

## Notes on Editing by Mia Engberg

The editing was done in several phases over the course of four years. To get an overview, I extracted stills from the filmed material and collected them on a big whiteboard. I put small, color coded slips of paper under the pictures to represent the audible voices. The dark blue slips stood for my Swedish narration, which framed the story and positioned it in time. The dialogues between the main character and the narrator were a light blue shade. Music was marked with red which contrasted strongly with the other colors. In this way it was possible to see the frequency of music in the film and whether it was threatening to dominate the voices or other audio. Dialogue between the main characters was pink. Diana's monologues were orange. There was just one word on each slip of paper, the title of the scene or the theme – for example Airport, Red Shoes or Morning.

Now I could see the film's dramaturgy in front of me like a map, at the web of voices, music and pictures and see their graphic relationships to one another. I often stood in front of the whiteboard without thinking anything. I just saw the different colors as pattern and rhythm.

I edited with headphones and concentrated on the musicality. Since none of the dialogue was visible on the screen, I could edit each voice with no limitations, achieving a precisely balanced rhythm in every scene. I cut some readings into hundreds of pieces, and a single sentence might be made up of words from multiple takes. The important thing was the exact amount of silence. Between every word. Between every scene.

The first editing periods were effortless and the work progressed without resistance, but the more scenes that I finished, the more laborious shaping the huge body of material became. The closer the work drew to being finished, greater became the consequences of each and every aesthetic choice. The editing grew ever slower. It felt as though I was trying to invent a new genre, and that I had no rules to hold on to in the process. It was hard, by far the hardest film I've made. I was torn between wanting to conduct my experiment and being afraid that no one would understand it.

When the fear of failure or the will to please grows too large and I stand in my own way with conventional thinking or cowardly actions, I usually say to myself: *It doesn't need to be good, it only needs to be finished. The only important thing is that you carry out your idea.*

After many months of editing I realized that my energy and ideas were not sufficient to finish the film. I invited young filmmaker Neil Wigardt into the process.. Primarily a director, he had a strong sense of rhythm and form. He also had a lot of ideas of his own and was a naturally positive thinker. When I suggested something he would reply – Nice! That will be nice! I wasn't always sure what that meant, but our collaboration was productive and moved the project forward.

We worked with detail and rhythm. Images were moved slightly forward or backward, dialogues were micro lengthened and/or shortened, tiny adjustments were made to the music. We got to the point where we had smoothed out the details

so much that the film had lost its dynamic; then we had to return some of the rough edges we had smoothed away. Up until the very last minute I was writing and recording voice-overs so that the narrator's voice would be balanced with the dialogue.

The greatest challenge were the images accompanying the dialogues between father and daughter. They were recorded in a "naturalistic" way, in real settings, and they had originally been written to be shown on screen. It was difficult to create a dynamic between the visual and the audio when the characters weren't represented in the images. Diana's monologues, my narrative voice and Vincent and Mia's phone call were all voice-overs; that is, voices that were written to be off-screen, so it was easier to connect them with images. Not seeing the narrator is a cinema convention, as is not necessarily seeing the person whose inner monologue we're hearing. However Vincent and Adina's dialogues were written as conventional "scenes" that take place between two people, and it was hard to find a visual language that didn't feel static, that didn't give a sense that there was something missing. Perhaps it was original, but it was somehow not dynamic.

Perhaps the editing process was long and complicated because there were too many different ideas for one film? The film would have probably benefitted from concentrating on certain techniques – for example the narrator's relationship to the audience – and abridging others – for example the lengthy dialogues between father and daughter. Nevertheless we chose to carry out the idea as it had originally been conceived, with all of the different narrative levels present, compressed like a sweater that was knitted a little too tightly. The result can perhaps be described as a film that is at once empty and dense.

Sometimes the situation felt absurd and claustrophobic. We sat holed up in the editing room for weeks on end, and on some days it was hard to tell if we were moving forward or backward. I think Neil thought that I was a perfectionist, obsessed with miniscule details to do with color and audio transitions, but I couldn't give up before the film was complete.

And then one day it was.

Not because I was certain that it was "good," but because it was finished.

There was nothing more that could be done.

*I longed for silence. I did my best.*

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