted clip
4. acceptance repeat

At the end of each part the editor provides ‘yeah’ agreement tokens. The director softens the authority here with ‘I think’. The director provides the comparative assessment of the two proposals formulated as ‘through the cutting’ versus ‘goodbye to Kev’ and he then recycles the editor’s first suggestion of how that can be done: “fade to black.” In fact the director’s formulation of ‘saying goodbye to Kev’ allows for two editing techniques: fade to black or a long-shot of the van and it is that latter possibility that the editor now brings back as one of the techniques by which the proposal can be accomplished. Around how it’s done the director continues to accept that alternative editorial solution, and in an upgraded, closing assessment ‘absolutely’.

What we can see here is the Editor is being left with considerable discretion in his instructions over how to edit the transition for their next review. That the ‘instructions’ are thus ones that he has had considerable agency in proposing and of course that a further review later in the day will be needed in deciding whether a fade to black or wide shot of van works. These editorial cycles take on a different character when the documentary is close to completion several months but here each cycle’s acceptance stands for the next cycle and is then open to further revision. In the released version of the documentary the opening clip of the shed has disappeared, as has the expert that opened this section (he is replaced by a different expert) and the newspaper text has returned to become an animated transition that highlights ‘an onlooker said’.

**Unfinished things**

It is an abiding characteristic of work on any feature documentary or fiction film that each and every section is revisited dozens if not hundreds of times over. From the final object, the completed documentary, we cannot recover the work that we have witnessed here. The lived work of its production is only partially visible to the theorist who reviews the final work with an orientation to the editing. This is not to say that it should be, even though many of the alternative sequences, transitions, dialogue to picture that are considered would be of interest to film theorists. It is for those with an interest in skill, work, practice and collaboration that the actual practices of editing are of interest. It is the material required for understanding, to adapt of a phrase of Eric Livingstone’s (Livingston, 1999) ‘cultures of editing’.

Familiar conversational logics of assessments, proposals paired with acceptance or rejection, take on a different inflection in the institutional setting of film production. They are not pattern of the proposals made by say one friend to another, or one family member and because a relationship of that nature is not at stake (Greiffenhagen & Watson, 2009). During any working day in the editing the project moves forward through the ongoing use of these assessments and proposals. They are not quite the competing proposals that we find in newspaper editorials (Clayman & Reisner, 1998) nor real estate deals (Maynard, 2010), indeed as we noted earlier they are done as incomplete formulations and they are imagined from the details of the media made available and relevant
through their playing, interrupting, pausing, freeze-framing and more. The skilled professionals here find what video is required to make whatever they are doing now, possible.

We have come a long way from imagination as a mental process that is only indirectly accessible and is indeed the same process nested in each individual creative brain. We have instead found a place for its exercise. In finding a place where we can follow its practices we have thus also avoided a second trap that has arisen in adopting the mirror image of the ‘imaginary’ as a more or less unconscious collective construction in the outer world (Ingold, 2011). Instead we have investigated its ongoing exercise in the activities of assembling a documentary film. The editorial imagination examines the media that constitute the documentary for their representational qualities, for what any part (or sometimes the whole) is missing, what ought not to be there and what alternatives there are (Raffel, 2004). In exercising their imagination the director and editor might be taking one thing away in an early edit and then later bringing it back (Laurier & Brown, 2011). They are ongoingly assembling, disassembling and re-assembling the sequences and layers of the film in working toward the film-to-come. Through all of this we come upon the centrality of the media, and Gustav Lymer provide a lovely phrasing for this, that the filmmakers in their editing suite have ‘an attunement to certain material arrangements’ (Lymer, 2010) p121-22. In trying to understand imagination at work we come upon a host of unfamiliar and unfinished things that in turn require our imagination to be exercised to also become aware of what and how they might become another of the finished films that circulate in the world.
References


