

BEYOND CUT AND JOIN

Expanding the creative role
of film editing

BY KERSTI GRUNDITZ BRENNAN

Cut and Join are both verbs and nouns.
Beyond the verbs lie the creative actions of the editor.
Beyond the nouns lies the creative authorship of editing.

Expanding the creative role of film editing is a two-fold proposition. The first is to acknowledge the impact of the editor and the editing on the film. The second is to suggest modes for filmmaking where creation in the edit room is a prominent part of the process.



Background and aims

The research project *Beyond Cut and Join* builds on my more than twenty years of working across many genres, formats, and platforms in the film industry. I have directed several feature documentaries and art films and taken on other cinematic practices like cinematography, script writing, and costume design. My professional identity is primarily shaped by my extensive experience in film editing, so my concerns with filmmaking generally start from an editing perspective.

Most of my artistic work is film portraits – reflecting my interest in human emotion and interaction. For most of my career I have grappled with who gets to be portrayed as complex characters and how that is achieved, from what perspectives they are portrayed and how the viewers' perception of the characters can be opened to multifaceted interpretations. I therefore focus on the role that editing plays in shaping characters in fiction and documentary films that center on people (characters) and relationships. For the purpose of this project, my understanding of character is 'a mediated (scripted and/or filmed, and edited) aspect of the person in front of the camera'.

[1] It is beyond the scope of this research to comprehensively address the evolution of the 'character' concept from Aristotle and onwards.



I came to this research with the desire to explore how to connect with characters in cinema. Before I went into film, I worked as a dancer and choreographer, and I have an MFA in choreography. This attunement to physical expression comes through when I edit as I relate to characters through my body more than through psychological understanding or identification with characters and events. However, this mode of relating to characters was rarely utilized and definitely not preferred in most editing situations I was in. I often felt that too much emphasis was placed on the performance of the people in front of the camera or on the image created in the camera and not enough on how to use editing to create a sense of physicality and movement in the characters. I wanted to research conditions for engaging with characters via kinesthetic empathy (feeling their body movement in my own body).

I have written about some of the creative challenges that preceded and spurred this research in the essay *Pre-research Conundrums*.

Link to:  [Essay // PRE-RESEARCH CONUNDRUMS](#)

OVERVIEW OF ARTISTIC AND THEORETICAL CONTEXTS

In *Essay // PRE-RESEARCH CONUNDRUMS*, I also point to filmmakers and films that offer relevant references to what I am interested in and not interested in exploring through this research.

I didn't formally study film at BA or MA level, but I did independent dance for camera projects as part of my MFA in choreography. I was influenced by the video work of DV8 and Rosas in the late eighties and early nineties. The dance film context is further described in *Memoir essays // Editor entering Screen Left – Winter-son getting me going*.

My path to editing was learning how to make my choreographed dance movements have the strongest kinesthetic impact when translated to the screen. I looked for literature to guide me, but most books on editing I found dealt with meaning-making through montage (e.g., Sergei Eisenstein), technology and craft, and anecdotal accounts of editing careers. It wasn't what I looked for, but these insights into editing are important foundations for my research. A full description of the theoretical framework I relate to editing is found in *Academic paper // Creating Character in Editing*, co-written with Karen Pearlman.

[2] Backed up by informal comparisons of course literature among CILECT film editing teachers.

Research on kinesthetic empathy is now an expanding field, and Karen Pearlman's book *Cutting Rhythms*, where she, among other things, writes about its relation to film editing, has become an essential reference when teaching film editing in film schools around the world². Few scholars are working with questions of editing from an embodied perspective, but building on Karen's research, I can see my trajectory of artistic research carving a path within academia. Considering her research approach and our shared experience of moving from dancing to editing, I eventually sought her out to join my supervision team.

Film studies and spectator theory from cognitive and phenomenological perspectives are part of the theoretical framework in *Academic paper // Creating Character in Editing*. The research doesn't explicitly build on feminist film theory and history, but I find support for a feminist approach to my research interests in adjacent academic fields; philosophy, gender studies, ecology, and physics. They are tangentially referenced in *Academic paper // The BLOD method*, co-written with Annika Boholm.

More than in academic fields, I've come to inscribe my research interests in artist traditions that inspire me. Maya Deren's work with dance film and Yvonne Rainer's approach to movement and her shift from dance to film and back to dance are solid influences through my education but not explicitly referenced in this research. Marie-Louise Ekman's and Agnes Varda's films similarly resonate with me in their play with anachronism, surrealism, and theater for film. Detailed examples of my influences are expanded on in *Memoir essays // Editor entering Screen Left – Winterson getting me going* where I write about Derek Jarman.

I am also guided and inspired by texts and authors I keep returning to; Susan Sontag (especially her last book, *Regarding the pain of others*), Jeanette Winterson, and Kerstin Ekman. I write more about them in *Memoir essays // Editor entering Screen Left*.

EDITING RESEARCH

At the beginning of my research education, I had difficulty framing the initial problem I wanted to explore as useful research questions. I also had trouble communicating my artistic research concerns to others. In the academic environment I had entered, I thought maybe this was an effect of the scarcity of frameworks to describe the creative potential of the editing situation and the part that editing plays in shaping cinematic experiences of characters and events. This perception, in turn, fed into another niggling feeling I had; that the creative potential of editing was poorly recognized in the film industry and that the editing phase in filmmaking often didn't have the best conditions (time, footage quality, decision making structure) for a creative process. In extension, there was little recognition of what the individual editor brought to the project in terms of skills, artistic sensibility, and personal past experiences and references. I realized that my project, while starting from the idea of exploring editing to create conditions for kinesthetic empathy

to be the main conduit for connecting with characters on screen, also needed to explore more general conditions for the kind of editing I wanted to research. That meant creating relevant material to edit, exploring the collaborative structure of a film project, working with cinematic storytelling that placed editing at the forefront and finding articulation to share the artistic practice of editing.

I have learned two things to be true regarding the film material to edit (the footage). I cannot edit anything from anything, but at the same time, there is no 'right' way of putting things together embedded in the material. Each editor will treat the material differently and a variety of films can be made from the same material. Even strictly adhering to a script, editing goes far beyond cut and join, beyond chiseling things out and putting them together. The film is not already formed in the material, just like a sculpture does not lay dormant in a piece of rock. But there are limits to what can be shaped from the material at hand. I have found that the creative options for editing increase with footage that balances this dual potential – being particular to the project while I, as the editor, can shape it in different ways. As an editor (an often-invisible intersection of cinematic practices), I am interested in collaborative story creation that happens in the edit room in an environment that allows creative clashes and diverse perspectives and for time to find ways through conflicting views without falling back on one person's veto. This became a priority when I started to design the research process.

As a viewer, I am interested in films where the editing is at the forefront, visible through extensive cutting between multiple perspectives and through fractured narratives. In my attempts to expand the application of editing-centered aesthetics and story creation methods to a broader³ range of films, I have often met resistance from collaborators and other stakeholders like commissioning editors and distributors. However, there are a couple of specific challenges with more editing-centered aesthetics: Extensive cutting can disorient the viewer to the point of not engaging with the film or disembodiment of its subjects into objects. Fractured narratives can make the story emotionally distant and overly confusing or cause it to collapse under the weight of its heavy-handed script construction.

There are also challenges with shifting the story creation phase more into the edit room as some factors that limit the creative options are hard to change or difficult to address due to their implicit nature: collaborator personalities, tastes, power structures, skills, or lack of vocabulary. Factors like the filmed material, deadlines, or other production conditions can be well understood but hard to affect by the time the editing starts.

I fell in love with editing at my first attempt at a video dance, long before I shifted my professional field from dance to film. I still love editing, it holds a vast potential for groundbreaking storytelling and I have theories on how to tap into that potential. I want change and awareness to come out of this research, and I want new conversations around the issues that brought me to it.

[3] It is mainly applied in experimental films, action movies and dance films.

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.



Editing in progress, 2007

I want to develop collaborative structures and creative methods that benefit story creation that takes place in the editing process, to challenge prevalent ideas about authorship in cinema. I want to challenge filmmaking conventions on how to create and perceive cinematic characters – both documentary and fictional. And I want to encourage filmmaking where editing is at the forefront of the aesthetic, with extensive cutting and fractured narratives. By expanding what people know about editing and understand about its possibilities, I hope to change the film industry culture and open a range of creative possibilities throughout the entire film production. I want to contribute to the training of editors and to the professional field of editing by demystifying and sharing an expanded toolbox for the editing process and by highlighting the creative impact of the editor.

Research Questions

Having given myself the challenge to expand the role of film editing (focusing on character), I immersed myself in an academic artistic research context and I worked with my supervisors to devise research questions that could guide my process. My research questions have evolved over the course of the research in a loop: initial queries to start an artistic process, reflection, and sharing of that process which then generates new questions to prompt further actions and processes. My interest in how editing can be used to connect with characters, kinesthetically or otherwise, prompted the need to explore different conditions for research on editing. I went through versions of research questions where the agency of the editor was in focus but let go of that question when I realized that devising methods for exploring editing was the underlying but unarticulated research question. The question of method development (along with content, aesthetics, and production structure) housed the issue of editor agency. When reflecting on and sharing the artistic practice, I have also continuously sought vocabulary to communicate in and around the research. How to find, collect, and introduce a language for the practice has been integral to refining my research questions.

The research questions that guide the project towards conclusion have evolved into the following:

1. CREATING CHARACTER IN 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?

2. CREATIVE PROJECT TO EXPLORE EDITING

What is a useful and challenging creative research design for exploring what editing does to invite and enhance layered experiences of characters in cinematic storytelling?

3. EXPLICATION OF EDITING PROCESSES

What expanded description of film editing can be articulated and explored to explicate it (for students) and deepen understanding and practice (for practitioners)?

Methods, Processes & Artistic Practice

I research through film editing and writing.

The research uses a bouquet of methods tailored to the different research questions. Research through writing has traditions to draw from, and I build on them by framing my texts in different writing styles – academic writing, essays, case studies, etc. The texts also reveal the methods used when writing them, and in this document, I will describe where they fit in the research project as a whole. When it comes to research through editing, I have found fewer research traditions to build from. I therefore provide fuller descriptions of the research methods used for the films that are the outputs from the practice-based research endeavors. Before I go into methods and processes tailored to the research questions, there are some general conditions I've articulated for my research on and through editing.

GENERAL CONDITIONS FOR MY RESEARCH THROUGH EDITING

You can't edit without film material to edit. I needed material that allowed for authoring to take place in the editing process, where I owned the rights to screen it publicly, and where I adhered to specific ethical concerns with regard to what is depicted and who is in front of the camera. To respond to these general conditions regarding material, part of my research has been creating footage for the purpose of the project. To highlight the importance of how the footage is created, I made the design of that creative project one of my research questions.

Another general condition for the explorations I wanted to do, is differentiating between dramaturgy and editing. Both are practices of composition. Roughly put, dramaturgy deals with ordering events and key moments, while editing deals with each detail decision when shaping those events and key moments. To highlight the authorial component of editing, I saw a need to avoid leaning on dramaturgical choices made in the editing room to validate the creative (authorial) participation of editing. To achieve this, I set out to use compositional strategies that favor physical and kinesthetic editing principles over psychological or narrative logic. An overarching condition for editing is the collaborative nature of filmmaking, reflected in my choice to include two co-authored academic papers in the project. One concern when researching through editing is setting up the structure for collaboration so that creative work can be undertaken from an editing perspective. The artistic practice of editing is intrinsically collaborative. (Even if I would write, direct, film, design, and perform myself, I would still collaborate with the material when I edit.) To invite the complexities that come with this collaborative nature of editing into my explorations, I have worked with a co-researcher from the start through the film and research project BLOD, which is further described in relation to research question 2.

The film material I edit in this research is created collaboratively with Annika Boholm, allowing for a collaborative structure where, with my skills in editing thinking, I can take creative part in practices other than editing.

My research through editing rests on the idea of cinematic storytelling as a cooperation of practices more than a collaboration of people with set professional roles. This stance is in part based on research on distributed cognition⁴ in the edit room, in part based on my previous practice where I've identified a need to complicate the standard assignment of roles in relation to the distribution of creative thinking and generation of ideas amongst many professions, practices, and contexts. The editing is affected by the choices that went into creating the film material. Those choices don't necessarily fall within the professional responsibilities of the person hired to edit, even though the actual film material affects what can be done through editing.

[4] Pearlman, Karen, John MacKay, and John Sutton. 2018. "Creative Editing: Svilova and Vertov's Distributed Cognition." *Apparatus. Film, Media and Digital Cultures of Central and Eastern Europe*.



Kersti editing with Annika Boholm, 2019

I research from the vantage point of editing, a practice at the intersection of the different artistic practices that form a unified cinematic story. The practices and professional roles may overlap, but there is a distinction between what the practice of editing does in the whole of the film, what a particular editor does, and the personal imprint they leave. Editing and editor are not necessarily the same but meet in the edit room along with the material and whatever other filmmaking professionals collaborate as part of the editing process. Collaboration doesn't mean creation via an anonymous collective where people are interchangeable. It may not be relevant to say who did this and who did that, but it is relevant to acknowledge the traces of each co-creators imprint on the film. If a film were a weave, we wouldn't say "*the blue did this and the red did that,*" but the threads are still distinctly blue and red.

1. CREATING CHARACTER IN 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?

The method for engaging with this question has one leg in editing practice and one in writing, both starting from my definition of character: a mediated aspect of a person (actor or not) in front of the camera, who in the context of the story creates the narrative through their actions, circumstances, and relationships.

Making video essay: AUTHORIZING CHARACTER THROUGH EDITING

By making a video essay where I illuminate the role of editing in creating narrative by authoring the audience experience of character, I clarify what I mean by character and thus provide an accessible entry point to the research.

The video essay shows that the creation of character not only stems from the actor's performances in front of the camera but can be created through editing. Though depending on what the actor/person did when filming as it is framed in the footage, a character can be created that was not in any script, nor part of the performance or filming setup for the scenes when they were shot. This creation by editing is done by selecting clips or parts of clips, timing them, and placing them in a specific order to imply things about the character's inner life.

Link to:  [Video essay // AUTHORIZING CHARACTER THROUGH EDITING](#)

Writing Paper: CREATING CHARACTER IN EDITING

Through co-writing an academic paper, Creating character in editing, with my secondary supervisor Karen Pearlman, I have explored the question of what editing can do to invite audience engagement with characters. Based on published research (hers and others) and my own editing practice, the work on the paper was a method to articulate how editors make choices that vary actors' performances and directors' instructions and shape the audience's perception of film characters. Through my taxonomy of editors' sources of expertise in shaping character, proposed and developed in the paper, I have investigated possible benefits of linking: learned skills with filmmaker tools; ways to interact with film material; different bases for interpretation; and cinematic positions or perspectives to enhance editor's ability to shape and develop multifaceted characters through editing.

Link to:  [Academic paper // CREATING CHARACTER IN EDITING](#)

For the research through practice I used material from the BLOD project to explore the specifics of character creation. To research the effect of editing on the creation of character in cinematic storytelling, I had to think about what it is that creates a character on screen – what we need to know about a character, what we can convey about a character in the film. I think of it in terms of time. A character can be defined by experiences that she's had in the past, her actions in the present, and her plans and projections for the future. These temporal modes became guidelines for devising different ways to explore how to create character through editing with the BLOD material. I also added other parameters specific to the three editing experiments that have resulted in three short films. I will describe how I worked with the three different short films below.


Editing: AFTER.

For the first exploration focusing purely on character, the short film AFTER., I was interested in conjuring past experiences to create a character, using editing to imply memory. I gave myself the challenge to create a character-based narrative without words, where a character is dealing with a never revealed past and where the editing promotes feeling for, experiencing with, and thinking about the created character.



Stills from AFTER

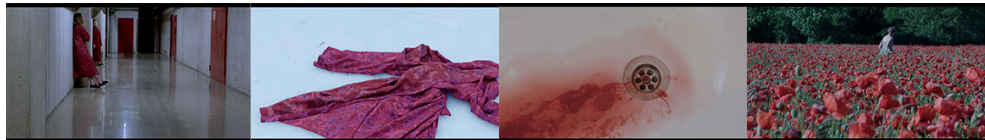
I used material from the ten connected scenes in BLOD, each featuring different characters and set in different rooms, but in the same apartment. Each scene had one or two characters played by one of the BLOD project's two researchers/actors, Annika Boholm and myself. Explicitly calling on skills in continuity editing, my embodied response to character movement, and her reactions to laws of physics, I sought to merge the characters played by Annika into one main character. Using montage principles, I wanted to create the character's inner life by implying memories tied to one character who is merged from separate characters from different scenes, times, and rooms, but linked by being portrayed by the same physical person in front of the camera.

Link to:  [BLOD short film // AFTER](#)

The short film *AFTER.* is also referenced in *Academic paper // The BLOD method*, co-written with Annika Boholm, *Academic paper // Creating character in editing*, co-written with Karen Pearlman, and extensively referenced and explained in Video essay *// Authoring character through editing*.

Editing: RED VELVET

For the second short-form character creation exploration, I wanted to convey the character by implying her plans and projections for the future. The main character in the short film *RED VELVET*, played by me, reacts to an explicit piece of information which spurs collages of footage that is erratic and spans very different places, situations, and tempos to invoke a sense of turmoil, a state of mind that can be interpreted as projections or associations. The editing also moves depicted situations rapidly through time, distorting cause and effect to allude to the events being hypothetical rather than real.



Stills from *Red Velvet*


Red Velvet – a score in G

Something has happened
Paralyzing numbness
Blood ringing in the ears
A creeping feeling of inevitability
Heavy door closing in slow-motion
Red
Apocalyptic visions
Stunned silence and immobility
Roaring panic and fear
Red

Manic chattering to quell the downward
sucking undercurrent
Green
Red
Spiraling
|
Grey
Floating in a cold sea
The comfort of the dying

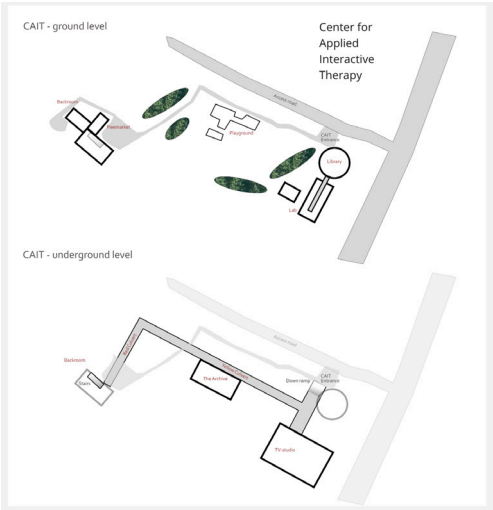


The composition of this film started from a score that I wrote, poetic imagery that traced an emotional journey of the character. The character's inner life is created by the audience's projection of their own reactions to the harsh news delivered and enforced by jagged editing to manipulate the viewer and to project their own physical reactions to distorted rhythm and cognitive confusion. As with *AFTER.*, the outer delineation of the character is organized around the likeness of the one actor, but the narrative here is built on audience sensemaking (or not) of fragmented dialogue, actions, and story events.

Link to:  [BLOD short film // RED VELVET](#)

Editing: The Four Day Intensive

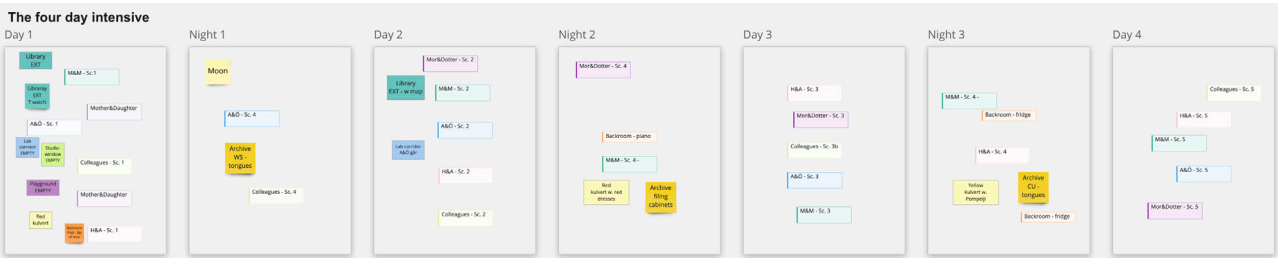
For a third short-form experiment, *the Four Day Intensive* explores how to create an array of characters that are understood as different people even though the same actor portrays them. I edited the film from the BLOD therapy scenes featuring the two therapists, five therapy couples, and two lab techs. All in all, 12 characters are played by two actors. The distinctness of each character is drawn from the actors’ performances in the different scenes and roles. To flesh out the distinctness of the characters, I tried to highlight how they were separate from each other at any given time or place as the story unfolds.



I meticulously stayed with the present as the temporal mode for the narrative, using editing to create a continuous time and space from scenes that were written and filmed without temporal or spatial relationships.

I made a map of how the locations featured in each scene relate to each other. The map helps with transitions between scenes and the relative placement of the characters.

The dramaturgy follows a linear timeline of four days and three nights. Editing in this chronological fashion is a way to help create containers for the different characters to be seen as different people reacting in various manners in different situations. Before starting to edit, I built the dramaturgy on paper (from the therapy session scripts).



Timeline/scripts

To further separate the characters, I enhanced contrasts and details of costumes and separated them by their direction of movement and gaze while also emphasizing the linearity of time. Actions are edited with continuity, precluding inference of inner visions or memory. In this exploration, the challenge was to define conditions for each character’s situation and create the character through their actions and reactions to these conditions.

Link to:  *BLOD short film // THE FOUR DAY INTENSIVE*



Stills from *The Four Day Intensive*

2. CREATIVE PROJECT TO EXPLORE EDITING

What is a useful and challenging creative research design for exploring what editing does to invite and enhance layered experiences of characters in cinematic storytelling?

To explore what editing does in character creation, I needed to design a film and research project conducive to my research interests. The collaborative nature of editing called for a collaborative project, not just me sitting there authoring by myself. I needed control of copyrights and not to be limited by hierarchies or preconceived role assignment. To explore editing of characters, the project needed content with people (characters) and relationships at the center. The film material should accommodate an aesthetic of fragmentation and processes of reassembly that revolve around movement, bodies, and embodied experiences. It also required a collaborative structure and creative process that promoted story making to take place in the edit situation.



Still from *BLOD*

Collaboratively and in response to my research needs, co-researcher Annika Boholm and I devised the film and research project *BLOD* based on her vision of a hospital bed on a soccer field. It is beyond the scope of my research to look at all of the potential practical and theoretical enquiries that could be contained within *BLOD*, so for the purpose of the PhD-project *Beyond Cut and Join*, I am focused primarily on one: explorations of editing.

The *BLOD* project is a fragmented and kaleidoscopic character and relationship-based set of possibilities to be fully realized in editing, and the research method is embedded in the feature film *BLOD*.

Link to:  *Feature film // BLOD*

BLOD is a shared site for research aiming to go beyond norms regarding content, aesthetics, and modes of collaboration in cinematic storytelling.

The story content revolves around female bleeding from cradle to grave and emotional swells in the wake of the blood – between people when bodies fail. The film events are based on our shared experiences of being humans with brains, hearts, and uterus.

Within the *BLOD* project Annika writes the scripts and I edit. All other hands-on artistic processes, including the acting, are done jointly and uncompromisingly, thus challenging traditional industry hierarchies. Cinematic naturalism and narrative logic are challenged in both imagery and mise-en-scene. The artistic research method has been articulated in the academic paper, *The BLOD Method*, co-written with Annika Boholm.

Link to:  *Academic paper // THE BLOD METHOD*



BLOD poster

3. EXPLICATION OF EDITING PROCESSES

What expanded description of film editing can be articulated and explored to explicate it (for students) and deepen understanding and practice (for practitioners)?

To address how to expand the role of film editing by explicating its processes, I use different methods to describe my creative process and creative strategies when editing.

When navigating the complexities of editing as an artistic practice, I could say that I rely on my “intuition,” which can mean a range of things from unreflective, split-second expert judgements and kinesthetic responses in my own body, to personal associations between frames, clips, and scenes in paths I could probably never account for as they stem from a complex mix of my cultural exposure, personal experiences, my disposition, accumulated learning, impressions, etc. In addition to referencing already articulated editing theories and craft principles, I use different methods to unearth more opaque aspects of my editing processes – academic writing to unpack embodied expertise and implicit knowledge, personal essays to reveal threads of my entangled associations, and teaching to test the explications and deepen my understanding.

Academic Paper

I grappled with the question of an expanded description of film editing when co-writing the *Academic paper // CREATING CHARACTER IN EDITING* with Karen Pearlman. Starting from her extensive research on intuitive editing, distributed cognition, cutting rhythms, and the authorial agency of editors, our co-written paper builds on findings in a range of publications. It proposes a new articulation of editing processes that involve kinesthetic empathy and implicit knowledge regarding laws of physics, autonomous reactions, and cultural conditioning. While primarily applied to the process of creating characters in editing, the writing of the paper has also been a method to expand descriptions of editing of both documentary and fiction beyond the paper’s focus on character.

Link to:  *Academic paper // CREATING CHARACTER IN EDITING*

Memoir Essays


To emphasize the editor's personal creative impact on the editing, one of my methods to deal with the question of explicating film editing processes, is to write memoir essays where the writing practice is close to the form, content, and address of my editing practice. These essays are attempts to share my tastes, ethics, biases, and the conditions and experiences that have shaped me.



Kersti rehearsing choreography "Flickering images of Something Else" with dancer Kate Weare (right) at ODC Theater, San Francisco in 1997

I believe that these factors leave traces through my editing. If they are known, they can be felt as my handprint on the film without showing a simplistic causal relationship between a particular edit and me as the editor. The writing will touch on editing and sometimes individual film projects or processes but doesn't seek to make direct references to or try to explain films that are part of the research practice.

I choose personal writing in the shape of memoir essays for its authoritative approach to describing me as an editor. I am the only one who can say something with authority about what I bring to the process and how I react to the conditions of a project. By sharing some background of my particular cinematic handprint, I use this writing method to provide an example that speaks to individual contribution versus collaboration in filmmaking.

Link to:  [Memoir Essay Collection // EDITOR ENTERING SCREEN LEFT](#)

PEDAGOGIC Collateral

This research project is embedded in dialogue with my teaching practice. A method for explicating editing processes is the teaching situation itself, and the ongoing conversations with students and teaching colleagues. The idea of cinematic storytelling as a cooperation of practices rather than a collaboration of people with set professional roles is a key concept in my teaching of filmmaking and the foundation of the film education curriculum I proposed. The articulating of physical principles for editing developed from the research is further refined in the teaching, and then re-applied to the research practice in a loop. What this loop of research and teaching has generated beyond the research questions is further described under the heading Pedagogic collateral.

When I started my PhD-research education, I also assumed the assistant professor position in film editing. Since then, I have formally divided my time between teaching and research, but the endeavors are intertwined. Some of my pedagogical work has developed from my research, manifested in parallel with the research, and has recurrently affected the trajectory of the research. Below are three examples of pedagogic outputs linked to the research project.

Physical Editing

Physical Editing is an advanced-level course with models for applying choreographic tools to interpreting, composing and editing film material without dialogue. This approach to teaching editing connects questions of filmmaker perspective, ethics, interpretation, and viewer experience to concrete film practice, challenging them in their artistry beyond reaching an audience.

Link to:  *Course Description // PHYSICAL EDITING*


Creating Character course

Since 2017 I have kept developing a course in editing that focuses on character creation. I presented the course as a case study at the Cilect conference “A Perfect Film Editor” and the Polish film school in Lodz in November 2021. The course is part of the curriculum for BA students specializing in film editing on both bachelor’s and master’s levels at Stockholm University of the Arts.

Link to:  *pdf of Conference Presentation // CREATING CHARACTER*

Curriculum Development Film and Media

In 2019 I proposed a new program structure for the film and media department at SKH based on my research in editing practice and collaboration in filmmaking. The proposal addressed structural problems, department teaching culture, student needs for greater influence over their individual path through the program, and the demands of a changing media technology and climate. BA-level students would get exposure to a wider variety of skills, genres, and platforms, and a closer link to the research environment and theoretical film studies. The new MA program would offer students to either specialize in a subdiscipline as part of film teams (making the film education a five-year progression) or choose an MA track of individual processes which might suit experienced professionals preparing for further research.


Link to:  *Proposal Presentation // CURRICULUM FILM AND MEDIA*

The curriculum of the new BA and MA programs was implemented for the BA and the MA of the individual tracks in 2020, and for the MA team tracks in 2021.

METHODS FOR SHARING, SHARING AS METHOD

Sharing the research process with others while it is still underway is also part of my method. Reflections on insights gained from designing and giving workshops and research presentations, as well as conversations with collaborators and participants, has informed and altered the research methods in an ongoing way. Over the course of the research, I have continuously documented and shared it with others. I have collaborated on presentation design with co-researcher Annika Boholm. Both the documentation and the different ways of sharing (collective or individual, in research contexts, in public or in teaching) have looped back into the research and generated new material, new ideas, additional layers and complexities, as well as new inquiries.

Obscured issues embedded in the research queries have been particularly clarified by moments of being misunderstood, not getting through, or having presentation formats questioned. The research has deepened and taken new paths in response to the lack of common terminology, expectations on pre-assigned roles in filmmaking and in research, and tensions between performance and media. These moments have also spurred the evolution of presentation forms and been incentives to use presentation opportunities as research moments.


Link to:  *Presentation documentations // BLOD SCREENING ROOM*

Both documentation and sharing (exposition) are iterative aspects of my research method. I have included a link to some unedited video documentations from research presentations as examples of this iterative component of the process.

On documentation

When it comes to documenting the artistic manifestations that come out of the research, I consider the research films themselves documentation of the artwork. Other film researchers may argue that a streaming link is only a partial documentation/rendition and that a theatrical cinema experience – controlled visuals, sound, focus – is needed to document the artwork justly. From my editing perspective, as long as the key cinematic elements are present, the film is the documentation of the artwork whatever media format it is viewed and preserved in.

I also think of documentation as traces that a process has left outside the artistic manifestations or academic outputs of the research – in the form of notes, in-progress documents, photographs, physical objects, and records of time. This kind of documentation forms the building blocks of a digital exposition of processes for the BLOD project.

Link to:  *Research Catalogues Exposition // BLOD, BLOD(y), BLOD*

Conclusions & Further Questions

I started this research endeavor because I thought the artistic practice of editing was undervalued, and editors often were treated as interchangeable. Lauding editing as magic only adds to the elusiveness of the practice – magic happens and if it doesn't, there is nothing to do about it. Lauding the genius intuition of certain editors highlights the precariousness of editors' positions as members of the creative team – if that intuition fails, what is there to do but replace the editor? I knew before I started that editing matters and that it matters who edits. Still, through this research, I have learned more about how editing matters and *why* it matters who edits, and how and why hold keys to elevating the status of this artistic practice that I love so much. The following are some specific conclusions supporting an expanded role of film editing.

- **We can say more about editing characters than that it is intuitive.**
Through teaching, writing, and the practice experiments, I have developed and made creative use of an expanded vocabulary for collaboration, problem-solving, and editor skill development.
- **We can design film projects that favor the editing process.**
The collaborative structure and kaleidoscopic nature of the BLOD project design has creative conditions to edit films with different stories, different formats, tones, and focus from the same material.
- **We can create characters in editing.**
The BLOD short films have been fertile experiments that have shown how much creative editing can affect how characters are perceived and understood, whether merging characters from different storylines into one or differentiating characters played by the same actors using editing to highlight spatial and temporal relations.
- **We can imagine a different role for the editor.**
The BLOD project has demonstrated some of the potentials for that role – as author, as character creator, world builder, and inference instigator. We created film material to be creatively handled as if that expanded role existed in order to bring that new role into being.
- **Editing can be considered an authorial practice.**
Working with the BLOD material, editing has significantly shaped the various films, whether editing closely to the written scripts or not. Editing epitomizes attention to detail and actualization of ideas; it is in the details and the doing that each creative voice leaves its authorial impact.
- **This research has challenged the idea that an artistic vision needs to be carried by one distinct voice (the director).** Pushing uncompromising collaboration within the BLOD project has offered alternatives to single-leader approaches.

- **We can see why personal experiences among editors are important.** By demonstrating the impact and handprint of one editor (me), this research points to the importance of diversity and representation in all cinematic artistic practices, not only the designated authors or people on screen.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

I hope to expand the discussions in the film industry about what risks are involved when striving for conformity and simplicity at the expense of multiplicity and diversity. Whether it be dramaturgical ‘script-doctoring,’ streamlined collective decision-making, or calls for ‘new’ individual voices, I want to challenge those normative values. I hope to infuse the debate with critical questions about what produces authoritarian and exclusionary film environments and the risks of subscribing to any single perspective. Further questions include how to design film projects so that a multitude of voices are invited, allowed creative license, and recognized in their own right.

I am also interested in further creating conditions for connection with what we don’t recognize, emphasizing how to share the experience of characters’ physical predicament to enhance kinesthetic empathy. Potential outputs from research that builds on this PhD project include a textbook on physical editing, academic papers, and conference presentations on collaboration, interactive sharing, and film teaching.

The research has proven to be fertile ground for many exciting directions, all emphasizing of the artistry of editors and the creative potential of editing. I have already begun to devise new research projects based on the BLOD method in collaboration with Annika Boholm. They include, but are not limited to, a short film about the Boulanger sisters and a research project, *Re-imagining Filmmaking as Embodied*.