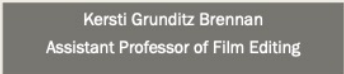




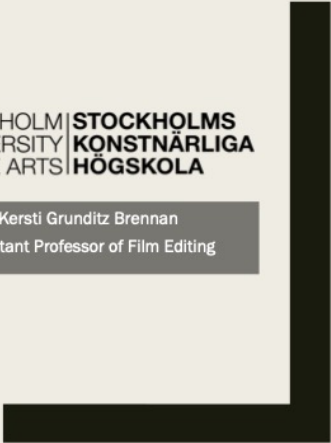
CREATING CHARACTER IN EDITING

methods and articulations

STOCKHOLM | STOCKHOLMS
UNIVERSITY | KONSTNÄRLIGA
OF THE ARTS | HÖGSKOLA



Kersti Grunditz Brennan
Assistant Professor of Film Editing



INTRODUCTION

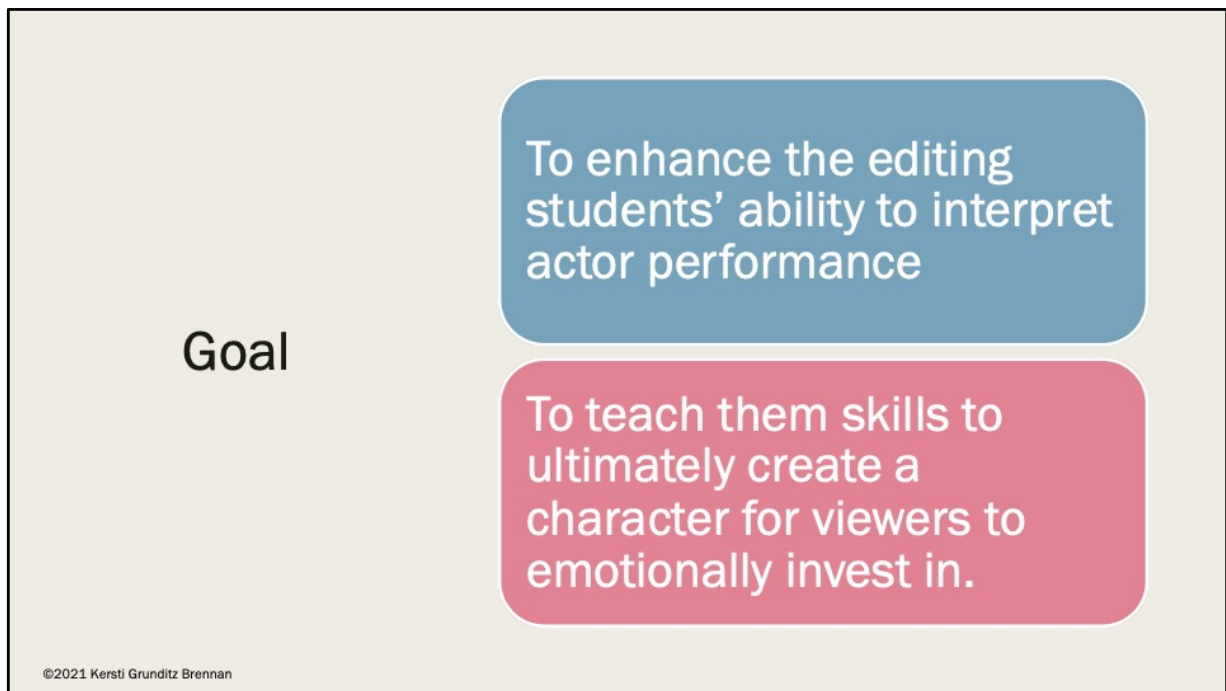
Editors' choices of shot, take and timing augment and vary actors' performances and directors' instructions to significantly shape the audience perception of film characters. This artistic aspect of editing, is often attributed to intuition – unreflective, split-second expert judgements.

Attributing this expertise solely to 'intuition' makes it problematic to teach the shaping of characters beyond craft skills like keeping continuity and emphasizing a particular perspective.

©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

We all know how hard it is to teach students how to evaluate performance. But as editors we do know that our choices of shot, take and timing augment and vary actors' performances and directors' instructions to significantly shape the audience perception of film characters. This artistic aspect of editing, is often attributed to intuition – unreflective, split-second expert judgements.

However, attributing this expertise solely to 'intuition' makes it problematic to teach the shaping of characters beyond craft skills like keeping continuity and emphasizing a particular perspective.



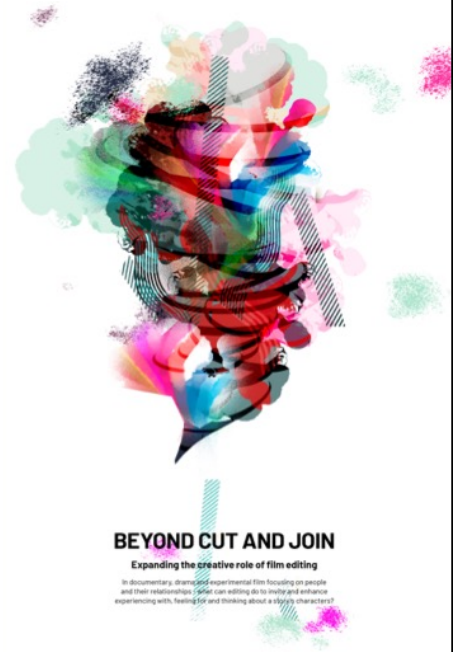
If I were to describe how I create any character in film and how it is introduced to the viewers, I could describe what she looks like and how she behaves and how the editing choices reveal that as the film progresses. As the editor, I could also describe how her behavior is shaped by the editing and how the perception of her is manipulated by contextualizing her appearance, setting and actions beyond the scenes she is in. Costume, make-up, staging, cinematography and acting are cinematic artistic practices that precede the editing and affect the potential to shape the character through editing. The film material available to edit is limited to footage of the actual actor that played the part, in the dresses and make-up she wore, acting in the set and staging in front of the camera as she did, in the light and framing of the takes that were shot. But there is still a lot of options left to work with in the editing. In addition to dialogue, the acting is manifest through (facial) expression, posture and other (body) movement. Relationships between actors and between them and the different narrative places/times are also established by means like direction of their gaze or body posture, movement patterns in the room, the linearity of time in relation to aging and growth, laws of physics dealing with gravity and inertia etc. Without even altering the script, as an editor I can shape how the character is perceived by choosing sections from different takes; mixing shot sizes and angles; repeating or deleting movements, looks and postures; and extending or shortening pauses.

So how do we give students tools to enhance their ability to navigate this jungle of choices?

Background

- My extensive experience of editing character driven documentaries
- Method developed through my artistic research project
- Teaching method used with editing students at Stockholm University of the Arts, applied to both narrative fiction and documentary film

©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan



Comes out of my extensive experience of editing character driven documentaries and my experience with live performance

This is a case study of a teaching method developed through an artistic research project:

Beyond Cut and Join – Expanding the creative role of film editing

Focusing on people and their relationships in documentary, drama and experimental film

– what can editing do to invite and enhance the audience's experiencing with, feeling for and thinking about a story's characters?

This method has been used with editing students at Stockholm University of the Arts, applied to both narrative fiction and documentary film.

The focus on body movement and experiences of the physical world stems from my own background as a dancer and choreographer.

Pre-requisite knowledge



CONTINUITY EDITING



HOW TO BUILD/SHAPE
A SCENE



SCRIPT ANALYSIS



BASIC DRAMATURGY

©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

I have taught this course the third semester of BA and a more advance level of it in the first semester of the MA.

Student prerequisite knowledge prior to course - continuity editing, shaping a scene, basic dramaturgy - script analysis (what theorists? character arcs, understanding subtext), observation before interpretation.



©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

Teaching material

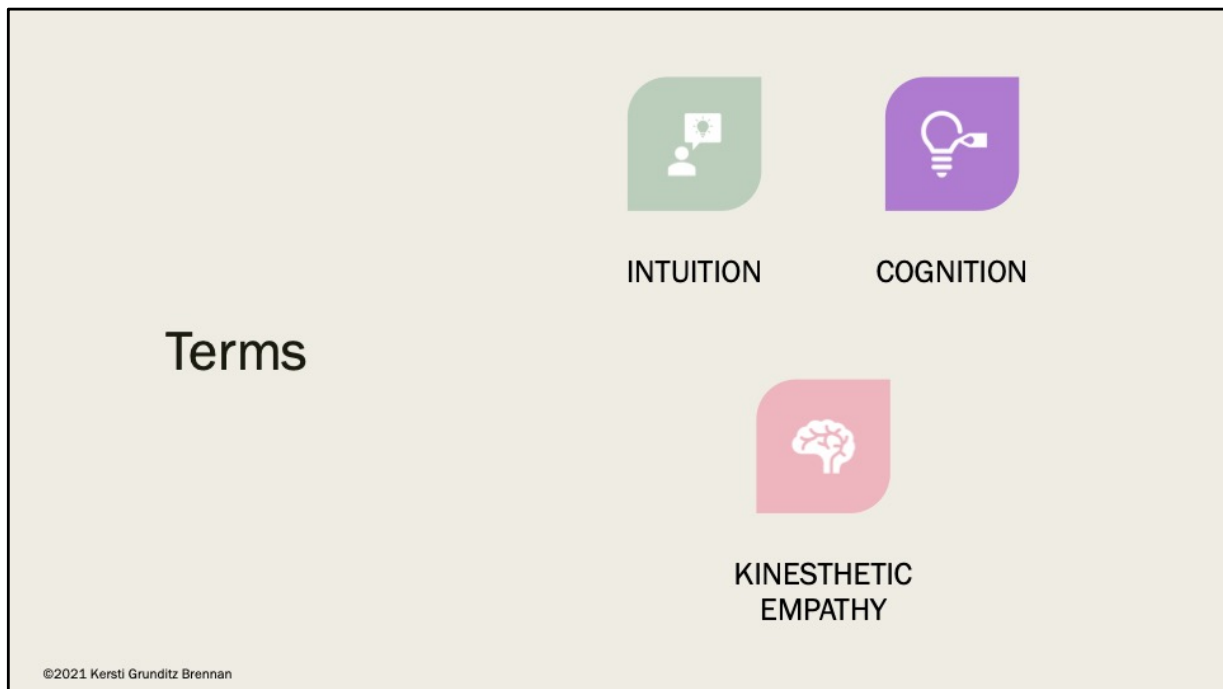
- Raw footage from mini-series SYSTRAR 1968
- Interactions with series director Kristina Humle
- Meeting with series main actor Mikaela Knapp and supporting actor Livia Millhagen

The teaching material is raw footage from a drama series with a strong main character and several supporting ones.

TERMS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan



Kinesthetic empathy – (embodied experiences of other people’s movement)
as a tool in editing, as response in viewer (editor as viewer and creator)

Intuition - reference Karen – unreflective, split-second expert judgements

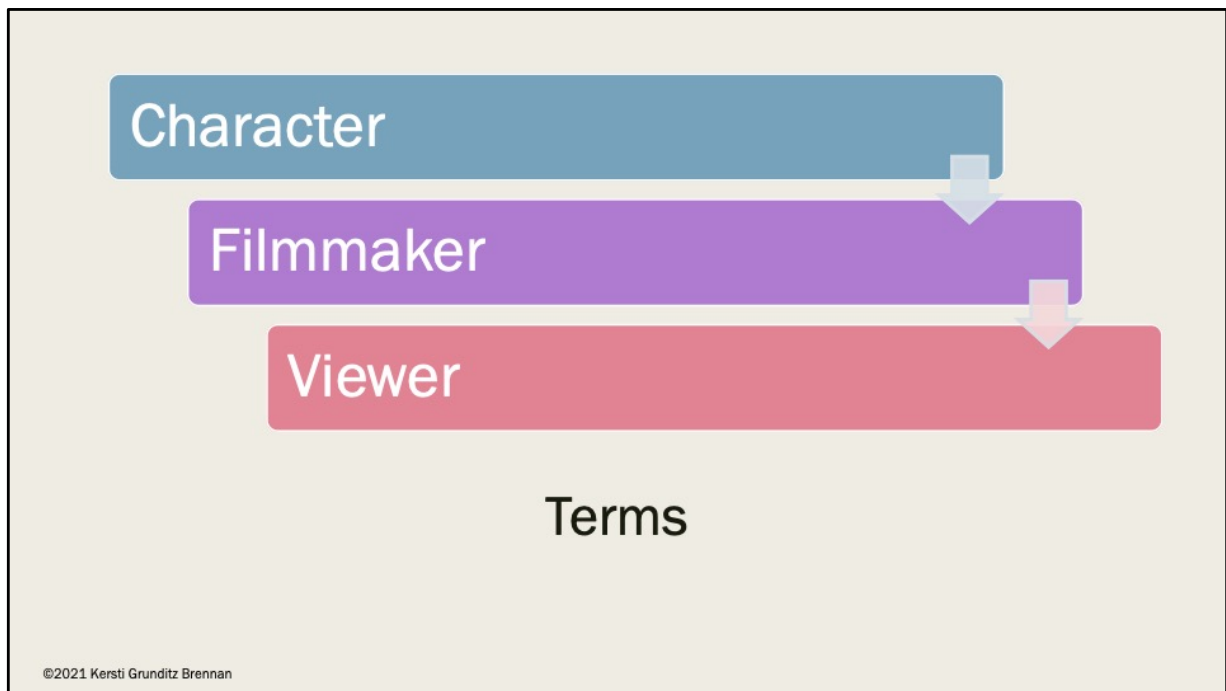
intuitive or unreflected upon editing choices - based on associations between shots and scenes, in paths I could probably never account for (stemming from a complex mix of my cultural exposure, personal experiences, my disposition, accumulated learning, impressions etc.).

But there are also decisions based on other types of implicit knowledge (culturally based interpretations, kinesthetic imagination, embodied experience of the physical world and its laws etc.) that could potentially be unpacked and articulated.

And other decisions based on my explicit knowledge of editing craft and choreographic composition. After all my years of choreographing and editing the explicit knowledge and the skills I use are available to me in the moment of an editing decision, without my thinking about them. Even the explicit has become embodied – second nature and part of my intuition.

Cognition – of the character, of the viewer, in the making (distributed cognition)

There are different perspectives available when describing editing– implicit or explicit, intuition or interpretation – and the editing process oscillates between the two. Switching between the perspective of maker and viewer - I make the cuts and join the clips and then I look at the result as an edited sequence of shots now existing outside of and independent of me. As a viewer I watch, listen, feel, interpret and evaluate compositional merits of *the* editing which in turn affects me as a maker and the next decision in *my* editing. And so it goes – back and forth, a constant dialogue between maker and viewer, impulse and construction.



Character - on screen, bearing on story, integrity as entity

Filmmaker – film, screen – director and editor combo, all the people that have creative impact on the film.

Viewer – co-creator, poetry happening in the viewer independent of filmmaker or character intention

These three positions in dialogue. As a filmmaker Attending to the material vs. Imposing on it.

Terms



LAWS OF PHYSICS -
CLASSICAL MECHANICS



AUTONOMOUS
REACTIONS



CULTURAL
CONDITIONING

Terms

- Actions & Beats
- Mise-en-scene, Image composition & Production Design
- Attention, Continuity & Rhythm

©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

Actions & Beats (performers' tools)

Mise-en-scene, Image composition & Production Design (footage visual tools)

Attention, Continuity & Rhythm (editors' tools)

Theoretical Framework

- Karen Pearlman – Collected research/books on intuitive editing, cognition and rhythm
- Tim Smith - Attentional Theory of Cinematic Continuity
- Eisenstein - Montage theory
- Murray Smith - Aligning with character
- Meyerhold/Stanslawski - Acting methods

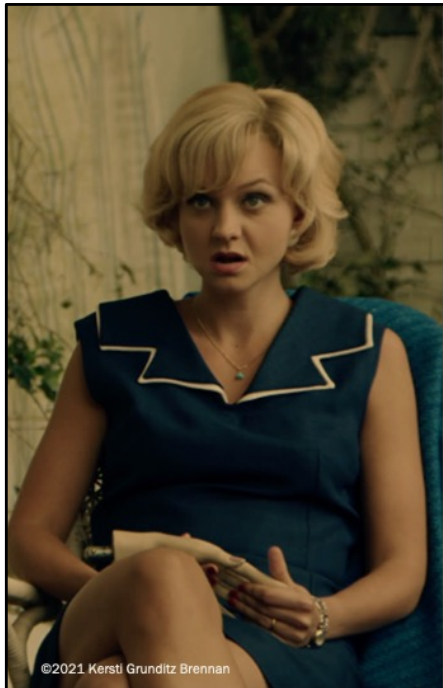
©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

METHOD PART 1

Make a supporting role into the main one

©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

After getting familiar with the material, they students meet the director and actors from the series.



Edit two scenes

- Edit two scenes, shift focus so that a supporting character is the main one.
- Create emotional development in the character from one scene to the next.

By changing the character's function in the story, the students need to explore how to create expressions and behaviors beyond the actor's performance.


Students first edit two scenes, making a supporting character into the main one and creating emotional development in the character from one scene to the next. By changing the character's function in the story, the students need to explore expressions and behaviors beyond the actor's performance.

METHOD PART 2

Character analysis and description

©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

Students show their scenes to each other.



©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

Describing the character

- Fellow students describe the main character:
 - *What is she like - adjectives*
 - *Why is she that way - background*
 - *What does she want - motivation*
 - *What is blocking her - obstacles*

Traditional character analysis –

Next the other students describe the character created. How is she (adjective descriptions), why is she that way, what does she want, what (inner or outer) obstacles block that. The description is solely based on the edited scenes



teaching skills of OBSERVATION and ARTICULATION
this in a way is a synthesis of theory and practice - film STUDIES uses this method of
'close reading'

Character in relation to situation

- Physical
- Cognitive
- Cultural



©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

The articulation is drawn from observations of what is revealed about the character in relation to the situation

Physical -

Cognitive – impressions (what does she see/hear), how does she react

Cultural – where the viewer's/filmmakers' biases and cultural conditioning, prejudice or preknowledge

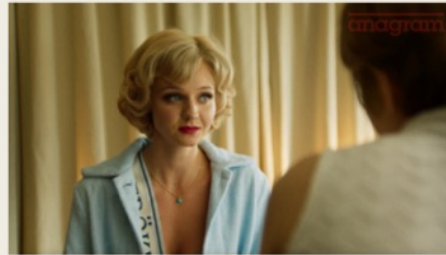
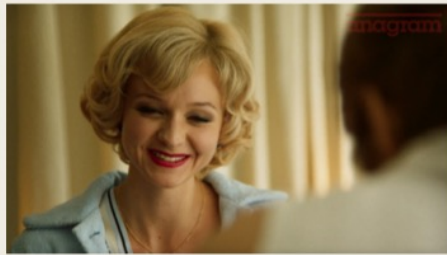


Character in relation to other characters

- Attention
- Position

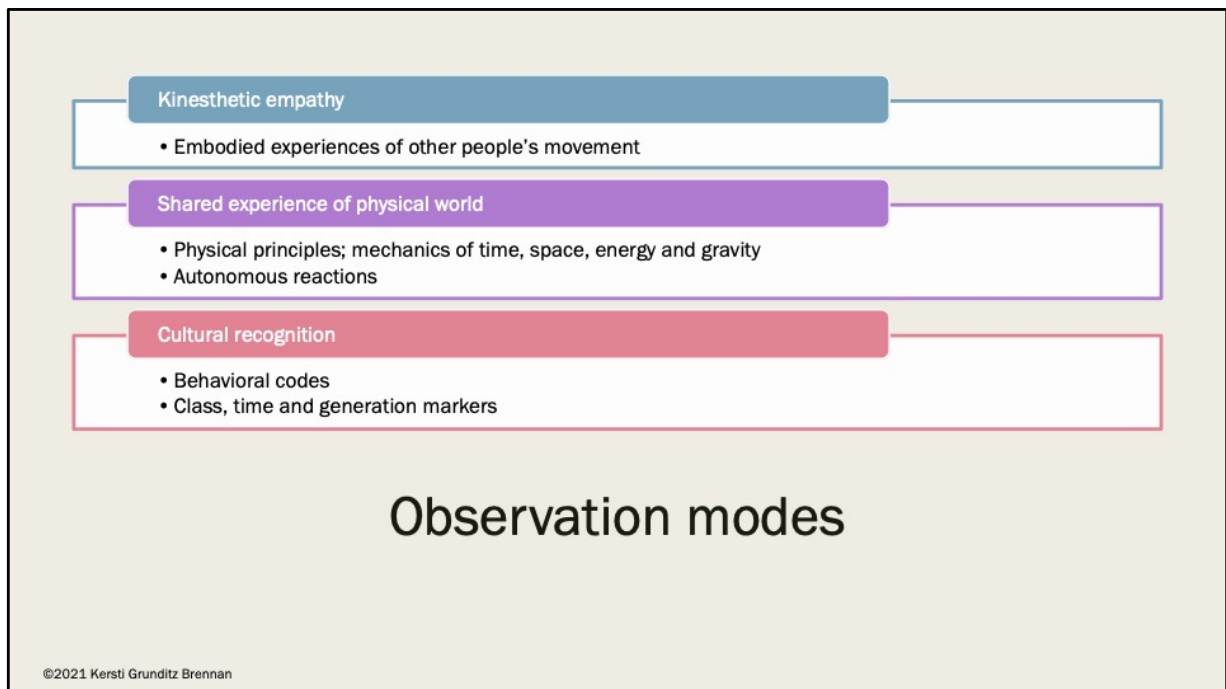
©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

Character in relation ordinary behavior



©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

creating and breaking of patterns – in reaction timing, or in shot sizes; illiciting a sense of break in the expectation of the viewer that feeds into the viewer's co-creation of the emotional state of the character.



This analysis is carried out with the use of provided explicit articulations of implicit knowledge such as kinesthetic empathy, laws of physics, autonomous reactions, and cultural conditioning.

The goal of the analysis is to extricate what is embedded in editing choices made - what we can infer about the character from what we see and hear, from what angle, for how long.

Emotional investment – relating to character like family

Experiencing	Feeling	Thinking
Experiencing with the character	Feeling for the character	Thinking about the character

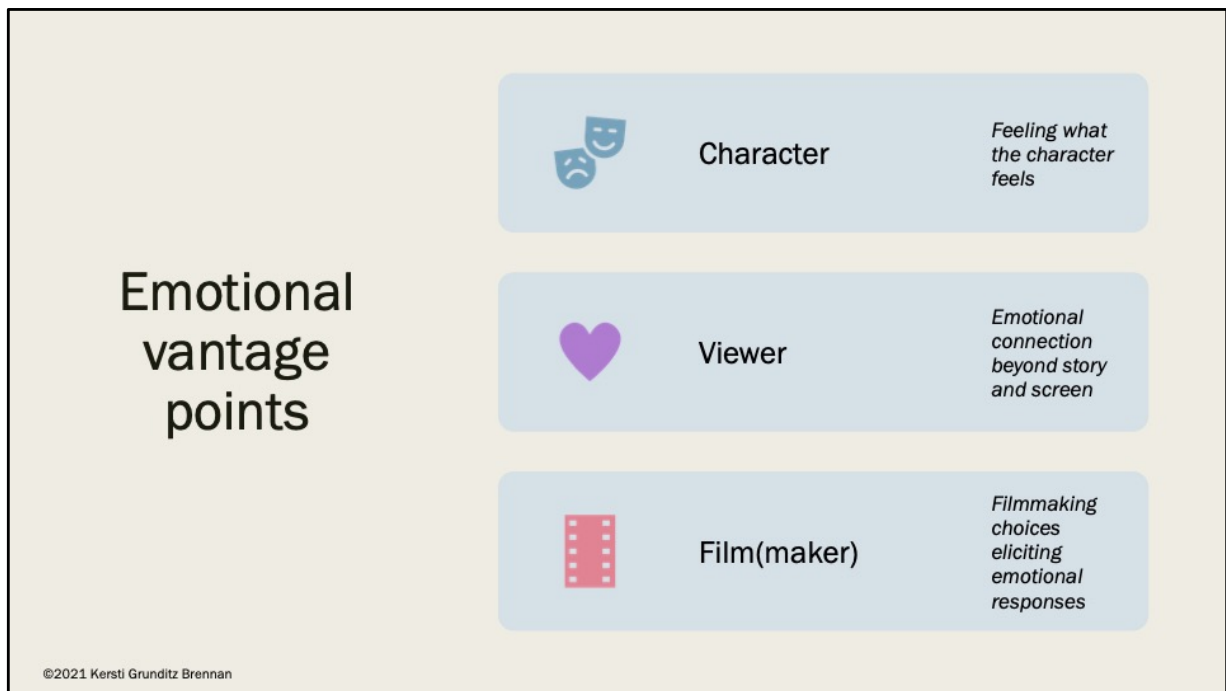
©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

Elaboration of the Murray Smith idea of aligning with the character -

kinesthetic empathy (do , laws of physics, autonomous reactions - what they can SEE and the how to differentiate between what they can see and how they read what they see (in movement, speed, dress, behaviour, shot, light (and attributing own feelings to the character,

creating and breaking of patterns

My thesis is that to ***both experience with, feel for and think about a character***, the viewer needs to take an active role in co-creating the cinematic experience.



Character

Feeling what the character feels, "crying because they cry, kinesthetic responses, imagining their emotion"

Viewer

Emotional connection beyond story and screen, co-creation, associations,

Film(maker)

Filmmaking choices eliciting emotional response
creating and breaking of patterns
Harmony/discord in rhythm,
Understanding vs. confusion


kinesthetic empathy (do , laws of physics, autonomous reactions - what they can SEE and the how to differentiate between what they can see and how they read what they see (in movement, speed, dress, behaviour, shot, light (and attributing own feelings to the character,

METHOD PART 3

Changing the character

©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

As a final task, the students are asked to change the character description, articulate directives for what to enhance and what to subdue in the editing and then re-edit the scenes according to the new character they have created.



New version of the main character

- Before editing, change the previous description.
 - *What is she like now - adjectives*
 - *Why is she this new way - background*
 - *What does she want now - motivation*
 - *What is blocking her now - obstacles*

©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan

the students are asked to change the character description,

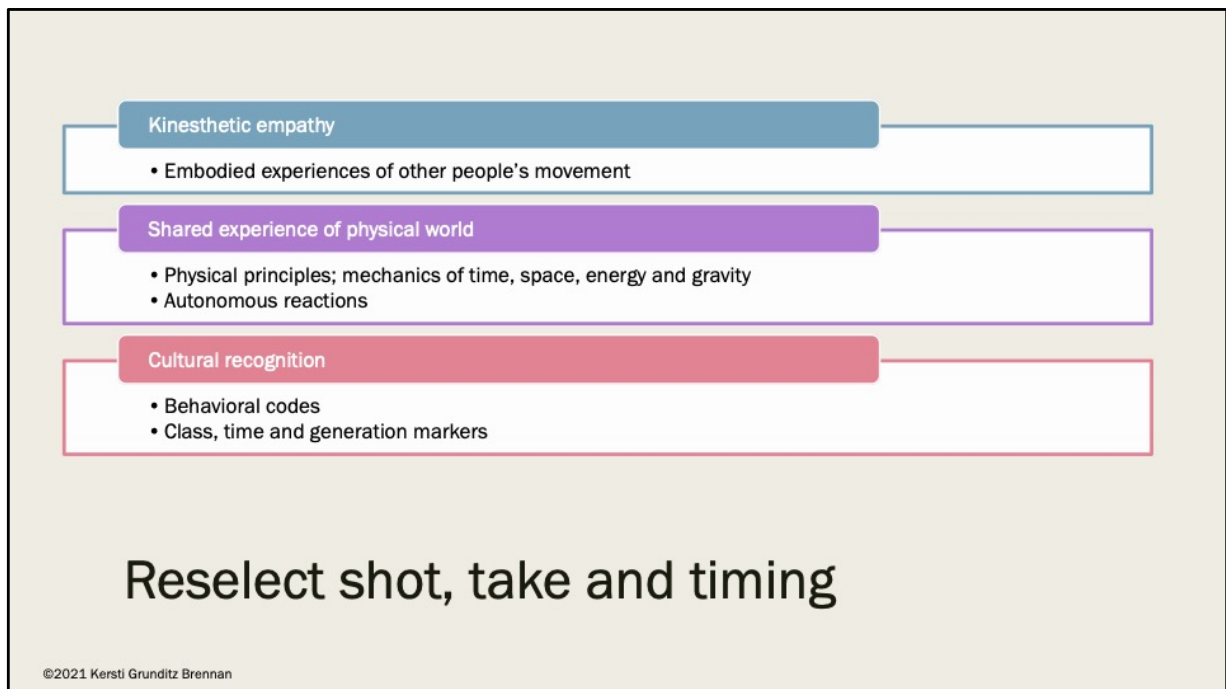
Articulate directives



WHAT TO ENHANCE



WHAT TO SUBDUE



This analysis is carried out with the use of provided explicit articulations of implicit knowledge such as kinesthetic empathy, laws of physics, autonomous reactions, and cultural conditioning.

The goal of the analysis is to extricate what is embedded in editing choices made - what we can infer about the character from what we see and hear, from what angle, for how long.

Follow the directives

- In relation to situation
- In relation to other characters
- In relation to ordinary behavior

©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan



Evaluate the editing from different vantage points



Character

Feeling what the character feels



Viewer

Emotional connection beyond story and screen

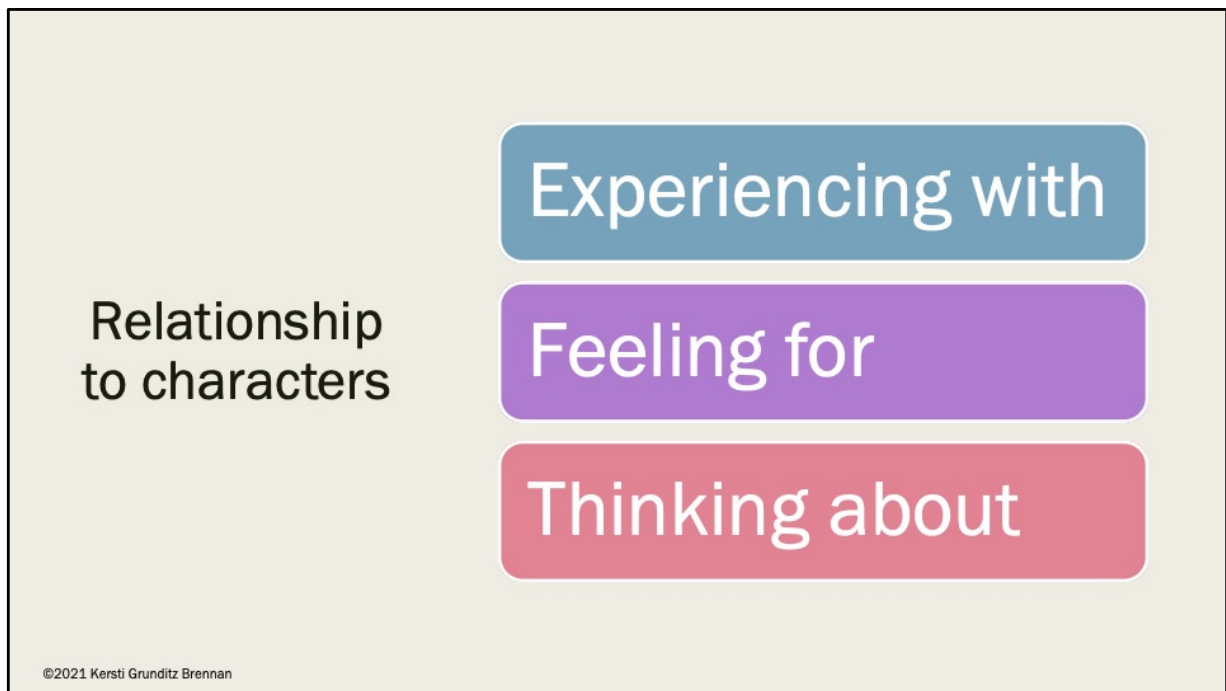


Film(maker)

Filmmaking choices eliciting emotional responses

CONCLUSIONS

©2021 Kersti Grunditz Brennan



The students have directly applied the learning from this teaching method in collaborative practices with students from other cinematic practices like directing, scriptwriting, cinematography, acting etc. When they went on to work on the next student film after this methods course, they had access to tools for editing and team communication that furthered their ability to shape and develop multifaceted characters through editing. They were also better prepared to take an active part in building narratives around characters and relationship that offer depth and nuance across the role roster. In extension to the concrete dealings with character creation, the students could take a more independent artistic responsibility and were more ready to respond to multiple complexities in dramaturgy, perspectives, style etc.



By using the choreographic strategies described, students learn the potential to shape and develop multifaceted characters through editing. Building narratives around characters and relationship that offer depth and nuance across the role roster. In addition – learning to respond to multiple complexities in dramaturgy, perspectives, style etc.

Widen the understanding of what it might mean to emotionally invest in a character – searching for shared ground beyond psychological understanding and visual recognition. Challenging the intuition – the trusting in the gut:

A Swedish commissioning editor used to boast about his unfailing gut feeling in evaluating project for potential funding. After reading the results of a scientific study on funding in relation to gender he said that he had realized that his gut was quite biased...