Creating character in editing

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This article focuses on methods by which editors shape character in editing. Given that editors' choices of shot, take, and timing augment and vary actors' performances and directors' instructions, and that these choices shape the audience perception of film characters, we ask: what components of editors' expertise are activated in shaping material to create characters that viewers can invest in emotionally? Editors' expertise is generally referred to as 'intuitive', which is a shorthand for knowledge and experience that informs decision making at a pre-conscious level. This article argues that 'intuitive' is not incorrect, however, drawing on the authors' extensive editing practice and building on existing editing theory as well as ideas from science and film studies, we seek more specific identification and articulation of editors' expertise. This article offers an original editing taxonomy in relation to editing character. The taxonomy includes explicit articulations of kinaesthetic empathy and implicit knowledge such as: laws of physics, reflex reactions, and cultural conditioning. Awareness of these pervasive but often unrecognised forms of knowledge, we argue, can enhance editors' ability to develop multifaceted characters through editing, clarify discussions between collaborators, and even enhance understanding of the art of editing more generally.

Keywords: film editing, editors, filmmaking, character, intuition, collaboration, implicit knowledge, expertise

Introduction

I began editing my first feature documentary in 2000. It was a portrait of Swedish choreographer Per Jonsson (Lindström 2003) who had died a couple of years earlier and who I had met briefly but didn't know. The film was created from archival material of him; video footage, tv and radio interviews, still images; and from interviews with people who knew him, as well as documentations of his choreographic work. The challenge was to shape the perception of him from the material at hand, create a character that was complex yet whole and whose story was relevant beyond the specifics of him, who invited emotional investment from a larger audience while being recognisable to the people who knew him. To navigate the material and the myriad of editing choices, I relied on my intuition about what was important and what details would depict the real person. When what I edited didn't 'feel right' or 'like him' to the director and interviewees who knew him, they often couldn't describe how or why, leading to frustrating conversations. We had no good tools for distilling what details and (editing) choices had what effect on the cinematic creation of his character. (Kersti Grunditz Brennan, 2022)

A lack of shared vocabulary and explicit methods has continued to cause creative roadblocks in edit rooms through the careers of both authors of this article and similar issues are frequent in conversations with editing colleagues: we know from experience how choices of shot, take, and timing augment and vary actors' performances and directors' instructions, as well as documentary situations and behaviours, and how significantly that shapes the audience perception of the film's characters, but how is it actually done? Editor Margareta Lagerquist (SFK) refers to this as 'an operation of dialling the temperature of the acting up and down'. Her gauging 'the temperature of acting' is an unspoken aspect of her artistic sensibility, part of a process often attributed to intuition. Gauging authenticity levels in people 'being themselves' is another editor skill often labelled intuitive. However, attributing this expertise solely to 'intuition' makes it difficult to talk about, to use for problem solving in editing situations, and to teach the shaping of characters beyond craft skills like keeping continuity and emphasizing a certain perspective. If this 'intuitive' expertise stays unarticulated, it may also inadvertently reenforce norms and stereotypes.

This article proposes a method for character creation in editing, built on articulation of relevant editing challenges. The core of the method is the linking of outer manifestations (what is seen and heard in the film) with the inner life of the character (feelings, motivations, intentions). The method is an attempt to expand the tangibility and visibility of those links by recognising how the character's perceived predicament in the physical world and their relation and reactions to it can offer pathways to understanding what is going on in their minds. The method is not dealing with editing on the level of creating the story, but on the level of creating (audience) impressions of the story's characters by exclusion, inclusion and ordering of footage and parts of footage.

The article begins with a brief clarification of what we mean by 'intuition' and 'character'. From there we provide an extended taxonomy of the kinds of knowledge, insight, and responsive creativity editors activate in the process of shaping character. This taxonomy has largely been devised by first author Kersti Grunditz Brennan through her work as an editor, a lecturer in editing, and a PhD candidate under the supervision of Dr. Karen Pearlman. Drawing on Pearlman's work on editors' cognition (Pearlman 2013, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019; Pearlman, MacKay, and Sutton 2018; Pearlman and Sutton 2022), one of the aims of Grunditz Brennan's thesis is to refine and augment knowledge of how to train editors and enhance their expertise around the specific and often sought operations of creating character. In this article, Grunditz Brennan writes in the first person about her experiences and the insights and vocabularies she has developed, and we make use of the third person voice to generalise this knowledge and the thinking and writing we have done together.

For example, Grunditz Brennan writes: The practical application of this method has been honed through my years of editing, most recently several different films from the vast footage created for the artistic research project BLOD (Boholm and Grunditz Brennan 2020), co-created with Annika Boholm. In this article, the BLOD project will occasionally illustrate aspects of the proposed method.

INTUITION

Editors often describe their decision-making processes with variations on the word ‘intuitive’. For example, a post in the popular film industry blog 'Art of the Cut' notes: ‘Sometimes people that I want to interview tell me that they really don’t have anything to say because it’s just intuitive’ (Hullfish 2018). (See also interviews in (McGrath 2001; Oldham 1992, 2012). To say that editing expertise feels intuitive is not incorrect, but the word ‘intuitive’ draws a veil over knowledge about expertise. It circumvents observation, investigation and teachability of editors’ complex forms of creative and intellectual work.

Editors, like many other experts, prefer not to investigate the sources and development of their creative decision making too closely. ‘Practitioners …sometimes give the mind –cognition –bad press, fearing that too much thought may disrupt well-grooved actions, or interfere with the body’s smooth, instinctive responses’ (Sutton and Bicknell 2022). In other words, there is trepidation that the rapid deployment of expert judgment, emotional acuity, and sensory perception that goes into the making of cuts is incompatible with the deliberateness that is required to observe it in action.

This is accurate inasmuch as observation and articulation of the complex cocktail of embodied, embedded, enactive, culturally assimilated, implicitly developed, and explicitly trained cognitive processes that go into expert editing is the work of many articles and books, including several on which this article is building. However, while we acknowledge that many aspects of an editor’s expertise do not generally require explicit or conscious consideration while actually editing, especially if everything is going well and everyone understands each other perfectly, we propose that explicitly identifying these forms of expertise has many benefits.

We focus here on the benefits to the process of creating character. Shared vocabularies for identifying the ways decisions about character are being made can be very useful in creating a shared understanding in the collaborative process. Further, explicit knowledge of the components we group together under the umbrella of ‘intuition’ are useful for teaching the shaping of character in editing. Understanding one’s own ways of thinking can also enhance editors’ skills and help them avoid falling into habit or cliché. Finally, we propose that recognition of the kinds of knowledge and expertise editors are employing in the shaping of character can enhance understanding of the art of editing itself.

We turn now to discussion of character and the experiences with editing through which Grunditz Brennan developed her expertise in shaping it.

CHARACTER

Through my years of editing creative documentaries, character driven documentaries and investigative ones, I've recognized that character making always has a level of *fictionalization* and the character on screen is only partially linked to the person in front of the camera. Cinema direct filmmakers Albert Maysles and Fredrick Wiseman consider any editing a fictionalization (Plantinga 1997), which is in line with Ilona Hongisto's claim that 'fabulation' is what 'occupies the space in between people who tell stories and the documentary camera that observes…' (Hongisto 2015, 67). I also find that Jens Eder's distinction between fiction characters and real persons applies to documentary characters who, even when recorded in spontaneous interactions, are perceived only in their mediated forms:

> *Our perception of characters is different from the perception of real persons. When we are watching films, we activate media knowledge and communication rules…. The symbolism and the communicative mediation of characters mark fundamental differences to the observation of persons in reality. (Eder 2010, 23)*

For an editor dealing with any character, the key issues are: how to engage with them, understand them, and do them justice. When making them compelling in the story, ethical dilemmas may arise that are different when the person in front of the camera is a professional actor performing a role or a social actor portraying herself. However, this article will argue that regardless of performance-type in front of the camera, the editing processes that significantly shape their mediated form as film characters functioning within the boundaries of the story being told, are similar. Therefore, it will rarely distinguish between documentary and fiction in the following discussion of creating character.

A taxonomy of editors' sources of expertise in shaping character

Grunditz Brennan: 'The problems we faced in 'Per Jonsson' highlighted the need for communication in the editing process about *what* to do and more importantly *how* to do it.'

Speaking to what a documentary editor does, Pearlman proposes 'a framework that maps cognitive processes common to all documentary editing; watching, sorting, remembering, selecting and composing.' (Pearlman 2018, 308) The authors find this applies equally to fiction editing and that the processes of watching, sorting, remembering, selecting, and composing are a recurring loop through the creative editing phase of a film project. This description of *what* an editor does is our starting point for discussing *how* that is done. Thus, we limit our scope to the creation of character, but understand this work within the general knowledge and skills at work in the cognitive processes of editing.

The method is structured around a taxonomy Grunditz Brennan has developed as a model for articulation of editors' sources of expertise. This taxonomy consists of four different groupings with three main subgroupings each:

1. Filmmaker tools	1.1 Performer tools	1.2 Footage creator tools	1.3 Editor tools
2. Interacting with the material	2.1 Explicit analysis	2.2 Kinaesthetic empathy	2.3 Implicit knowledge
3. Basis for interpretation	3.1 Classical mechanics Laws of physics	3.2 Reflex reactions	3.3 Cultural conditioning
4. Responding from a cinematic position	4.1 Character	4.2 Filmmaker	4.3 Viewer

Many aspects of 1. *Filmmaker tools*, and 2. *Interacting with the material,* have been articulated before and by others. As part of this proposed method, we therefore include only a brief overview of what is relevant to articulate for this context. The focus of the article is on 3. *Bases for interpretation,* and 4. *Responding from a cinematic position* as these are conceptual contributions Grunditz Brennan has developed through her professional practice, research, and teaching.

FILMMAKER TOOLS

1. Filmmaker tools	1.1 Performer tools	1.2 Footage creator tools	1.3 Editor tools
2. Interacting with the material	2.1 Explicit analysis	2.2 Kinaesthetic empathy	2.3 Implicit knowledge
3. Basis for interpretation	3.1 Classical mechanics Laws of physics	3.2 Reflex reactions	3.3 Cultural conditioning
4. Responding from a cinematic position	4.1 Character	4.2 Filmmaker	4.3 Viewer

Many aspects of 1. *Filmmaker tools,* and 2. Interacting with the material, have been Creative techniques or Filmmaker tools are generally acquired in film schools or through industry apprenticeships and experience. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive taxonomy of these culturally and industrially embedded skills. However, they are important to acknowledge as they form a layer of what practitioners come to think of as intuitive. As such, they have a substantive role in the shaping of character.

Performer tools and *Footage creator tools* are names for the range of filmmaking techniques, artistic practices and decisions that precede the editing and leave imprints on the footage material an editor has to work with. These imprints are intrinsic to watching, sorting, remembering, selecting, and composing to create the characters. *Editor tools* are the operations that are congruent with these two toolkits. They are the principles of shot selection and arrangement that respond to the techniques and conventions of imprinting performance in image and sound.

1.1 Performer tools

Creation of a character who invites emotional investment is often misguidedly only attributed to the performer's ability to convey an inner life:

> *In fiction, a great performance is a collaboration ... Without the director and cameraperson doing their work, the actor has no stage; without the editor, the actor has no boundaries. Shaping a performance in the edit room is crucial to the success of that performance, and that might be even truer with nonfiction. (Greene 2015)*

Whether building a character from a person 'being themselves' or an actor's craft, the performance in front of the camera is often evaluated in terms of 'good acting', 'believable character', or 'this feels authentic'. To more fully consider the integrity of the performance however requires further qualification; 'good in relation to what', 'believable to whom', and 'authentic to where and when'; which can be articulated using vocabulary of performance style; traits of cinematic traditions, modes of documentary (Nichols 2010), or genre conventions; and acting methods; Method acting's actions and beats (Stanislavski 2013; Weston 2014), Meyerhold's biomechanics of preparation, action, and rest (Pearlman 2016, 120), highlighting inner conflicts between the character's want, need, and key flaw (Eder 2010, 30), or understanding acting beyond characters' performing of gestures (to illustrate an idea or convey feelings) if the actor moves with intention (Orpen 2003, 109). In the BLOD project, the two people who played all the 30+ parts used a dancer's approach to performance: not considering the character's inner motives but learning and performing movement patterns and then responding to those actions as 'themselves'.

In fiction film, an actor's 'real person' is always part of their fictional character. The actor's face, body, rhythms, and responses become entwined with their portrayal of a fictional person. This absorption of fiction into an actual body begins the process of creating what we perceive as authenticity in character. Similarly, though a different performance process, any mediation fictionalizes the real person to some extent. For example, the camera captures images and rhythms of the real person from angles that convey some qualities and occlude others. The editor makes selections from those qualities that strengthen or emphasise some aspects of the real person and obscure others, thus completing the work of mediating a real person and presenting them as a character. The onscreen manifestation of this character is a result of the thoughtful entanglement between the performer's processes and those of the editor.

1.2 Footage creator tools

Outer manifestations of a film character are what she says and does, in what order, and what she and her environment look like – visual clues to the character's social context and to the film style: naturalistic, surrealistic, belonging to 'genre', 'documentary mode', etc. In a finished film these outer manifestations of character are the combined result of editing and the cinematic artistic practices imprinted in the footage – the script, directing, production design, staging and documentary situation, cinematography, and performance.

Circumstances, actions, and camera frame the performance in fiction and documentary. Editing shapes it by considering both the content of the image, and the narrative function of the image composition – shot size, camera position and camera mechanics. As often described in books on film form and shot composition (see for example (Van Sijll 2005)), the function of shot sizes is broadly: wide shots convey spatial and situational orientation; medium shots convey character actions; medium close ups convey communication; and close ups convey emotion. The camera position relative to place (actual or fictional) and character movements creates depth perspective and scale and will indicate general perspective: omnipresent, character point of view, or subjective filmmaker. As will be discussed below, an important aspect of the method described herein is articulating these things during the editing process. As Grunditz Brennan notes: 'When editing to create character I make sure to articulate my evaluation of footage based on clues to where the character is, what they do, what they hear and say, and what they feel but also who is watching, and from what perspective.'

In this taxonomy of editors' methods for shaping character, the significance of *Footage creator tools* to the perceptions and understanding of character lies in the artful imprinting of these outer manifestations. The *Footage creator tools* generate what is in the material that can be selected and composed to become what is seen and heard in documentary and fiction films.

1.3 Editor tools

Editors can turn captured behaviour into very different characters, make someone 'long-winded or witty, solipsistic or generous, like a bad listener or … a patient friend' (Greene 2015). Using *Editor tools* on footage, whether editing documentary or fiction, editors shape the character through amount of screen-time, and what we let them do over the course of the film. In the following brief discussion of *Editor tools*, we articulate some basic principles of editing that are relevant to more complex considerations in later sections.

Editors shape perceptions of characters by choosing sections from different takes; mixing shot sizes and angles; repeating or deleting movements, looks and postures; and extending or shortening pauses. By using editing rules (Reisz 2017, 181-188) developed in practice dating back to silent film: Point-of-view (or shot-reverse shot) editing and smooth continuity of action (in time and space) across cuts, editors establish links between a character's inner life and her actions and

relation to spaces, situations, and other characters. We apply editing principles of montage (Eisenstein 1949) to hint at what's going on in the mind of the character, alluding to past events or what they hear and see by the implied meaning that comes from juxtaposing any grouping of shots (Dancyger 2002, 369).

Physical, emotional, and event rhythm are key concerns of the editing (Pearlman 2016). Editors articulate these changes over time as sequences of anticipation met or thwarted, built from narrative logic or pre-understanding of character conditions but also from establishing patterns that speak to character behaviour based on repetition. An example of shaping a character with a temporal pattern from projects Grunditz Brennan has worked on would be: 'if a character rarely hesitates, I can trim a performance so that the character always makes an immediate start. I could then insert a pause before an action to imply they are faced with something unusual. Conversely, if I shape expectations of character behaviour with a little pause before every action, hesitations become part of the character's way of being.'

These techniques of continuity, montage and rhythm editing are congruent with the techniques of performance and footage creation practiced in most fiction and documentary film productions. The question however remains: when creating character, can we become more directly cognizant of the assumptions and knowledges we are using in the practice of these techniques? To develop this awareness, we turn now to what Grunditz Brennan calls *Interacting with the material* for a discussion of the kinds of creative cognizing we do in response to material.

INTERACTING WITH MATERIAL

1. Filmmaker tools	1.1 Performer tools	1.2 Footage creator tools	1.3 Editor tools
2. Interacting with the material	2.1 Explicit analysis	2.2 Kinaesthetic empathy	2.3 Implicit knowledge
3. Basis for interpretation	3.1 Classical mechanics Laws of physics	3.2 Reflex reactions	3.3 Cultural conditioning
4. Responding from a cinematic position	4.1 Character	4.2 Filmmaker	4.3 Viewer

When editors edit, whether watching, sorting, remembering, selecting, or composing, they interact with filmed material imprinted with creative choices that precede the editing. This taxonomy proposes that editors' interactions with the material are guided by a combination of *Explicit analysis*, *Kinaesthetic empathy*, and *Implicit knowledge.*

2.1 Explicit Analysis guides the interactions through reasoning strategies we have access to through learning. Education strategies in film schools throughout the world rely upon widely available texts on filmmaking (see for example (Bordwell and Thompson 2008) to develop students' explicit analysis capacities. These learned reasoning strategies for explicit analysis include knowledge of script analysis, continuity rules, dramaturgy, aesthetics, ethics, and politics.

2.2 Kinaesthetic empathy refers to the experiences of feeling *with* body movement in the material, and using these embodied responses to gesture, expression, and action onscreen to guide decision making (Pearlman 2018). Kinaesthetic empathy is a widely used term in dance contexts and provides shorthand for both authors' deep training in dance, which informs our editing. However, we propose that it is also how all editors interact with material on a body level. The term is sometimes used in film theory, however, more often, cognitive film theorists refer this form of empathy as 'embodied simulation' (Gallese and Guerra 2012) – meaning we have similar neurological responses when we sit still and watch a movement performed by somebody else as when we perform the movement ourselves. When creating character through editing, interactions guided by kinaesthetic empathy are especially useful as will be further addressed in section 4.

2.3 Implicit Knowledge stems from practice, exposure to the world, and accumulated insights and impressions (Pearlman 2016, 10) and increases with experience. E.g. *Filmmaker tools* can be *implicitly known* by watching a lot of film. *Implicit knowledge* is also personal in that it is accrued through individual life experiences which may vary significantly. Implicit knowledge, including things you know without knowing how you learned them, plays a big role when interacting with material. It may be the source of attitudes, assumptions and perspectives that are particularly salient when making decisions about how to link outer manifestations and inner life of characters. Sorting material guided by implicit knowledge can be fast while still complex and plastic, or it can be unconsciously reproducing convention or bias.

One way of ameliorating this unconscious reproduction of convention or bias is to develop deeper understanding of what Grunditz Brennan is calling our *Bases for interpretation*. We turn now to a more in-depth consideration of these.

BASES FOR INTERPRETATION

1. Filmmaker tools	1.1 Performer tools	1.2 Footage creator tools	1.3 Editor tools
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Interpretation of footage is at work in processes of watching, sorting, remembering, selecting, and composing. It is partially the result of *Kinaesthetic empathy* or *Explicit analysis* of character behaviour and conditions but seems to be more substantively based on *Implicit knowledge*. Edit room problem-solving mostly gets stuck trying to pinpoint our different implicit understanding of what the actor's performance or the social actor's actions (as framed in the footage) expresses about the character's intentions and motivations. If we cannot link the character's inner life with observable manifestations, there is little use for even the deepest understanding of existential dilemmas or the most brilliant analysis of psychological causalities.

Grunditz Brennan: 'To develop more precise tools for interpreting (and by extension creating) character from what is seen and heard in the footage, I started to trace my cultural conditioning and acknowledge shared conditions for living in the physical world through laws of physics and reflex reactions.' The following proposes articulations and unpacking methods for some of the implicit knowledge on which footage and character interpretation is based.

3.1 Laws of physics in classical mechanics

When editors interpret footage and create character through editing, we implicitly understand that a character is subjected to outside forces by manifestations of gravity, friction, work, energy, angles, speed etc. in the footage. The underlying principles that govern mechanics of the physical world are mathematically described in *Classical mechanics*[1] (Crowell 2020), but we implicitly know them through experience of living in the physical world. We understand that forces like gravity and friction affect the trajectory of moving objects (Crowell 2020, 135), i.e. how the relative tilt and surface[2] of the ground will cause a rolling ball to change speed or direction. We subconsciously estimate how forces like heat producing friction tap the rolling ball of kinetic (movement) energy to slow it down.

[1] Classical mechanics deals with speed far less than 3x108 m/s and size far larger than 109 m.

[2] Specifics of different surfaces and the amount of friction force they produce are not as universally experienced as gravity.

We can predict motion in the physical world without explicitly analysing everything around us, but articulations of this implicit knowledge can be useful when building the physical world around a character, and Classical mechanics can provide language for this. It also taps into the fact that conditions for matter on earth are ruled by empirically proven *Laws of physics,* which means that all living creatures have universally[3] shared experiences of moving objects and what affects them. When editing, we can therefore imply a character's predictions about, for example an approaching ball, by showing nothing but the ball's movement.

[3] Valid for the planet earth.

Conscious editing choices to highlight or omit aspects of physical conditions are even more useful when it comes to characters moving through the story world in relation to the forces acting on them. Gravity is a constant force known to all who live on earth. Activating the viewers' bodily knowledge and experience of forces like gravity or wind resistance can suggest characters' inner reactions without shared associations between symbolic imagery and particular emotions. *Laws of physics* explain why gravity makes a walk up a hill require more energy the steeper the hill (Crowell 2020) and this language offers insight and precision that can be used when analysing the footage at hand. Intentionally choosing parts of shots that indicate gravity, friction, work, energy, angles, speed etc. helps to emphasize or omit forces that characters are subjected to in any given moment. It gives editors communicable tools to edit in a way that hints at the character's inner and outer struggles regardless of framed performance. By choosing shots and timing that emphasize the steepness of a hill and slow speed of a walk, an editor can convey that a character feels overwhelmed and dreads the rest of the climb without the actor wincing in pain or the character saying as much.

Grunditz Brennan: 'I illustrate this with an example from my thesis film project *BLOD* (Boholm and Grunditz Brennan 2020). In *AFTER,* a short film cut from the vast BLOD-footage, there is a close-up of a couple kissing and door slamming shut behind them, followed by a close-up of a foot approaching the floor at the end of a stride, walking much slower than the door slam. While not adhering to continuity of direction and speed across the cut, the two movements still feel connected because the discrepancy matches *Laws of physics:* the force of gravity has curbed the trajectory downward and the impact with the floor absorbs some of the energy. Articulating the specifics of this connection aids the creation of a narrative: she is walking away from the events by the door, reacting to what happened there.' Recognising and naming the physical conditions manifest in the footage is a method for productive and nuanced discussions in the edit room when we shape the character's inner life from what is present in the footage.

Discussions on *Laws of physics* can disrupt tendencies toward cliché or habit in *Implicit knowledge* in part because the experience of physics is so immediately, viscerally, and readily accessible to everyone. We share, if nothing else, an experience of living in a world where the laws of *Classical mechanics* apply. So,

when we articulate our thoughts or ideas as having basis in that experience, we are tapping directly into something we share. The discussion of physics can also have an impact on understanding of the art of editing. It augments theories around 'continuity, convergence and divergence of vectors' and the creation of 'screen spaces' proposed by Zettl (Frierson 2018), and around 'trajectory phrasing' by Pearlman (2016, 2019) It adds practical, actionable valence to Coëgnaarts (2022) analysis of how 'directed forces or vectors in cinema' make meaning.

3.2 Reflex reactions

Links between what is observable in the footage and a character's inner life can also be brought to explicit discussion by articulating the character's behaviour in relation to expected *Reflex reactions*. For example, reacting to sudden sounds or movements – the startle response[4] – is one of our survival instincts. We have multiple reflexive responses to the environments we live in. Like most (sentient) living creatures, we avoid danger without constantly evaluating everything around us by noticing discrepancies in established patterns and acknowledging what others pay attention to. We don't watch each car individually on the freeway but notice and react if one is going against the traffic. We instinctively follow the gaze of people intently focusing on a particular direction to see if there is something we also need to know. Noel Carroll applies these *Reflex reactions* to viewer interaction with moving images (Carroll et al. 1996) and Tim Smith's attentional theory of cinematic continuity (Smith 2012, 2) is built on the premise that rules of continuity editing are designed to maximise efficiency of reflexive eye movements.

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Startle_response

Although they may not be explicitly articulating that they are doing so, experienced editors use these attentional cues to shape expectations of character behaviour. A loud and sudden noise emanating from the diegeses of the film situation and the viewer will expect the character to react to it. Editing choices can create inferences about what it means if they don't. A close-up of a little flinch in the hand hints at an effort to not turn towards the noise. Cutting to her point-of-view can indicate who she hides her reaction from. Abbreviating her inhalation before talking and choosing the take where she talks the loudest or fastest, can indicate that she tries to ignore it. A medium shot showing no reaction at all might say that she doesn't hear, or that she's used to this sound. Similarly, it's enough to show a character's point-of-view of a car swerving into oncoming traffic to imply her emotional reaction to noticing it.

Articulating expectations of *Reflex reactions* and bringing the character's compliance or non-compliance with them to the surface, provide great opportunities to build complexity and depth of a character. Further, as with *Laws of physics*, there is a great deal of commonality amongst human experiences of these reflexive actions. Thus, consideration of them can not only strengthen collaborators' shared understanding of characters but is a direct pathway to engaging audience recognition and empathy with characters' outer and inner states.

3.3 Cultural conditioning

Cultural conditioning is a third, highly significant aspect of *Implicit knowledge* that affects both the created characters and the filmmakers' creative process. Addressing experiences of class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, abilities, religion, societal time and place, as well as learned social codes, education and exposure to media, arts, and interest group (sub)cultures can add depth and nuance to the creation of a character that is complex yet whole. Unaddressed, this blind spot can (re-)produce stereotypes and one-dimensional characters, cause unproductive miscommunication, or create barriers for editors to interpret the material – especially when dealing with different cultural conditioning within a creative team. To articulate as much as possible of this complex web, Grunditz Brennan's taxonomy proposes starting with one's own conditioning as part of one's implicit knowledge. Grunditz Brennan: 'My cultural conditioning plays a role in all my editing processes, and I bring it to every collaboration. Whether I am aware of it or not, I use it to interpret expressions and behaviour when watching and shaping a character. To me, the fact that the woman in my short film *AFTER* is in a fancy dress but barefoot may signal a particular state of mind but being barefoot might not carry any significance at all to someone with a different cultural conditioning. Looking away is another example. I may interpret someone looking away as a sign of shame or guilt where in a different time and place I might read it as respect.'

A character's relation to cultural codes around them can also provide links to what is going on in their mind; by using an actor's inadvertent stumble in a discarded take or a tiny pull on a garment, we can emphasize that it is an effort for them to blend in, even if they are dressed and behave cohesively with their environment. When editing, articulating interpretations of character behaviour and expressions in relation to one's own cultural conditioning, gives us access to our implicit (potentially biased) understanding of the character. It can also better support team communication by bridging creative differences stemming from contradictory readings through different cultural lenses of what the footage or edited sequences convey. By unearthing as much as possible of what implicitly feeds the team members' respective interpretations, we get access to new potential aspects of a character and a more fruitful creative process.

The complexity of articulating one's cultural conditioning with its myriad of affecting factors and evolving nature, is augmented by its entanglement with personality traits like temperament and intelligence type. We make no claim of a method for comprehensive articulation of cultural conditioning or language to pin down every detail of why we interpret something one way or another. Sometimes a framed performance, or an edited sequence of shots, conveys a character's depth, complexity and contradictory nuances to both creators and diverse audiences through kinaesthetic empathy or through associative paths too intricate to disentangle. But to articulate as much as possible, editors can take notice of: our own conditioning as it contrasts with others'; when depictions of it hit embarrassingly close to home; and when we get challenged by new ideas or people around us. We can practice articulating our conditioning by exposing ourselves to conver-

sations and cultural experiences that are unfamiliar to us, by seeking collaboration and creative contexts where people come with diverse experiences, and by expanding our educations to new schools of thought. These strategies are particularly beneficial to students, and like most filmmaker/academics, both authors of this article regularly encourage students, through exercises and discussions, to understand and be reflective about their own cultural frames and those of others. Articulations of cultural conditioning benefit two aspects of character creation: communicating and navigating the film team's creative agreement on what we are trying to achieve and sharpening tools to create impressions of the character's cultural conditioning – their attitudes and actions as part of being shaped by their culture. Juggling this dual application is where the three 'positions' that will be discussed below are useful.

RESPONDING FROM DIFFERENT CINEMATIC POSITIONS

1. Filmmaker tools	1.1 Performer tools	1.2 Footage creator tools	1.3 Editor tools
2. Interacting with the material	2.1 Explicit analysis	2.2 Kinaesthetic empathy	2.3 Implicit knowledge
3. Basis for interpretation	3.1 Classical mechanics Laws of physics	3.2 Reflex reactions	3.3 Cultural conditioning
4. Responding from a cinematic position	4.1 Character	4.2 Filmmaker	4.3 Viewer

Creative communication about character often breaks down because it is unclear what aspect of character we are talking about: the character as an autonomous being in the story world; the traits of the character that further the intentions of the film; or how the character invites audience engagement. This lack of clarity has been addressed in fiction film studies by Jens Eder through his 'clock of character' concept, where aspects of character are separated as fictional being, artefact, symbol and symptom (Eder 2010, 18). In my quest for more specific vocabulary in edit room conversations, I have generated a model where I distinguish between different cinematic positions from which to interact with and talk about the character. For a filmmaker, these positions are more direct than Eder's character clock, but they coincide with his separated character aspects. The positions also loosely overlap the triad of gazes; the camera's, the characters' and the audience's; on which, Valerie Orpen argues, editing relies (2003, 113).

For our purposes in the discussion of shaping character, the positions can be thought of as people: the Character who was in front of the camera in the filming situation, the *Filmmaker* who is present in the editing situation, and the Viewer who will be in front of the screen. Acknowledging that an editor may occupy different *positions*, or one could say the perspectives, and recognising the influence different perspectives or positions might have on editing choices is a useful way to clear up confusion in discussion or in editing.

4.1 The Character position

The character exists on the screen, in the film world; its conditions and range of actions limited to what is heard and seen in the film. Jens Eder proposes we 'envisage film characters as identifiable fictional beings with an inner life that exists as communicatively constructed artifacts.' (Eder 2010, 18-21) Their likeness to a person 'being themselves' or an actor 'performing a role' provides levels of connection to real people on a sliding scale, and in documentaries and fiction alike, characters may have personal integrity but are not real persons.

Taking the *Character* position when editing is a way of testing the integrity of the created character. We can use our own experiences and psychological insights combined with our understanding of the character's inner life (embedded in the framed performance, fictional script, or documentary situations), to imaginatively 'step into' the shoes of the created character's body/mind/social context to access their conditions, agency, and mindset in the diegesis of the film. When editing, we can consider how it would feel in our bodies to move that way, what sense it would make in this story moment to use that inflection, etc.

Grunditz Brennan: 'I break down this virtual immersion in relation to: *situation*, *other characters,* and *time.*

Situation: Imaginatively occupying a character's situation involves considering physical conditions, and the character's impressions of the space; what she sees, hears, and reacts to. The situation includes cultural markings of the room, clothes, and type of event.

Other characters: In relation to other characters, I take the character position to test direction of attention and relative positions and how they shift over time, including what is said but also what is not, like gestures, expressions, and other body language.

Time: In relation to time, I 'try on' behaviour established through creation and breaking of patterns of reaction timing or repetition of performance components like gestures, breathing, sounds, as well as cultural expectations of behaviour.'

Imaginatively occupying the *Character* position during the editing process impacts choices about the shaping of situational pressures on the character, dynamics of other characters in relation to each other, and the timing patterns created for a particular character. It is also a way of cutting through one of the most frequ-

ent arguments in an editing suite (or writing process): whether a character would 'really do that'. These conversations are particularly significant sources of enmity when people do not recognise the ways their implicit cultural conditioning is shaping their perspective. Deliberately occupying the *Character* position and investigating her perspective in her situation, in relation to other characters, and her timing patterns offers some specificity. It generates vocabulary for uncovering assumptions that may be influencing judgments about character behaviour, and in doing so can help to cut through arguments that are underpinned by experiences or cultural norms that may or may not be shared.

4.2 The Filmmaker position

It is from the *Filmmaker* position that what Jens Eder calls the artefact of the character is created.

> *The manifold representational devices of film impart characters with physical concreteness in image and sound. The primary contributing factors here are cast, star image, performance styles, mise-en-scène, camera work, sound design, music, and editing. (Eder 2010, 27)*

The filmmaker in this context is an aggregate of all the people who have creative impact on the film. Taking the *Filmmaker* position when editing, we make the creative choices that build the character's physical concreteness – what gestures, how long, from what take, what shot… Interactions from this position are not dealing with the character in the story world but with the character's function in the storytelling. Using hand gestures as an example – how frequently a particular gesture is used by the character, doesn't say anything about when and how often it should be shown. Even if the character (fictional or actual) always uses the gesture, the gesture may only be relevant for the intention of the film at a particular story moment. Without getting confused by 'the character always does that gesture therefore it is important', we can take the Filmmaker position to justify editing other story moments only from shots that don't show the defining gesture.

From the *Filmmaker* position editors can use *Editor tools* (as discussed above) to manipulate audience responses beyond connecting to the story events. We can consciously elicit emotional responses to harmony/discord in rhythm, expectations set by image vectors or understanding vs. confusion. We can create and break patterns, cut fast-paced and hard to disorient viewers or use smooth continuous approaches to put them at ease. These *Editor tools* and techniques of continuity and montage are fairly reliable methods of shaping audience responses and creating opportunity for audiences to attribute these responses to the film experience as links to the character's inner life. Further, as discussed, *Editor tools* align effectively with *Footage creator* tools and *Performer tools*. In addition to invoking this broad toolkit, taking the *Filmmaker* position is helpful when deciding how strongly to promote the presence of the filmmaker as constructor of the film or subject providing the film's perspective.

4.3 Viewer position

Grunditz Brennan: 'When I take the *Viewer* position in the editing process, I don't envision a target audience consisting of other persons, or guess how someone else may perceive or engage, but really think of myself as the audience and personally engage with the characters.' The way to do this is similar to the way Murray Smith describes spectator engagement as a multi-modal experience.

> *Recognition is Smith's term for spectators' construction of characters as individuated and continuous human agents. Alignment refers to the way a film narrative gives viewers access to characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions; it is primarily about the communication of information. Allegiance describes the process by which film creates sympathies for and against characters. (Copland 2009, 102)*

Phrased differently, from the Viewer position, editors experience with, feel for, and think about the characters all at once. When we edit, this is the position, ourselves as audience, from which we gauge the result of the editing and it is from here that Eder's 'character as symbol' and 'symptom' (Eder 2010, 33) are co-created with the viewer. To some extent each viewer will create a unique story from their personal associations, a poetry happening in the viewer independent of filmmaker or character intention.

Using the cinematic positions

Grunditz Brennan: 'To create a character for the audience to emotionally invest in, I've found that the character needs to be considered from all three positions. So, in my editing practice I am all three, and look at the character from different perspectives to solve different types of problems. I oscillate between the three as I interact with the film material: I experience as the *Character,* feel what they feel, react in the logic of their world and kinaesthetically respond to their body movement; I am the Viewer who feels for them through emotional connections beyond story and screen and co-creates them through my personal associations; and I consciously think about what they do in the story in relation to what I as the *Filmmaker* want from the character.'

These cinematic positions can also be applied to two questions that often come up in the editing process: whose perspective is put forward and where the story/character is created/perceived to be created.

Whose perspective is in focus correlates to the footage creation question 'who is the camera?' and can be answered either as: the *Character*, whose point-of-view is shown; the *Filmmaker* through a present but invisible subjective camera; or the Viewer by the all-knowing narrator device. Available options are generated in the footage creation phase, but editors can create shifts between these narrative perspectives to reveal ethics of relationship to what is filmed, to award character (leading and supporting roles) more or less agency, and to present the viewer

with a range of perspectives or a claim of objectivity or truth.
Applied to the question of where the story is created/perceived to happen, understanding *cinematic positions* provides vocabulary for conversations on mode/narrative style and character's relationship to real/realistic persons and events.

From the *Character*, position, the characters are perceived to drive the narrative: the story unfolds (seems created) in front of the camera – naturalistic, observing, through story events and character interaction.

From the *Filmmaker* position, the characters have no perceived agency but are symbols or vehicles for thoughts or ideas: the story creation resides overtly in the filmmaking tools – compilation montage, use of narrator, aestheticized imagery, genre conventions etc.

From the *Viewer* position, story creation is up to the audience with room for ambiguity and personal interpretation and association. The viewer projects things onto the character not necessarily explicit in the film. Without knowing what the filmmaker or the character wants, viewers attribute the character with what they want, based on personal experiences, cultural conditioning and recognition of the character situation.

In the editing suite the three positions are in constant dialogue. The narrative perspective and the perceived power over the story can shift or be fixed through the course of a film and both are dealt with through editing choices that have bearing on character creation with regards to perceived authenticity and to character integrity and agency.

Conclusions

The proposed taxonomy is an original contribution to the field of editing theory and practice as it builds on existing editing theory; ties ideas from science and film studies to editing experience; and connects it all to the specifics of creating character in editing. Providing opportunities for synthesis of theory and practice makes the taxonomy a useful teaching tool. In 'close readings' of scenes they have edited, students can apply it to explicitly call on their filmmaking skills, acknowledge how they interact with material, articulate their (implicit) interpretations, and respond to it all from different cinematic positions.

When used in the professional editing situation (both documentary and fiction), the described model for analysis can deepen the creative process, overcome creative roadblocks and avoid clichéd stereotypes. By articulating the link between what an editor can see/hear and how she interprets what she sees/hears in movement, speed, cultural markers, behaviour, shot, light, how she is attributing her own feelings to the character, the response to patterns and the breaking of them, the 'intuitive' becomes tangible and the multitude of artistic choices go from being magic or inexplicable to becoming an accessible source for building complex narratives around characters and relationship that are nuanced and invite emotional investment.

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