ABSTRACT

Editing *Closet Memories*: Theory and Methodology

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Editing is a unique aspect of the filmmaking process that involves crafting production footage and audio into a cohesive story. The editor must also approach the film with an objective eye in order to craft the best narrative possible. This study examines the creative editing process of *Closet Memories*, a short film, from preproduction through post-production as well as the relationship between the editor and director and how the vision of each shaped the film from the rough cut to the final cut.

Editing *Closet Memories*: Theory and Methodology

by

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A Thesis

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CHAPTER ONE

Storytelling and Professional Goals

The ultimate goal of this thesis is to apply various editing theories and genre conventions to the editing of *Closet Memories* in an attempt to effectively tell a story. It was important to document this short film as it evolved from the rough cut to the final cut during post-production. As an editor, I needed to approach the material objectively and without ego in an attempt to make decisions that best serve the story, which is the ultimate role of the editor.

The role of editor, like others in the production of a film, is collaborative, and it was important for this project and my professional development that I documented my experiences with the director as I attempted to enhance the story while honoring her vision. Outlining the role of the editor, Ken Dancyger is quick to point out that "it is an overstatement for any one person involved in filmmaking to claim that his or her role is the exclusive source of creativity in the filmmaking process" (xxi). Before I acquired the footage, my only way of judging the project was through a script reading and my relationship with the director. I was committed to the project and had no knowledge of the performances, coverage, and overall quality of the footage I would be editing. This is the position almost every editor finds himself in when he begins a project. As one can see, this approach presents a clear problem: the editor often has little to no say in the quality of the footage he receives. The same is true in this case study; I was presented with the footage and called upon my research and prior editing experience to sculpt the raw footage and sound into a cohesive whole that has clarity and impact. This brings up

a role of the editor that is often overlooked: correcting mistakes made during the filming process. A good editor can make a good film great, but it takes a great editor to make a bad film bearable. Dancyger states that, "the editor presents options, points out areas of confusion, and identifies redundant scenes. The winnowing process is an intuitive search for clarity and dynamism" (xxi).

It is difficult to understand the impact an editor has on the finished product unless one has witnessed the entire editing process. Therefore, I attempt to shed light on the decision-making process that editors are faced with during the post-production phase of filmmaking. The editor is meant to act as an extension of the director by adopting his or her point of view (Dancyger xix). This does not mean that the editor is obligated to agree with the director's opinions, but to view the film from a broader perspective, much like a director. The editor must understand how each shot fits together within a scene and how each scene relates to each other, not to mention understanding how the cinematography, acting, and sound also affect the story. With this perspective the editor must ask questions that include, but are not limited to: What, if anything, needs to be cut out of the film? Do I need to cut around poor performances? How do I cut around production mistakes and continuity errors? How do I balance the drama and action of the film without it becoming heavy-handed? How do I achieve an appropriate visual rhythm for the film? And most importantly: How do I creatively interact with the director? How do I honor the vision of the director while adding my own creative contributions? How do I handle disagreements with the director? These are only a few of the questions swirling within the editor's mind during the cutting of a film. This thesis is not meant to be representative of the process involved in all films, but the process that worked best for me

the film. It is, in that sense, a case study. In order to tell this story effectively, I attempt to move beyond the execution of editing technique and craft to elevate my editing to an artistic level. Reaching an artistic level means that I have achieved emotional resonance within the viewer. Over the course of this project I fully expected to alter (and improve) my decision making process and, as a result, become a better editor.

Before editing a film, it is important to examine films of the same genre in order to gain an understanding of various techniques that may provide inspiration. *Closet Memories* is a story about a teenage female protagonist who must defend her school from armed gunmen while dealing with her own demons. Given the serious subject matter, I examined drama and thriller genres in order to maximize tension when appropriate. In the script there is a brief flashback sequence that reveals information about Austin, the protagonist, and her relationship with her deceased mother. I want to utilize this footage in creative ways throughout the film so that I can gradually endear the audience to Austin because she is an anti-hero. I must find the right balance so that I do not overuse the flashbacks to the point of making them a crutch. I enjoy utilizing flashbacks because they provide character insight while also adding an element of nonlinearity. Nonlinear editing forces the audience to pay closer attention to the narrative and offers an unexpected layer of dynamism that encourages the viewer to engage the story. From the perspective of an editor, nonlinear story structure is fascinating to cut because it requires one to think more creatively than one might for a linear narrative. A nonlinear story is not chronological, giving the editor the freedom to play with the structure of the film, which is a welcome break from the more solidified structure of a linear film. I am

particularly drawn to the nonlinear editing style of Lee Smith, A.C.E. in films like *The Prestige* and *Inception*.

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CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Researching various texts and films was crucial to my preparation for editing

Closet Memories. I examined literature that offered editing techniques and theories that

aided my creative approach to the film as well as accounts of the relationship between

directors and editors. I also viewed films that display an effective use of editing

conventions from suspense and thriller genres.

Film Literature

The most valuable text for evaluating Closet Memories is Norman Hollyn's *The*

Lean Forward Moment. According to Hollyn, the Lean Forward Moment (LFM) occurs

during a key moment in the scene when a change occurs that affects the arc of the main

character (15). In order to identify the change, Hollyn states that the filmmaker must ask

three questions: 1) Whose scene is this? 2) How does the character change from the

beginning of the scene to its end? 3) Where exactly does the change occur in the scene?

(Hollyn12)

The point at which the character's change occurs is the LFM. It is during the

LFM that there needs to be a change in the editing to accentuate the character's change.

The change can be in pacing, shot size, camera work, movement, music, sound design or

a combination of all of these elements. A key to identifying the LFM in each scene is

understanding the script in depth. This approach was incredibly useful in my preparation

to edit *Closet Memories.* I analyzed the script for the LFM in each scene.

Understanding the psychological effects of editing was crucial to crafting my cuts around a LFM. In *In the Blink of an Eye, a Perspective on Film Editing*, Walter Murch examines the psychology of editing, why it works, and what works best, from his experiences. Two of Murch's editing principles were of special importance for this project.

The first principle is to create the most with the least (Murch 15). It is easy to over-edit a scene by using too many cuts and showing the viewer more than is needed. If the editor shows too much, too quickly the viewer will not be able to engage in the story and search for himself (Murch 16). Murch states that "past a certain point, the more effort that you put into a wealth of detail the more you encourage the audience to become spectators rather than participants" (15).

The second principle is the rule of six, which states that there are "six criteria that make a good cut" (Murch 17). The six criteria are 1) emotion 2) story 3) rhythm 4) eye-trace 5) two-dimensional plane of the screen and 6) three dimensional plane of the screen. Emotion outweighs all other criteria combined, while story outweighs the four after it. An ideal cut is made of all six, but "emotion…at the top of the list is the thing you must try to preserve at all costs. If you find you have to sacrifice certain of those six things to make a cut, sacrifice your way up, item by item, from the bottom" (Murch 18-9).

These were valuable principles when I edited *Closet Memories*. If I failed to satisfy these principles, the viewer could become emotionally disconnected from the narrative. I had to find a way to preserve the emotion of the story, without over-indulging and pointing to the obvious.

In addition to understanding the psychology of editing, it was necessary for me to understand how to achieve thematic goals, such as editing for suspense. *The Technique of Film & Video Editing: History, Theory, and Practice* by Ken Dancyger is an incredibly insightful and all encompassing text. The first half examines the evolution of editing throughout cinema history and how modern techniques built upon the early innovations of D.W. Griffith, Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod I. Pudovkin, and Dziga Vertov. Understanding how filmmakers have advanced the art of editing throughout history encouraged me to think outside of the box when I approached the editing of *Closet Memories*. The text also examines effective uses of sound in storytelling. Dancyger delves deeply into editing for various goals (such as dramatic emphasis), genre, and editing principles. This is one of the most complex and immersive sources on editing that I have found.

Bobby O'Steen examines various scenes from famous films and breaks down why they are effective in *The Invisible Cut: How Editors Make Movie Magic*. Breaking down a scene from the editor's perspective is invaluable because it reveals useful ways for me to approach the editing of *Closet Memories*. The first half of the book outlines basic editing rules and principles, but the second half plunges the reader into scene analysis, which is the best part of the book.

One of the most difficult aspects of editing to master is pacing and rhythm. In *Cutting Rhythms: Shaping the Edit*, Karen Pearlman examines the function of rhythm in editing, how to shape rhythm in films, and how to develop rhythmic intuition as an editor. Some of Pearlman's greatest insights include emotional rhythm, event rhythm, and style. The text does not examine basic editing rules; instead it examines the effect of great

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rhythm and how to achieve it. Editing rhythm is an incredibly misunderstood topic that greatly aided the shaping of *Closet Memories* and hopefully draws the viewer into the story.

<p align="center">*Memoirs*</p>

Although *When the Shooting Stops…The Cutting Begins: A Film Editor's Story* is an autobiographical work about Rosenblum's editing career, it is filled with insightful experiences regarding the editing process and his relationship with various directors. The most remarkable chapter chronicles Rosenblum's editing of *Annie Hall* and serves as powerful evidence for the impact of a great editor. Before he began editing the picture, Rosenblum describes *Annie Hall* as "an untitled and chaotic collection of bits and pieces that seemed to defy continuity, bewilder its creators, and, of all of [Woody] Allen's films, hold the least potential for popular success" (273). During the editing process, Rosenblum and Allen transformed the film from a series of comedic bits to a narrative about the relationship between Allen's character and Annie Hall. This text encouraged me to work openly with the director and consistently think outside of the box as I attempted to edit *Closet Memories* in the clearest, most effective way possible.

<p align="center">*Films*</p>

The Godfather is referenced more than any other film in Hollyn's text because it offers a superb example of crafting a scene around a LFM. The scene examined is the sequence in which Michael Corleone kills Solozzo. That sequence is a perfect example of building up to a LFM and then creating subtle changes in the editing and soundtrack to accentuate those moments. *The Godfather* also displays fantastic dramatic beats and character development.

<p align="center">8</p>

Few films create tension better than *The Silence of the Lambs*, which is why it is essential to study before I edit *Closet Memories*. One scene in particular that stands out to me is the first meeting between Clarice and Hannibal. Craig McKay, A.C.E. creates an eerie tension in the scene that I tried to re-create when Elliott asks Austin for her key.

When I watch Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*, there are two scenes in particular that stand out to me: the scene between LaPedite and Hans Landa and the scene in the German Pub. These scenes are important because they are incredibly long dialogue scenes, yet the tension Sally Menke, A.C.E. creates is incredible. The pacing of these scenes is very deliberate, and there are plenty of pauses for the characters to think and react. Tremendous tension exists when characters' eyes meet and they remain silent; they are studying each other, calculating, figuring out what to do next. Depending on the tone of the scene, this can create intense and introspective moments. I am always in favor of giving the viewer time to read the character's face when it is appropriate. There are numerous moments in *Closet Memories* when it was critical to build tension or intimacy through silence.

No Country for Old Men carries an eerie tension throughout the film thanks, in part, to its editing and sound design. The rhythm of the cuts is very deliberate and methodical, which matches the unsettlingly calm and composed demeanor of the film's antagonist, Anton Chigurh. This creates tension because the viewer must hold on a shot longer than is typical of a film that involves a game of cat and mouse between characters. The viewer anticipates the outcome of the conflict, but when more time is spent on the buildup, the tension and discomfort of the viewer builds as well. Joel and Ethan Coen create a soundtrack that is devoid of a score, instead opting for the near quiet sounds of

the desert. This lack of sound mirrors the ghost-like presence of Chigurh as he hunts

Llewellyn Moss and enhances the use of sound effects like the beeping of the transmitter.

Drive is yet another example of what deliberate pacing can do to elevate the

tension of a scene. The scene in which Driver is waiting for Standard to rob a pawnshop

is gut-wrenchingly intense. Once Standard and Blanche enter the shop, the focus stays on

Driver as he sits in the car. There is no score, only the faint sound of his wristwatch

ticking. Limiting the viewer to Driver's perspective creates anxiety because he has no

idea how the robbery is going. When Blanche exits with the money, one still wonders

where Standard is and what is holding him up. It is not until Standard walks out that

some of the tension is released and Standard is then unexpectedly shot. There is a similar

scene in *Closet Memories* in which the audience is limited to the perspective of three

characters while they await the arrival of two others.

Closet Memories contains moments of nonlinearity, and Christopher Nolan's

Memento serves as a prime example of an expertly crafted nonlinear narrative. I am

deeply drawn to nonlinear storytelling because it forces the audience to pay attention and

match the pace of the narrative. The events of *Memento* not only play in reverse, but play

forward as well, and eventually merge at the end (or is it the beginning?) of the film.

Dody Dorn, A.C.E. crafts the film in such a way that the nonlinear storytelling draws the

viewer into Leonard's condition and is never reduced to merely becoming a device.

From an editing perspective, *Inception* is one of the most influential works I have

ever seen. Lee Smith, A.C.E. had his work cut out for him when he began editing

Inception because the film contains several storylines happening simultaneously as the

characters plunge deeper though multiple dream layers of a character's mind. I enjoy the

nonlinear elements of *Inception*, but I am particularly mesmerized by Smith's careful balancing act between each storyline while presenting the narrative clearly. Most editors will utilize parallel action a couple of times within a film, but Smith does it for over an hour of the film's running time.

Bennett Miller's *Moneyball* does a fantastic job of pacing conversations in a very realistic manner. Christopher Tellefson, A.C.E. creates plenty of realistic and awkward pauses in the dialogue between characters. In a film scripted by Aaron Sorkin and Steve Zaillian it is easy for the dialogue to be delivered at an incredibly fast rate, but Tellefson shows restraint, allowing conversations to flow in real time. Natural pauses before each character speaks add gravity to what they say, and emphasize the speed of the dialogue when it does pick up during a whirlwind trade deal. The film also effectively cuts to flashbacks of the young Billy Beane during his short-lived baseball career. These flashbacks are utilized in a way that is impactful without being heavy-handed.

Unhelpful Sources

The *Grammar of the Edit* presents an explanation of the most basic editing rules. This is great for explaining editing technique and, to a lesser extent, craft, but does not discuss how these build on each other to raise a film to an artistic level. Although this is an incredibly useful text for beginning editors, it did not aid me in my research because it did not deconstruct complex and subtle editing conventions that I am sought for this project.

Richard Pepperman's *The Eye is Quicker: Film Editing*, offers a step-by-step approach to cutting scenes based on various situations such as parallel action, emotion, and proper use of cutaways, just to name a few. Instead of offering ways of approaching

general situations, he offers examples of various sequences analyzed cut-by-cut. The attention to sequences and not the overarching narrative gives the impression that Pepperman is more concerned with the craft of the edit, rather than the overall art. This is a useful guide for applying editing techniques to specific situations, but does not stand out as an overall editing guide.

Put simply, *On Film Editing: An Introduction to the Art of Film Construction* is dated. Ed Dmytryk has extensive editing experience, but throughout the text he urges the reader to not deviate from the established editing rules and principles. Although this might be useful for a beginning editor, it does not encourage abstract and experimental editing to which modern filmmakers are accustomed. It is for this reason that this text feels dated and was not useful for the editing of *Closet Memories*.

Sight, Sound, and Motion is Herbert Zettl's seminal text on applied media aesthetics and contains two chapters on editing: one covers continuity editing while the other covers complexity editing. This book is a fantastic reference for media aesthetics and wonderful for beginning editors, but served little purpose for the editing of *Closet Memories*. I was more interested in working toward perfecting my editing ability with this film, which means understanding how to build upon basic techniques so that I can incite specific emotions in the viewer.

Gael Chandler presents various editing conventions that are used to grab the viewer's attention in *Film Editing: Great Cuts Every Filmmaker and Movie Lover Must Know*, but does not go beyond that. At best the text works as a menu of techniques that are good in specific situations, but it does not cultivate thinking that encourages using them in new and interesting ways.

Conclusion

Of all the literature analyzed, Norman Hollyn's LFM approach was the most useful theory as I prepared to edit *Closet Memories* because it helped me pinpoint moments of emphasis in each scene. Viewing suspenseful and thrilling films made me more aware of effective genre editing techniques, all of which benefited the editing of the film. Next, I identify the LFM for each scene to determine which portions the editing will be crafted around.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The methodology for editing *Closet Memories* consisted of analyzing each scene in the final draft of the script and identifying key LFM's around which I structured the editing of each scene. The LFM represents a moment when a key change occurs or decision is faced by the characters that will propel the plot of the story forward. In order to subtly emphasize the importance of these moments I made changes in the editing of the scene. These editing changes are reflected in altered shot selection, subject size, pacing, or sound design. I also discuss any scenes that needed to be restructured or shortened.

Scenes 1 & 2

These opening scenes involve a voiceover monologue by Austin, the main character, who is then introduced after apparently shooting someone in her high school's gym. As she holds the gun, police officers bust into the gym and tell her to lower her weapon. She does not lower her weapon and is shot. The LFM in this scene occurs when she is told to lower her weapon, but she does not. This scene ends as Austin is shot, creating a cliffhanger that causes the viewer to wonder how she got into that situation in the first place. The next scene takes the viewer back several months before the shooting.

Scene 3

This scene is, chronologically, the beginning of Austin's story. She has just been hit by Lacey (a classmate) with volleyball in the gym. The story is from Austin's

perspective, so the viewer is not quite sure if Austin is being bullied or this act was an accident. The LFM occurs after Lacey's apology to Austin because the viewer is wondering how Austin will retaliate. Tension mounts because the viewer is already aware that Austin will kill later in the story, and is not sure what her day-to-day demeanor is like.

<div align="center">Scene 4</div>

Austin is sitting in class alone, writing in her notebook before class starts. Mace Burning, a new student, enters trying to get his bearings before class. Austin shrugs off his small talk until he introduces himself. Mace is genuinely friendly, but Austin pauses before she gives him her name. This is the LFM moment because she is quiet and reclusive, which makes his potential friendship a significant part of the story. She gives him her name, accepting his friendship.

<div align="center">Scene 5</div>

Scene 5 opens with the off-screen dialogue of Mr. Nathan, her calculus teacher, scolding her for writing in her notebook instead of paying attention in class. The location does not change from the previous scene, which aligns the viewer with Austin's perspective of being caught up in writing in her notebook. Time was bridged with one cut. The time waiting for Austin's response to Mr. Nathan is the first LFM of the scene because Austin feels victimized and the audience is unsure of how she might react. During Austin's scolding, Mace abruptly enters, late for class. There is clearly tension between them as he sits behind her. Her visible nervousness from having potentially angered a new friend is the second LFM of the scene because the viewer is unsure of how she will handle the situation the next time they can talk (It should be noted that it is

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possible for there be more than one LFM in each scene). As the plot progresses, a character may be faced with more than one moment that affects his or her arc in any given scene. This presented an interesting dilemma, because I had to create some sort of subtle change in the editing to accentuate the first LFM and then create another change for the second LFM.

<p align="center">*Scene 6*</p>

Austin walks through the hallway during a passing period, counting her paces. The LFM is created by the uncertainty of why she is counting.

<p align="center">*Scene 7*</p>

Mace confronts Austin about him being late for class and what initially feels like an angry confrontation actually becomes playful. After he tells her that he is on Mr. Nathan's bad side, the LFM occurs when she does not know how to react and thinks he is upset with her.

<p align="center">*Scene 8*</p>

Austin arrives at home and has a strained conversation with her father, Monte, as she clearly resists his attempts to be an involved father. While she is unloading her car, he gets a call from Elliott, an employee at his gun store who tells him that a shipment of semi-automatic guns has gone missing. The LFM occurs when Austin becomes very interested in the missing guns because she may have information that her father does not know.

Scene 9

Austin retires to her room, pulls a black bag out of her closet, and begins drawing a map. It is at this moment that she begins planning for a school shooting. She lays out her supplies and walks through every detail and schedules the shooting down to the minute. The montage builds to a climax as she plans the shooting to occur during a pep rally on August 24th, but the LFM occurs when she writes "Mace Burning?" on the map. It is at this point the viewer should realize that she might spare Mace. Tension is created because of the developing relationship between Austin and Mace and because he has been endeared to the viewer by this point. Throughout the scene there are references to a photo of Austin's mother and cutaways to home video footage, which add intrigue to the relationship between Austin and her absent mother. There is a moment at the end of the scene when Austin's dad knocks on her door to see if she wants dinner. This is arbitrary and was cut from the story.

Scene 10

At school Austin overhears two girls talking about Mace and the relationship he has formed with Lacey. After the hallway has cleared, Elliott appears and tells Austin that her father told him to get his key from her so that he can pick up an item for work. The LFM occurs as she debates whether or not to give him the key. This is certainly an unusual occurrence, which makes Austin skeptical. Austin eventually gives Elliott the key and, afterward, he has an odd encounter with another student who recognizes him.

Scenes 11 – 14

It is the day of the shooting and as Austin walks into the gym she encounters Mace, who tells her he has saved a seat in the stands for her, but Austin tells him she left

something in her locker. As he walks away, the first LFM occurs. At this point, the audience is anticipating the drama of the shooting and is unsure whether Mace will be spared. She locks all of the doors to the gym, walks in, and begins shooting students. During the course of the shooting, Austin singles out Liz Burning, Mace's sister. As she slowly walks toward the huddled Liz, the LFM occurs. It seems to take an eternity to get to her, which raises the tension as the viewer hopes Austin does not shoot Liz. Austin shoots Liz and as she falls to the ground, she pulls Austin's locket from her neck. Austin sees a horrified Mace and realizes she has made a grave mistake.

Scene 15

There is a cut to Austin in her room, frantically unloading the guns, when she looks at a locket that her mother once gave her and begins to cry. The LFM moment occurs as she looks at the locket and begins to cry. The memory of her mother played a role in preventing the shooting, leaving the viewer wondering what their relationship was like and how this might impact the rest of the story. It also begs the question, if Austin did not shoot her classmates, how does she get into the predicament at the beginning of the film?

Scene 16

Two months have now passed since Austin decided not to terrorize the student body at the pep rally. She leaves for school and has another strained conversation with her father, but she is now making an attempt to connect with him. The viewer discovers that Austin is now friends with Mace. Other than that, this scene does not have any real purpose and does not progress the story. Although this scene is arbitrary in its thematic

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content, it does allow the viewer a moment to breath between the hallucination and the actual shooting that will soon occur.

Scenes 17 – 19

Austin, Mace, Liz, Lacey and two other friends – Jordan and Eric – are walking to a presentation in the gym when a masked person catches Austin's eye. Austin becomes very nervous because of this person's presence, which is the first LFM of this scene. Austin desperately tries to convince her friends not to go to the gym for the presentation. Liz persists because she does not want to be late. The second she leaves the group she is shot by the masked man, which is the second LFM. The group evades the shooter and hides in a custodian closet.

Scene 20

The group huddles in the closet as they hear screams and gunshots through the door. As Mace copes with the loss of Liz, Austin explains that she has a plan for an escape and that she thinks she knows what the shooters' plans may be. Mace begins to question how she knows so much; this is when the LFM occurs. The viewer begins to wonder if Austin will reveal that she had a planned a school shooting two months ago. The scene ends with Austin deciding to slip out and have a look around, but Mace and the others are aware that she is withholding information.

Scene 21

Austin makes her way toward Liz's body and notices two shooters searching classrooms for students, shooting any that they find. Austin focuses on Liz, feeling responsible for her death when someone suddenly grabs her from behind; this is the

LFM. She turns to find out that the person is Mace. They notice a shooter coming down a hall and run into a classroom in an attempt to evade him.

<center>*Scene 22*</center>

Lacey, Jordan, and Eric become increasingly worried as they wait for Mace and Austin to return. The LFM occurs when they suddenly hear a shooter yelling at somebody in the hallway and hope that it is not Mace or Austin. They hear gunshots and fear that the worst has happened when the door is thrown open as Mace and Austin run into the closet. They tell them that the hallways are guarded and their only hope for escape is a small entrance by the gym.

<center>*Scenes 23 – 25*</center>

The first LFM of the scene occurs as they file out of the closet and are spotted by a shooter. They run for the entrance, but as they approach they are cut off by another shooter. The shooters round up the group and Austin tells them she knows that they want her alive and if the group is not spared they will not get her. The second LFM occurs as the viewer wonders if they will be shot, but she has called their bluff and they take them to the gym.

<center>*Scenes 26 – 30*</center>

Once the group is lead to the gym with the rest of the student body, they find out that Elliott is the leader of the operation. Through a series of flashbacks, Elliott reveals that he carried out the shooting because he loves Austin and wants to see her wishes fulfilled. Through a flashback it is revealed that he discovered her plans when he rummaged through her room the afternoon he got her key. The first LFM occurs when

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Elliott gives Austin a gun so she can kill Mace. The tension mounts as she approaches Mace, but she then turns the gun on Elliott and the gunmen. The hostages bolt, creating chaos as she guns down the shooters. The police officers burst into the gym (from the first scene) and gun down Austin. The second LFM occurs as she dies and Mace asks her why she did not go through with her original plans.

Scene 31

This scene is a flashback to the pep rally when Mace tells Austin he will save her a seat. She is caught off guard by his kindness and leaves to put the guns back in her locker.

Conclusion

I analyzed the script for key plot points and LFM's, and I could not help but notice that the script feels contrived and melodramatic, which makes it heavy-handed. Due to its heavy-handedness, I was not sure that I could completely prevent the film from feeling pretentious, but I had to focus on ways to minimize that and make the final edit as subtle as possible.

CHAPTER FOUR

Final Project

To view Closet Memories, please click on the link, <u>Closet Memories</u>. Director: Ruth

Sabin. 2013.

CHAPTER FIVE

Project Analysis

The editing of *Closet Memories* was an undertaking that yielded mixed results and also provided unexpected challenges, particularly in regard to the director/editor relationship, structuring scenes, crafting character performance, and overcoming shot coverage shortfalls.

Opening Monologue

Initially, Austin's opening monologue consisted of the monologue played over a black screen. This opening lacked punch and was not particularly insightful because it did not add anything to the character that the viewer could not capture from watching the rest of the film. Near the end of the monologue, a gunshot is heard and then a close-up of Austin holding a gun slowly fades in. In a later cut of the film the monologue was eliminated altogether and instead began with the sound of the gunshot; however, the result was worse because the gunshot had a more abrupt effect with the monologue present. The director and I decided that the only way this intro could possibly work was with some sort of footage or sound effect laid over it to make it something more than flatly delivered dialogue. Austin's performance throughout the film is too weak to be a convincing main character. Even though Austin is a loner, her facial expressions rarely seem to vary, leaving an impression of blankness instead of a subtlety that implies there is a sea of complex emotions and thoughts lying beneath her stoic shell.

I next experimented with laying shots of Super 8 footage of a young Austin and her parents playing in the park. This strategy proved fruitful because it serves as a prologue to the present while also making the brief use of Super 8 footage in two later scenes carry more impact. The sound of children playing, which eventually transition to screams add and eerie tone while also reflecting Austin's change from happy child to alienated youth. It also distracts the viewer from the somewhat meaningless monologue, giving it the appearance of being something more important than it actually is.

The monologue is an interesting opening, but is poorly written because it does not add any useful information to the story while feeling like a weak attempt at artistry, which results in a very contrived opening. The only way the monologue can possibly enhance the story is the addition of the Super 8 footage as well as abstract sound. The primary function of this scene is to enhance the structure of the film.

Planning Scene

This is an incredibly important scene in the film because it is the first time that the viewer understands what Austin is planning to do: execute a school shooting. This scene was also the most difficult scene in the film to edit because it needed to stand out from the rest of the film stylistically and was cut into a myriad of versions before the director and I finally settled on the final cut.

The scene was originally shot and written to reveal Austin drawing up her plans for the school shooting as her voiceover narration provides a step-by-step walk through of her plans down to the smallest detail, while also revealing her assembling a gun in another location. When I first approached this scene, I did so from the mindset that a sequence involving Austin drawing out her plans with flat narration would be very boring

for the audience, so I decided to cut in shots of the hallucination scene in which she plays out the shooting in her mind. I also justified using this footage as a flash forward to hopefully create more tension for the viewer later to make it seem as though she is actually going through with her plans when, in reality, she is only daydreaming. The scene started out slow and then built to a climax that ended with the police officers aiming their guns at Austin (which was first used in the opening scene). I also used the footage of her assembling the gun in such a way that it appeared she was putting it together multiple times and getting faster each time. The idea was to make it seem as though she was practicing and increasing her skill level until the end when she cocks her gun a last time, punctuating the end of the sequence while conveying her skill and preparation. Toward the end of the scene I gradually included shots of Austin writing out Mace's name on the plans, adding yet another element of tension to the end of the sequence in order to make the scene a bit shorter. The first cut of this panning scene was one minute and 39 seconds long.

Upon watching this cut, the director had three primary issues with the scene. The first issue dealt with the repeated use of the gun assembly. She believed that reusing the footage was redundant and did not convey the idea that Austin was getting better, which was also the result of the pace not differing enough from the beginning of the sequence to the end. Second, she did not like the procedural feel of the sequence with the dialogue revealing every single step. My take on that issue was that the two primary reasons that the sequence felt too procedural was the flat delivery of the narration and that it was written in a very linear manner. Although I was pleased with the sequence, it did not project the chaotic feel that the director desired. The final issue involved the use of the

hallucination footage, which the director thought revealed too much information, too soon. At the time, I felt very strongly that using the hallucination footage along with her narration would help intensify the planning sequence, but the director thought it would take away from the hallucination scene that occurs later. My primary observation was that Mace's name needed to be written after the conclusion of the montage because the importance of the act was lost in the chaos of the sequence and needed to stand out on its own.

After receiving the director's notes I found myself reluctant to change the structure of the scene because I had poured great effort into it and believed my vision for this scene was best. However, I knew I needed to alter my version to reflect her requests because she is the director and needed to at least try them before I could convince her that I was right. With the director's notes in mind I came up with other options for cutting the planning sequence. In the second cut, Austin writes Mace's name down directly after the completion of the planning montage, and she gradually assembles the gun over the course of the sequence, ending with her cocking the gun. This alteration of the gun assembly fit the sequence and was the correct choice because it was far less confusing and projected a greater sense of finality to the end of the planning. The hallucination footage was not removed, nor was the procedural nature of the sequence changed, because I had trouble coming up with new ideas and still strongly believed that it currently existed in its best form. This was the point in the process in which my ego began to take over and the sequence was less about yielding the best result and more about being right.

The director was also having difficulty brainstorming ideas for this sequence and therefore suggested cutting it as it was written in the script, which involved intercutting

between Austin planning and Super 8 footage of a young Austin enjoying a day at the park with her parents. The reason I did not initially cut the montage in this way was due to my belief that intercutting the two would give the viewer the impression that Austin's parents were the catalyst driving her to shoot her classmates. I got halfway through a version that included the Super 8 footage and ceased working on it because the montage implied that her parents were somehow the cause of her current mental state. At this point I decided to focus working on other portions of the film and take a break from the planning sequence because I was having trouble coming up with other ways of cutting it and still believed was already in its best form.

It was not until the fifth cut that I finally came up with an idea that worked well. In a meeting with the director, I asked her what words best described the feel she was aiming for with the sequence. She told me that "chaotic" and "Austin's thoughts should be swirling" were the best descriptions that came to mind. The comment on swirling thoughts was a response to the procedural feel of the montage. She wanted the planning to feel like fragments rather than steps, as if she is thinking of things faster than she can write them. With this input, I made two versions: one with the hallucination footage and one without. The common thread between the two was the use of repeated lines that were lowered and panned through different speakers to make it seem as though Austin might be whispering the plans to herself. Portions of the plan that were more important were repeated three or four times for emphasis. This method shortened the existing sequence significantly (by 40 seconds) and made it more chaotic. The version without hallucination footage required more thought because it needed to remain fresh and thrilling while only using shots of her writing and laying out her implements of

destruction. This version progressed from Austin drawing out her plans and escalated

rapidly when she pulled out chains, locks, and guns. The idea is to draw the viewer in by

making him or her wonder what Austin is doing until the guns are revealed, leaving no

doubt about her intentions. When the guns are revealed the gun assembly footage is

intercut, climaxing with the cocking of the pistol. In order to make this version more

stylistic, I picked portions of the footage in which the camera is slightly adjusting its

framing and focus; small jump cuts and speed ramps were also used to create frenetic

energy.

When I showed the director both versions, she had her strongest emotional

reaction to the montage without the hallucination and immediately knew it projected the

feel she desired. I was still clinging to the idea of the hallucination footage, but when I

sought the opinion of my thesis committee chair, he agreed with the director. I have now

come to accept that this is the best version for the film, but for a long period believed that

my initial approach to the sequence was the best. My ego was locked into my initial

vision for the scene and was not willing to change it because I liked the dynamism of

using the hallucination footage and the last thing I wanted to do was change it. The first

pass of this scene took a longer time to edit than any other because there is a high

quantity of cuts in a short amount of time, not to mention it had to be carefully structured.

When it came time to recut it, I did not know how to approach the scene differently, not

to mention I did not want to change something I had poured so much effort into and felt

strongly about. In the end, my ego could not part with the scene because that meant my

vision was wrong, plus I was too lazy to rebuild the scene from the ground up. My

egotistical demeanor stunted the growth of this scene for several cuts of the film and

prevented me from objectively approaching the film. This instance illustrates the importance of collaboration between the editor and director. Although the editor is meant to be an objective eye for the good of the film, the guiding vision of the director can protect the film when the editor's instincts are wrong.

Transitioning from the Hallucination to Austin's Room

Upon completion of the rough cut, an unexpected problem arose regarding the transition from Austin's hallucination in the gym to her emotional breakdown in her room that immediately follows. Transitioning straight from the hallucination to Austin entering her room and frantically unloading her guns not only gave the impression that Austin actually assaulted her peers, but that she evaded the authorities as well. Although Austin briefly looks at her locket to ensure that it is still there, the gesture was not strong enough to reinforce the idea that she decided not to carry out her plans. Failing to alter this transition would create the likely scenario that the viewer would wonder how Austin escaped the police instead of focusing on her emotional struggle with the horrifying act she nearly completed.

A transition shot was never filmed because it was not written into the script, so solving this problem meant finding a shot that could be used out of its original context to act as a buffer between the two shots. I chose a shot from earlier in the scene in which Austin is looking in Mace's off screen direction while fingering the locket around her neck, which would show the viewer that she still has the locket and that the shooting never occurred. I also reinforced the idea using sound design. During the hallucination, all diegetic sound fades out and only the score remains, which allowed me to use a sound effect to transition from the minimal sound scape of the hallucination back to the sound

of the crowd cheering in the gym. I reasoned that the crowd would not still be cheering if Austin had been firing her weapon, and that the audience would pick up on this. In the bedroom scene that follows, I also added a flashback shot of Austin's mom and a shot of Liz pulling the locket from Austin's neck when she checks to make sure her locket is there. The shot of Austin's mom with the locket was utilized to create an emotional connection with Austin while the shot of Liz pulling the locket off reminds the viewer that the previous scene was a hallucination.

Initially, the director did not like the use of the buffer shot because she thought it was distracting, but over the course of post-production, she agreed that it was beneficial. Her only issue with the shot is that Austin looked far too calm, especially in comparison to her emotional breakdown that would occur immediately after. Thus, she suggested using a shot from the opening of the film in which Austin reacts to being shot (see fig. 1). I was opposed to using that shot in this case because it is distinct, so I found another angle of her reaction to being shot that was not used in the film. The reaction works for the film, but I still believe that there is a stronger connection to her gazing across the gym while lightly fingering her locket because it is repurposed from the same scene, which gives the impression that it intended to be used as a transition between scenes. As an editor, I do not always see eye-to-eye with the director, but I must do my best to make the best film possible while also honoring the director's vision, which means that my ego has to be removed from the equation. Sometimes that vision is challenged by unforeseen problems that may require it to change, so I must adapt. In this case, the decision to ad a buffer shot was accepted by the director, but the shot used for the buffer was rejected in favor of a shot she thought would work better. Neither the director nor the editor will

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always get what they want, yet they must both set their egos aside to make the best decisions. The director was willing to set hers aside and admit that the buffer shot needed to be there. I had to set my ego aside to acknowledge that both shots worked and the film was not going to fail on using her shot over mine.
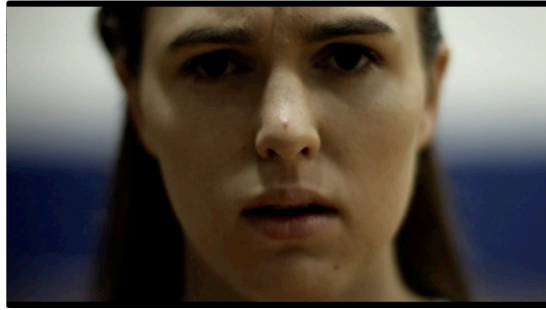

Fig. 1. Austin's close-up.

Custodian Closet Scene

The closet scene in which Austin, Mace, Eric, Jordan, and Lacey are hiding from the shooters was drastically shortened over the course of post-production. The director was the primary advocate for shortening this scene because she saw issues that were not apparent to me, although I was more than willing to cut lines of dialogue out because most of it was redundant exposition. The director was not happy with the redundancy of the characters' lines as well as Austin's expert analysis of the shooters' plans. Eric and Mace both ask Austin how she knows so much, so we cut out Eric's line because he asks Austin how she knows that there are multiple shooters – the line is implied when he simply asks, "They?" – he does not need to follow it up with the same exact question that Mace is about to ask. In the rough cut, Austin gave the impression that she knew the killers' every move. The problem is that there is no reason for her to reveal that much information to the others because they would immediately associate her with the villains.

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The others have reasons to be suspicious, but if Austin reveals too much, the viewer will not be convinced of the authenticity of the other characters because they should not trust her. In order to remedy this issue, two lines of exposition were cut from her response to Eric's question. At the end of the scene, Mace tells Austin, "I know you're not telling me something, but I'm going to trust you." I decided to cut the line, "But I'm going to trust you" because he has questioned her, knows something is wrong, and has gotten angry enough to throw her against the wall; there is no reason he should trust her at this point. By ending the scene with "I know you're not telling me something," the tension between Mace and Austin is more palpable and carries into the final scene of the film.

When I showed this later cut to my thesis committee chair, he suggested that some more lines be cut, specifically Austin saying "That's what I would do" as well as Mace's immediate lines of inquiry after he slams her against the wall. The purpose of eliminating Austin's line revolves around the fact that it makes Austin instantly seem like a school shooting expert, which she should not reveal to the others. That line was Mace's motivation to throw her against the wall, but using a shot of her silently looking at the floor also works because Mace's anger and suspicion boils over. Instead of continuing the questions, he is willing to do something drastic to get answers, which is a more realistic and honest response. Cutting Austin's lines means cutting Mace's lines that immediately follow. Instead of focusing on Mace's delivery, I cut from Mace slamming Austin to the wall in a wide shot, to Lacey's shocked reaction, to Mace staring Austin down (see fig. 2). Editing the scene in this manner created a continuity issue, because Mace's hand is right next to Austin's head instead of being closer to her waist. This is because during his second line that was cut, he slams his hand next to her face in a

threatening manner. The director and I went over the scene and decided to cut in a shot

of Mace pausing for two seconds immediately after Lacey's shot and then cut to an over-

the-shoulder shot of his hand slamming down next to Austin's face (see fig. 3), as though

his anger was still boiling over after the initial slam against the wall. This series of cuts

works well and creates more subtlety in Mace's character where it did not previously
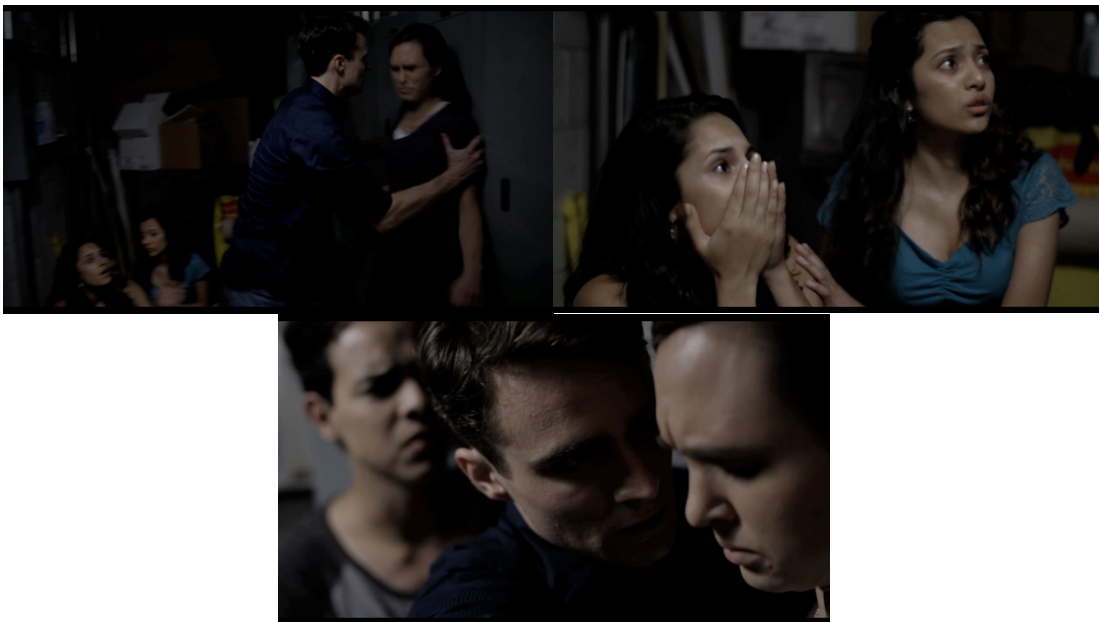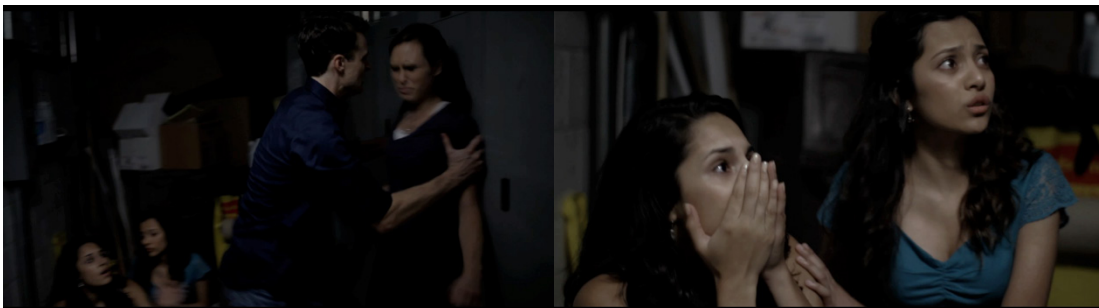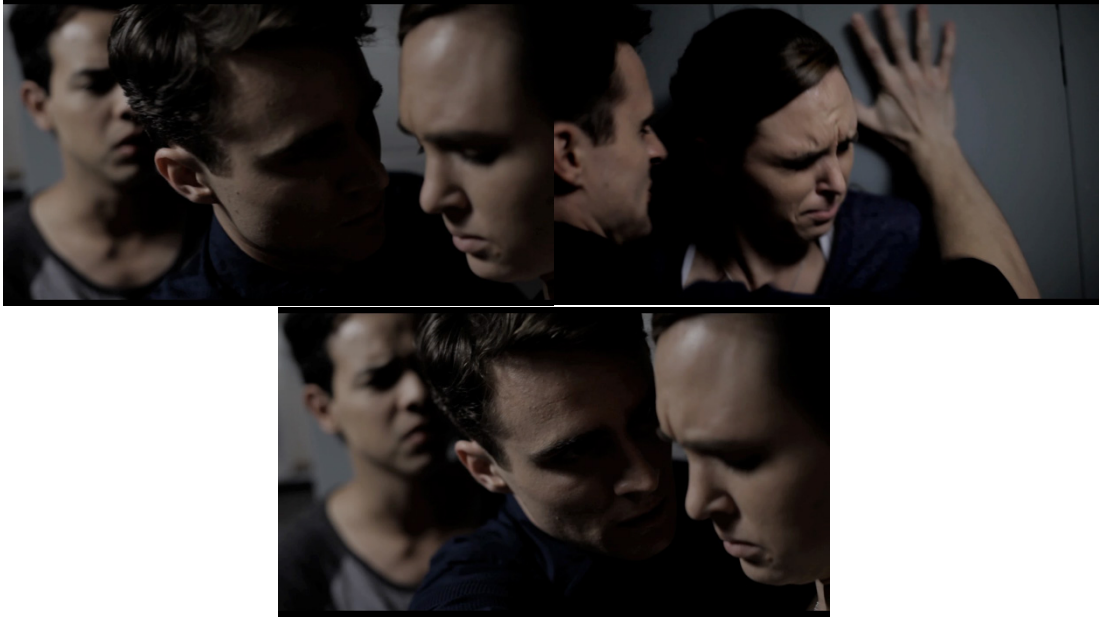
exist.

Fig. 2. The rough cut.

Fig. 3. The final cut.

Climactic Gym Scene

This lengthy scene was problematic because of its lack of effective coverage. More camera angles were filmed for this scene than any other in the film, but it still lacks three or four shots necessary to give it the proper coverage. Elliot's reveal and the moment when Austin shoots Elliot are two key instances where additional coverage is necessary.

The wide shot of Elliott pulling off his bandana in the final cut is the only shot of that action that was filmed (see fig. 4). When pouring over the footage I was amazed that such a pivotal moment was only filmed in a wide shot that is slightly behind Elliott. Except for this scene and the one immediately before the hallucination, Elliott is not present in the film, giving the impression that he is a character added at the last minute to offer the audience a faux villain. Relying only on a wide shot of his reveal supports that notion. Elliott's appearances are severely limited despite his crucial role in the film,

which is a shortcoming in the script that cannot be overcome by editing because the much-needed material does not exist.

Fig. 4. The only shot of Elliott's reveal .

When Austin is debating whether or not to shoot Mace, there are not any shots that clearly reveal Elliott's position relative to them. This is crucial because Austin turns and shoots Elliott instead of Mace. I had two shot options: a close-up of Elliott (see fig. 5), which does not reveal his location, or a tracking shot that moves over Austin's shoulder as she shoots Elliott (see fig. 6), revealing his location, but he is out of focus and indistinguishable. I decided to go with the close-up because the direction in which Austin aims her gun and Elliott backs away from her earlier in the scene gives the viewer an idea of his location. It is also important for the viewer to be aware of his death because of his crucial role, if the tracking shot was used, the viewer would not know who Austin shot and may later wonder what happened to Elliott. I tried editing both shots together, but the result was confusing and sloppy because of the very soft focus in the tracking shot.

Editors can create new meaning in a film by repurposing footage in a way that was not originally intended, but the editor cannot create what never existed. An editor can have hundreds of shots and takes to choose from, but if key shots are missing, the

scene may never reach its full potential without a reshoot. The editor may not have great

options, but he still must assess and take the best one available.

Fig. 5. Elliott's close-up.

Fig. 6. Elliott out-of-focus.

Director and Editor Relationship

Closet Memories marks the first collaboration between this particular director and

I, which proved to be a different experience from what I am used to. I am accustomed to

working with directors who have a very clear vision for their films and can communicate

it clearly. I rely on that direction in order to edit it in the best way possible. Without clear

communication of the director's thoughts, it is very difficult for me to edit because I tend

to seize up when faced with too many options. I need the director's guiding hand to give

me boundaries to play within. If those boundaries are too big, then I may creatively stray

from his or her original intent. I am a rule follower by nature, and feel comfortable

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having some boundaries to contain me, which is reflected in my relationship with the director. This also explains the reason I love editing: I can take something created by another (the footage, coverage, acting, sound, etc. constitute boundaries) and play with it in an attempt to elevate it to a higher form. Despite the boundaries of the footage that I am limited to, the director's vision narrows my focus within them, which creates new boundaries. The director's boundaries manifest themselves in his conversations with the editor. These conversations allow the editor to explore the extent of the director's vision in the cutting room and can lead to unexpected ideas. When new ideas are formed, the director's vision may shift, potentially resulting in a different and better film. I find these conversations to be the most invigorating part of the editing process because we are exploring the film in a way that had not previously been done. Woody Allen and Ralph Rosenblum crafted *Annie Hall* out of a myriad of a "chaotic collection of bits and pieces" by collaborating in this way (Rosenblum 273).

After my initial edit of *Closet Memories*, I was not getting very specific notes from the director and we did not have many in-depth talks about the film. This made it difficult to progress because I did not know exactly what the director wanted and I naturally favor my initial decisions when I am lacking input. Our conversations regarding the planning scene are a great example of this. I knew that it was not what the director had in mind, but she did not offer an alternative idea. Continually re-cutting the sequence based on my vision is the equivalent of shooting in the dark and hoping that I eventually hit the target, which is not efficient and has a low success rate. For the sake of time and better ideas, I needed better feedback from the director. Her most fruitful direction came from me asking her to describe the feel she was aiming for. The editor

can aid the director by helping him to express his vision when he is having difficulty doing so. As an editor continues to work with a director, he can get a feel for the director and learn to anticipate his preferences. This intuition develops over time as the director and editor grow more comfortable with each other and their relationship strengthens. This interaction taught me that even if the director does not have a specific idea, a simple description might give me a path to follow, which can be incredibly valuable as I move forward in my career as an editor.

The greatest creative moments the director and I had occurred when she was in the cutting room with me, carrying on a constant dialogue about the film as I cut it. Early in the process it was harder for me to set my ego aside and respect her vision because I could not understand her motivation. This is part of the reason I was reluctant to change the planning sequence. What had started as confidence in my interpretation of the scene gradually transformed into an issue of ego and pride because the director had not come up with a better idea and I was not willing make major changes. I understand that the director will not always be present in the cutting room, but I appreciate logical conversations about the implications of our editing choices, which makes me far more comfortable about the direction of the film. I cannot exist in an editorial vacuum and be expected to take vague notes without question. Clear communication is key to the relationship because it leads to understanding, which makes it easier to set aside one's ego.

Theoretical Application

Halfway through the rough cut I had an interesting revelation: I had unknowingly abandoned all attention to the editing theory that I had previously researched. This does

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not mean that I was not applying theory, I just was not actively thinking about it, which led me to the realization that editing is dependent on feel. Dancyger states, "the winnowing process is an intuitive search for clarity and dynamism" (xxi).

During the course of any editing session the editor is analyzing a shot based on a myriad of variables. Is this an establishing shot? Is a close-up more appropriate? Is the framing good? How is the acting? Which take is the most dynamic? Who is the focus? When that shot is cut next to a different shot, another series of questions arise. Is there continuity between these two shots? Is the acting performance inconsistent? Why does that cut feel awkward? Is it the camera movement? Is it a jump cut? The editor is not always conscious of these questions because, with enough experience, one glance can significantly shorten the list of questions.

As I edit a sequence from shot to shot, I ask myself, "As a viewer, what information do I want to see next?" The answer to that question always dictates which shot is used next. The first cut is always dictated by feel. This may seem like an insufficient process, but as I edit I am subconsciously making decisions based on every film I have ever seen and every film I have ever edited. Editing is the most, if not one of the most, instinctual disciplines in the filmmaking process because innumerable decisions are being made in the blink of the eye. Walter Murch states that editing for emotion is the most important factor when editing, but emotion cannot be calculated (Murch 18-9). There is no formula that yields a specific emotional response to a film; it results from something intangible that exists within the footage and is unlocked while editing. It is not until I review the rough cut that I recognize my shortcomings, and I then consciously apply theory to the editing process in order to achieve a desired result.

Scene 21 is the best scene in the film, and it was edited almost entirely by feel. It also branched outside of its anticipated LFM. I had originally anticipated that the LFM happens right before an unknown figure grabs Austin from behind. While editing, I felt as though the stronger LFM happens when, unknown to Austin, one of the shooters begins to walk in Austin's direction. The moment this shot is revealed, the viewer should immediately begin to wonder if Austin is about to get caught when she, and hopefully the viewer, is surprised from another direction. I cut the moments leading up to the LFM with a pacing inspired by *Drive*. *Drive* has a very deliberate and slow pacing to its edits, which gives it a dreamlike quality. In scene 21, Austin is reminded of her mortality when she becomes entranced by the presence of Liz's dead body. It is as though she is confronted with the aftermath of something she almost did and is reaching for the blood, attempting to confirm that Liz is actually dead and she is not dreaming. This scene has an ethereal feel to it, and the slower editing pace reflects that. As I edited the scene, I decided that the scene needed a slow, dreamy feel in order to emphasize Austin's reflective state, and I immediately thought of *Drive*'s editing style. This is the best editing of any scene in the film, but this scene did not achieve its full potential because of editing alone. The performances were honest and subtle, it was a well-written and vulnerable scene, the lighting is beautiful, and the shot coverage was carefully planned.

Overall, I found the LFM to be an effective way of predicting key moments in each scene to shape my initial cuts around. My early analysis of the LFM in each scene was pretty accurate; what varied was the emphasis of each LFM. Each LFM advances the story or character arc in some way, but some are more crucial than others and, as a result, receive more emphasis. For instance, in scene three the LFM occurs when the

viewer wonders how Austin will react to Lacey. The film does not fail or succeed on this LFM, but it does offer some valuable insight based on how Austin handles the situation. In this case, cutting back and forth between Austin and Lacey multiple times to build tension would be blatantly over-the-top. However, simply showing Lacey quickly apologize followed by a shot of Austin looking after her creates an awkward situation that makes the viewer wonder how she will respond, especially given the assumption that Austin will go on a shooting rampage.

A good example of editing that enhances a crucial LFM occurs in the climactic gym scene when Austin is deciding whether or not to shoot Mace. I knew that the shots of Austin and Mace looking at each other needed to be drawn out to increase the tension in that moment. There was not a specific formula for this, but I was constantly thinking about the intensity created by lengthy shots and slower pacing in *Inglourious Basterds* and *No Country for Old Men*. The most suspenseful scenes of these films are aided by quiet, ambient soundtracks, which make them even more uncomfortable because there is not a score to distract the audience from the mounting tension. The characters' lingering looks invite the viewer to imagine what they may be thinking and might induce a viewer to attempt to predict their next move. It is my hope that the viewer cares enough about the characters to be intensely drawn into that long moment, the outcome of which is unclear.

Conclusion

The editor's relationship with the director is a collaborative one that is key to the development of the film in post-production. Over the course of editing *Closet Memories*, I discovered that the greatest thematic contributions to the film were the result of honest

dialogue between the director and me. Ego can stunt the growth of the film, but when the director and I learned to eliminate it from the equation and thoughtfully explained our decisions, the film always benefitted. If the editor and director can work together humbly, doing their best to serve the needs of the film, it will always yield a better product. The editing process is one that is built on intuition that is developed from editing practice as well as absorbing editing conventions from other films. The editor's instincts are being honed with each project that is cut and each film that is watched. Many of the editor's decisions subconsciously occur in the blink of an eye, especially during the initial cut of the film. It is not until he reviews the rough cut that he begins to consciously seek the solutions to issues that have arisen by examining editing theories and observing genre conventions.

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