Towards directing : An editor's journey

Woodruff, Alan

Towards Directing: a film editor's journey

Submitted by

Alan Woodruff

Master of Film & Television (Screenwriting)

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Arts

Australian Catholic University
Melbourne, Victoria
Australia

March 2021

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

Signed:

Date: 14 Mar 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Towards Directing: A film editor's journey' represents the exegetical component of this PhD by project. It is written to accompany the short fiction film that forms the practical component and is integral to the work. The text discusses the challenges encountered by a film editor attempting the task of directing a short film. It is concerned with differences between the two roles and how these differences shape the experience of a seasoned editor attempting the journey.

The exegesis is structured into chapters that relate to the process of making the film: Scripting, Preproduction, Production and Postproduction. It begins by investigating the roles of editors and directors and spaces where they intersect. It goes on to examine my journey through each of these production processes. The influences of other filmmakers are discussed, particularly those who began their careers as editors.

The exegesis concludes with a reflection on my journey through the process of directing the short film project, and how my progress was influenced by my editing background. The text ends with a commitment to pursue further directing experiences despite the intense pressure and frequent uncertainty involved.

CHAPTER 1
An Introduction

> '… and I sat there and I thought, well, I don't know a goddamn thing about movies, but I know I can make a film better than that.'
>
> Stanley Kubrick, director (Ginna, 1999b, para. 8)

BACKGROUND

I never set out to become a film editor

Looking back to the time when I used to make Super 8 films with my friends as a teenager in rural Victoria, I can't recall ever indulging in fantasies of a career in the film industry. I was destined for a 'safe' future in telecommunications technology that built on my strong maths-science grades, a direction that was considered logical, inevitable and, most importantly, *sensible* by my teachers, career advisor and parents.

I was usually the initiator of these film extravaganzas, usually nothing more than bits of derivative silliness, action-based and plotless, shot in the environs of the dairy factory where my father worked or in the paddocks and sheds at someone's farm. I was almost always the cinematographer, 'directing' from behind the camera. And, after a friend's father bought a crude Super 8 editing system I became the editor too.

Later, after moving to Melbourne, I distracted myself from the tedium of my telecommunications' studies by taking short courses in film making and film aesthetics. From there I managed to talk my way into a production house specialising in television commercials (TVCs) where I immediately fell in love with the 'toys' of full-scale film production, especially cameras and lighting equipment. I was determined to become a cinematographer, and this ambition drove my application to study filmmaking at the then Swinburne Institute of Technology. To increase my chances of getting into the program, I made a Super 8 film intended to showcase my nascent filmmaking skills—a

naïve and 'arty', visually-driven seven-minute drama. Such was my obsession with cinematography that I was more than a little bit deflated when, during the subsequent interview, the head of the panel singled out the directing for praise without any mention of the camera work.

During my time at Swinburne my obsession with cinematography took precedence over everything else; even the compulsory directing exercises were relegated to second place in favour of shooting other students' films. In the meantime, I was supporting myself with casual work as an assistant editor at the TVC production house. The work was routine, mainly syncing the sound and vision for TVCs, although occasionally I'd get to assist in small ways on film shoots. This on-set experience was invaluable because it provided the opportunity to watch professional cinematographers at work. I'd bombard them with endless questions about lighting, lens choices, film stocks, filters and anything else that came to mind. It was an exciting time, working on a professional shoot one day and then applying what I'd learnt to a student film the next.

By the end of film school I'd gained a reputation among my student colleagues as a cinematographer but I'd also graduated with a hefty debt that required immediate attention. Jobs on camera crews were hard to find, and the few that came up were vigorously contested. So, I gritted my teeth and took a job as a full-time assistant editor at the production house, hoping I might be able to use the position to manoeuvre myself into their in-house camera team. Despite my initial disappointment, the assistant editor's position turned out to be the luckiest break I've ever had – and marks the beginning of my love affair with postproduction.

The in-house editor, an embittered and hectoring American of whom everyone was at least a little bit afraid, including even the directors, and whose slapdash approach to cutting was obvious even to a neophyte, was on extended leave in the USA. Her stand-in, Marty Stevens, a feature film editor so solitary that I'd never once met him even though his cutting rooms were on the same floor as us, proved to be her complete opposite. Although acutely shy in the way I later came to recognise as stereotypical of editors, he nevertheless endured my promiscuous enthusiasms, politely answering my endless questions even though they mostly related to his work as a drama editor on feature

films and not the shampoo commercial he was reworking for the umpteenth time as part of the circus that is TVC production.

The greatest distinction between the two editors lay in Marty's approach to his work. Even the most odious commercials received his full, professional attention. Instead of routinely selecting the last take of each shot on the basis that 'this was where the director stopped shooting, so it must be the 'go' take, right?' (the practice of the in-house editor), Marty would patiently troll through all the material and choose only the very best pieces: a line of dialogue of perfect saccharine sincerity, the firmest deal-closing handshake, the fullest, most ingratiating smile. And the all-important tagline might well be a seamless graft of picture and sound from multiple takes in order to strengthen the faded pop singer's shrill insistence that this deep-fried chicken *really* is finger lickin' good. It was finicky and fastidious and the options seemed infinite. And I loved it.

As quickly as I could I moved across to become Marty's full-time assistant, working on feature films, documentaries and television miniseries, learning both the creative and technical aspects of picture cutting. Often, there was more than one project on the go; at one stage during a hectic couple of months there were five simultaneous projects, including a couple of feature films in different stages of postproduction, a telemovie, several documentaries and a string of TVCs. I never questioned the long hours; everything was vivid and exciting and didn't seem like work at all.

I came to see the interdependency of the four key roles of writing, directing, cinematography and editing. For instance, how an excessive reliance on dialogue can hamstring the ability of the camera to contribute to a scene, or how poor choices of camera placement can catastrophically reduce editing options, and, of course, of how bad acting ruins pretty much everything. The most egregious examples were to be found on some of the short films I started cutting under Marty's supervision, most of which had been funded by state and federal government film bodies. Despite their six figure budgets these projects were usually doomed from the outset because the scripts consistently lacked even the most rudimentary elements of drama: an engaging visually-driven story peopled with idiosyncratic, empathic characters. Compounding the problem was that the standard of directing rarely rose above the source material.

Postproduction became a nightmare of diplomacy, not my strong suit, trying to minimise errors, many of which were as avoidable as they were egregious, while at the same time dealing with the grandiosity of these novice directors.

My obsession with cinematography at film school had left little time for writing and directing; I had no idea if I could do any better than these government-funded wannabes but I was certain in my conviction that I could do no worse. And so, perhaps for the wrong reasons, I set about having another try.

I began a parallel life, editing during the day and writing at night, trawling through the creative journal I'd been keeping since my Swinburne days. I used (and still use) the journal to record the eclectic and random inspirations I have relating to every aspect of filmmaking, including story ideas, interesting dialogue, characters, music—anything that draws my attention, really—together with lots of images, including photographs cut from newspapers and magazines, others I'd taken myself, and memorable screen grabs from film and television productions.

After a few false starts, a chance remark by a friend sparked an idea about a classical musician struggling with HIV-AIDS. From there the story almost seemed to write itself; whereas my previous attempts had been frustrating and scratchy and self-conscious, now the characters and the story simply appeared before me, pretty much fully-formed, seemingly out of the ether. Adding to this excitement was the feeling that, unlike my day job as an editor, I was at the very epicentre of the creative process, instead of being a facilitator of other people's ideas.

I was staggered when the resulting script was offered a six-figure grant not too far shy of the sum required to produce it by Film Victoria, the state government film funding body. But the offer came with a caveat: I had to find the rest of the finance, around thirty thousand dollars or so. Inevitably this didn't happen (raising money for short films is notoriously difficult), and the chance was lost.

But I was hooked. I was determined to write and direct my own film, and when a friend working in film exhibition suggested that the story would work well as a full-length

feature film I accepted his challenge to expand the thirty pages of the current version into the one hundred-plus pages required by a feature.

Marty and I shook hands after a ten-year working relationship. I'd decided I only wanted to take on short-term work that would generate a subsistence income while freeing up time to work on the script. Marty was sympathetic but not optimistic. Early in his career, while employed as a full-time editor of TVCs, he used his clout as the company's pre-eminent editor to leverage his way into a dual role as director and editor, intending eventually to graduate to directing feature films. But he ultimately abandoned his directorial ambitions; while he enjoyed the creative challenges, he found the interactions with advertising agencies (whom he frequently cited as the *bête noire* of the TVC industry), together with the unrelenting communication demands of the role too enervating. He retreated back into editing where he remained for the rest of his career.

I knew nothing about writing a feature film, and unlike the experience of writing the short film very little appeared before me 'out of the ether'. I read screenwriting books and endlessly re-watched favourite films, trying to reverse-engineer an approach to writing long-form screenplays. After eighteen months of frustration and dead ends, together with a few epiphanies, I'd produced a feature-length screenplay, which I grandly titled *Precious*. I had no idea if it was good or bad; *I* liked it but I knew this was no indication of its merit. I also knew that I wanted to direct it regardless.

During the writing of the feature, I took on freelance work producing educational videos for secondary schools and universities. In addition to the meagre income it provided, it allowed me to describe myself as a filmmaker, a title I used self-consciously but was determined to get used to. I found the work difficult, not because of the demands of the productions *per se*, but because the client had a well-deserved reputation for being pedantic and parsimonious in equal measure, often insisting I make trifling changes to programs at my own expense, even when the changes fell outside the parameters of his tightly-written contracts. Yet despite his ruthlessness he could also be generous with his praise when he chose. These occasional affirmations went some way toward consolidating my confidence as a director.

I also began teaching screenwriting to postgraduate students. I found I enjoyed teaching enormously, especially the evening courses with mature-age students. Their work ethic and camaraderie, together with the quality of their ideas, resulted in classes that felt more like a writers' room than a classroom.

Precious beat over one hundred other scripts to win the Australian Writers' Guild (AWG) Award for Best Unproduced Screenplay. In a small way, I was suddenly 'hot'. The government film making bodies had strategies in place to assist first-time feature directors and with my award-winning script I was suddenly a contender. But there was a problem: even neophyte directors need to be able to demonstrate a certain level of proficiency before landing government finance, and I doubted that my corporate work, straightforward and unremarkable in every way, would be accepted as evidence that I could manage a substantial drama.

So, I wrote *Absolute Zero*, a twelve-page script about a man who finds himself accidentally locked inside a refrigerated meat wagon. The story unfolded in a way that was somewhat experimental, not because I'd set out to be self-conscious or 'arty', but simply because it seemed to be the best way to tell the story. Kench (2021) describes experimental cinema as an elusive and niche genre that can be difficult to define, that 'bucks the trends of conventional cinema and pushes the medium of film in unexplored ways' (para 3). In the script of *Absolute Zero* I experimented with style, using a mix of documentary, drama and surrealism to deliver the story. The narrative slips and slides between these divergent styles seemingly at random, driven only by my thoughts and guesses about which was appropriate for each scene.

Given the success of the *Precious* screenplay, I was hoping the funding bodies would bankroll the production of *Absolute Zero*, allowing me to demonstrate my directing capabilities, paving the way for me to direct *Precious*, as had been their strategy for other emerging writer-directors. But after a curious mix of backslapping and equivocation they passed on the project.

I set out to make the film on my own. Its fragmented structure made it easy to break the story into small, discrete sections that could be shot in short bursts with minimal cast

and crew, with me acting as writer-producer-director and co-cinematographer (and, of course, editor). I resolved to continue my subsistence lifestyle, churning out educational videos and being available for short-term work on feature films, until the project was done.

Being at the centre of the writing process had been one of its real pleasures, but it was a solitary exercise, even more so than editing. Having committed to making *Absolute Zero* I was faced with the reality of driving the project from that same central position but in a very public way. I had to be the producer as well as the director; nothing happened if I didn't initiate it. I recruited the crew and cast, a job that would have been a lot easier had I been able to offer payment. Instead, I was asking people to work for nothing *and* to be available at short notice over an extended period of time. I also went begging for equipment and other production resources. Locations were especially problematic given that the film was set in 1950s rural Victoria, requiring several period country railway stations, one in good order and the other totally dilapidated—and involving not one but two working steam trains.

The unending networking and organising over the twelve months of filming both exasperated and bored me in turn. In the educational video environment, the title 'producer' is a catch-all term covering not only the process of producing the video but also included writing, directing and editing—so there was a direct parallel between my 'day job', making fast turnaround videos, and the extended process of shooting *Absolute Zero*.

But there were also marked differences: the production requirements of the video work was minimal, seldom ranging beyond straightforward budgetary and deadline issues. *Absolute Zero*, on the other hand, was set in the countryside, across two different time zones, both decades in the past, and involving vintage railway rolling stock—all to be achieved with a miniscule budget. Who would want to be a producer trying to pull that together? Apart from the occasional fleeting satisfaction at, say, having organised all the elements required for a big day of filming, I found the job to be a chore. It confirmed for me that if I was going to move out of the cutting room, it had to be as either a writer or a director. And when the script *Absolute Zero* won me a second AWG award, this time for Best Short Screenplay, I felt confirmed in my ambitions.

Shortly after I finished shooting I was offered three weeks' work in New Zealand on Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings (LotR)* trilogy. It was a call completely out of the blue. I was flattered and curious—and dead broke. What I saw in Wellington was filmmaking on a scale I could only ever have imagined: mind-bogglingly ambitious and sophisticated, and with a seemingly limitless budget, all under the control of an uncompromising director with virtuosic camera skills. And, coming directly after the experience of shooting my little no-budget movie, the insights I gained were even more vivid.

Three weeks became by increments three years. During that time my creative ambitions for *Absolute Zero* grew under the giddy influence of Jackson's extraordinary visual skills. I received a daily education in how to use a camera to not merely record the action but to instead be an active participant in the delivery of the story. I set about the task of applying this newfound awareness to my film. I wasn't in a position to reshoot anything; I was in another country without access to cast or crew or locations. This, of course, greatly limited my options, but I taught myself several visual effects (VFX) programs and used these new skills to rework the footage I'd brought over from Melbourne. I added camera moves, reframed shots, and even created new shots out of the existing footage. Such was the power of this experience of re-envisaging the film in the light of the *LotR* experience that it consolidated my determination to continue making films beyond *Absolute Zero*.

While in New Zealand I also took advantage of some down time to complete a feature script I'd been toying with for some time. As with *Precious*, the idea had started life as a short project that I expanded to feature-length, but unlike *Precious*, which had taken eighteen months to complete, the new script, *When I Dream*, took less than two weeks. It won me another AWG award, again for Best Unproduced Screenplay.

The process of finishing *Absolute Zero* continued for some time after my return to Melbourne. When completed, the film was successful at festivals around the world, winning awards at nineteen festivals, in categories that reflected positively on my abilities as a filmmaker, including writing, directing and editing.

This success drew producers interested in the *When I Dream* screenplay which, of course, I was keen to helm as director. Disappointingly, after seeing *Absolute Zero* each responded in more or less the same way, offering the backhanded compliment that while the film showed an 'unusual' or 'extraordinary' or 'unique' visual style and was thoroughly deserving of its success it did not testify to an ability to direct a conventional story (such as *When I Dream*). Several stated bluntly that I needed to make another short film, less 'experimental', demonstrating the ability to direct a mainstream narrative under mainstream conditions. This PhD is, in part, a direct response to those comments.

Integral to any substantial project is a search of the literature. I began by seeking out biographies and autobiographies of high-profile editors-turned-directors in the hope of finding accounts of their journeys and the challenges they had to overcome. The obvious starting point in this quest for exemplars was the well-documented and stellar career of David Lean. It was disappointing to discover that Lean, a very successful editor before moving into directing, said very little about the value of his editing background beyond saying—with some regularity—that it *was* valuable.

During his long career he was nominated for seven Academy Awards, winning two for *Bridge Over the River Kwai* and *Lawrence of Arabia*. He was a filmmaker's filmmaker, with directors of the stature of Stanley Kubrick, Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorcese citing him as a major influence (Bose, 2021). Kubrick said of him, 'There are very few directors, about whom you'd say you automatically have to see everything they do. I'd [include] David Lean at the head of my list' (Kubrick, as cited in Bose, 2021). Nor did his ascendancy as a director diminish his reputation among those familiar with his editing work. Ronald Neame, producer of several of Lean's early films, said, 'He was a great director, but he was an even better editor. He was one of the greatest editors of all time' (Bowers, 2012).

Beginning in the early days of his directing career, Lean used to regularly enthuse about the value of his editing experience—'If you want to learn about direction, make your final destination the cutting room' (Blakeston, 1947, para. 11). At the tail end of his career, after directing what was to be his final film, *A Passage to India*, he returned to the

cutting room to edit the film personally, against his usual habit of recruiting others into the role—an accomplishment he celebrated in the opening titles with the double-barrelled credit, 'Directed and Edited by David Lean' (Lean, 1984). Afterwards, he reaffirmed the importance of his early days in the cutting room, 'Editing is everything. It's one of the chief—if not *the* chief—of the tools of my trade [as a director]' (Lush & Thompson, 1988, 0:03:29). As a practitioner hoping to follow the same path, I find his mantra reassuring but without being in any way illuminating.

I recognise that my interest is somewhat arcane and that, as with other directors, Lean's films should naturally be the focus of attention. However, I regret he did not share more about *how* his cutting room origins facilitated his transition to directing.

Compounding my disappointment are the autobiographies by other editors-turned-directors such as Ralph Rosenblum and Sam O'Steen. Both were high-profile editors (Rosenblum had worked with Woody Allen and Sidney Lumet, O'Steen with Roman Polanski and Mike Nicols) before becoming directors themselves. Yet despite—presumably—having control over the contents of their memoirs, they revealed little about their move to directing beyond the fact that they made the jump.

Another disappointment was the autobiography of editor-turned-director turned author Edward Dmytryk. He began as an editor for Paramount before commencing a directing career that spanned forty years, during which time he helmed over fifty films working with actors such as Marlon Brando, Elizabeth Taylor and John Wayne. Like Lean, he emphasised the value of his postproduction background. 'It was in the cutting room', he wrote, 'that I learned the rudiments of filmmaking' (Dmytryk, 1978, p. 21). Yet, of his move into directing, he wrote simply, 'What the hell—why not?' (1978, p.41). Despite this disappointment, the series of books he wrote in later life, including a collection of craft-focussed texts on scriptwriting, directing, acting and editing, have been of enormous value in this research.

I decided to embark on a creative practice PhD using filmmaking as research. This involved the production of a short film under conditions representative of mainstream drama production together with an account of the challenges I faced and my response to

those challenges. In doing so, I hoped to add to the body of knowledge in both the film world and the academy.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research, 'Toward Directing: A film editor's journey', is a creative practice research project investigating the challenges faced by an experienced editor wanting to move beyond the cutting room in order to direct a short dramatic film. The research takes the form of the production of a short film, including the writing of a script and an analysis of selected scenes supported by this accompanying exegesis. The script is constructed to provide a series of scenes that can be filmed in a way that allows the research questions to be explored and responded to.

The exegesis presents the reader with the story of this journey to discover the following research questions:

1. What challenges does an editor face when journeying to directing?
2. How can the production of a short fiction film be designed and produced to aid in this journey?

CREATIVE PRACTICE RESEARCH

In recent times creative practice research has moved from outlier status (Lebow, 2014) to where it now dominates the discussion and practice of research in university-based creative arts programs (Magee, 2012). Although a solid, universally agreed-upon definition has yet to reach a 'settled status' (Candy & Edmonds, 2018, p. 63), it is generally accepted that creative practice research 'is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge, partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice' (p. 63).

Despite its ascendancy in the creative arts the broad acceptance of creative practice research by the Academy is by no means complete (Arnold, 2012). At issue is the notion of practice as knowledge, a marked departure from the empiricism of traditional science-based methodologies (Scholtes & Batorwicz, 2019). 'Traditional research comes with long established expectations for how processes and actions are framed, in order to make the methods of research as transparent and open to scrutiny as possible' (para 3).

The integration of creative practice into research methodology is a direct challenge to this orthodoxy because 'the very nature of situating an enquiry within the researcher's own creative practice begins to blur existing lines established by more traditional forms of qualitative research' (para 4). This departure from the time-honoured analytico-referential framework arouses suspicion among traditionalists, with some sniping that the coupling of the words 'practice' and 'research' is an oxymoron (McDougall, 2019), while others virulently regard the emergent methodology as an attack on the Academy itself (Arnold, 2012).

In turn, some creative practice researchers disparage the scientific approach as a 'straightjacket' (Arnold, 2012). '[Traditional] researchers are expected to conceive an outcome in advance, and identify the significance and innovation of the research proposal. Intentionality sets in place preconceptions about what the work will do' (Bolt, 2009, p. 4). These preconceptions about what the work will do are counter to the creative practice approach where instead, once a question or an idea for a work has been formulated, 'the making process itself leads to a transformation in the idea—which in turn leads to new works' (Candy & Edmunds, 2018, p. 64). This synergy is, of course, precisely the reason the methodology has been embraced by the creative arts, where 'not only is practice embedded in the research process, but research questions arise from the process of practice, the answers to which are directed toward enlightening and enhancing practice' (p. 63).

The purpose of an academic investigation, such as a PhD, is the generation of knowledge. 'A PhD describes knowledge that is new (in the world)', explains Candy (2006), 'it can be shared with others and can be tested in some way' (p. 4). In practice-based research it is the work produced—the artefact—that forms the basis of the contribution to knowledge (Skains, 2018), but taken alone it is not sufficient to be regarded as a research outcome that generates new knowledge.

> As a minimum, a commentary is needed that frames the context in which the artwork is to be understood. … The expression of knowledge and whether or not it is communicable in a generally agreed sense is an important issue in judging whether or not there is a genuine contribution to knowledge. (Candy & Edmunds, 2018, p. 65)

In a PhD this expression of knowledge takes the form of a written exegesis, produced with the same rigour demanded by traditional methodologies (Jolly, 2022), in which the 'knowledge that has remained implicitly within the artist [is] made explicit and seated within the context of the scholarly field, [allowing] a critical discussion of the significance and context of the artist's claims' (Skains, 2017, p. 1). But while a contextualising exegesis is deemed essential, Arnold (2012) emphatically insists this should not be taken as an acknowledgement that the creative process is somehow inferior to traditional modes of enquiry, in need of bolstering before it can be regarded as worthy of the Academy.

> We must reject the idea that the exegesis is legitimising creativity, or indeed that bringing creativity into the Academy so directly is in itself a legitimisation … The latter does not justify the former nor interpret it in an academic and theoretical way. (p. 10)

The Academy is by its very nature traditionalist and hence conservative, thereby ensuring that the issues around the broad acceptance of creative practice research will continue into the future (Arnold 2012). But for those in the creative arts, the synergy between artefact and exegesis already operates to enrich and expand their artistic processes while at the same time delivering new models of knowledge (Candy & Edmunds, 2018). Arnold (2012) describes the nexus as 'potentially transformative, … provid[ing] us with the ability to look at the world in new ways, to look through different prisms and lenses and through other people's eyes so as to develop new aesthetics' (p. 10).

THE INVESTIGATION

The Project

The investigation comprises two components: a short film and associated screenplay, and an exegesis, both 'conceptualised as independent answers to the same research question[s]' (Milech & Schilo, 2004, p. 6). The project component of this research consists of producing a short film under conditions designed to replicate the challenges faced by an editor undertaking a longer-form project such as feature film. Editing also features prominently in this research because it is in the cutting room that the success or otherwise of my directing endeavours will be most apparent. I will also select scenes

from the film to use as deep analysis—comparing what I intended to what was actually achieved. Given that the focus of my research is on process not product, analysis of the resultant film independent of the exegesis would yield little, if any, information about the nature or extent of its contribution to new knowledge. In other words, the film has not been made to be judged as a stand-alone piece but to be accompanied by an exegesis. In order to achieve this, I need to examine my practice to date.

The short films I've directed have been, quite simply, exercises in pragmatism; I wanted to try my hand at directing, and these short projects were the only realistic options given the available resources. With barely enough money to cover the cost of film stock and processing, I sourced the cast and crew from friends and acquaintances who were prepared to work for nothing, and borrowed cameras, lenses and lights from friends and employers sympathetic to my ambitions.

I've always scheduled my productions as a series of short shoots, typically a day or half-day at a time, usually on weekends or evenings, to make it easier for cast and crew with other commitments, myself included. As stated earlier, my film *Absolute Zero* (Woodruff, 2010), with a running time of 27-minutes, took twelve months to shoot, a strategy that was crucial to the viability of the production but is clearly not analogous to the industry model. Steven Spielberg's first feature film, *Duel* (Eckstein, 1971), was shot over eleven tightly scheduled days (Green, 2018). 'We sprinted', recalls Spielberg, 'from one setup to the next' (Green, 2018, para. 4). Under the shooting paradigm for *Absolute Zero*, this eleven-day shoot would blow out to over three years of part-time filming.

Of course, Spielberg didn't operate as a one-person crew, as I sometimes did on *Absolute Zero* (Woodruff, 2010) acting as both director and cinematographer, directing the relatively straightforward exterior scenes from behind the camera. At other times, during scenes that required lighting and recorded dialogue, the crew would typically consist of five or six people: a cinematographer (to light the scene and operate the camera), a camera assistant, a sound recordist, a gaffer (a lighting assistant), hair and makeup, and a production assistant. While this fluctuating crewing arrangement worked well for me in the past, I recognise the importance of testing my ability to lead a full complement of crew if my feature directing aspirations are to be taken seriously. A crew

of six is not unusual for small-scale production (Ryan, 2015), however feature film crews tend to be more substantial. An example is the recent Australian film *Storm Boy*, which lists around 140 crew involved in the shooting phase of the production (Street & Bowen, 2019). Given that mounting a production of such magnitude is beyond the limit of my resources, I was relieved to read Rabiger and Hurbis-Cherrier's (2020) assertion that 'Short films are an excellent practice ground: they demand a full palette of skills' (p. 231).

The *story* of the project might be of secondary importance but the *script* is paramount, for it must be written to provide opportunities that offer the production challenges listed above. Given this unusual emphasis on process over product, could the script not simply be a series of unconnected scenes, each requiring a specific directorial response—in other words, why not simply gather together a series of disparate scenes from existing screen stories, not written by me, chosen for their technical and performance demands?

It is a tempting option that would do away with the need to write a script but one which, ultimately, I believe would not deliver a sufficiently comprehensive challenge. Lost, for instance, would be the test of building credible story and character arcs across the length of a story through the use of calculated performance and shooting strategies designed to deliver a cohesive, progressive whole. Also lost would be the necessity of making creative choices for entering and exiting scenes so that they transition from one to the other with appropriate dramatic effect which my experience in the cutting room suggests can be a challenge for even the most seasoned directors.

Another consideration is the length of the shooting period. The shoot needs to be long enough to accommodate the demands of this investigation while at the same time being achievable within realistic budgetary and time constraints. I decide to aim for a one week, fifty-hour shoot, contained within suburban Melbourne.

DEFINING THE KEY TERMS: Directing, editing and mainstream production

Key to setting up the parameters of this research is the establishment of the terms 'director', 'editor' and 'mainstream production', both as I understand them and as they operate in this exegesis.

The director

The director is generally recognised as the creative focus of the filmmaking process, with responsibilities and authority across all aspects of the production, often including input into the screenplay but whose prime responsibility is for the shooting and editing phases (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020). That directors are usually seen in this central creative role is often attributed to the writings of Francois Truffaut, in particular his 1954 essay *A Certain Tendency in the French Cinema* in which he reminted the term *auteur* (Griffin, 2017). The concept had its origins in the 1920s, in the writings of French critics and directors during the silent film era, and is literally the French word for 'author' (Hawyard, 2018). Truffaut was rebelling against the filmmaking establishment, which he scathingly referred to as '*le cinèma de papa*/daddy's cinéma ... produced by the same old scriptwriters and filmmakers whose time was up' (p. 29). He and his colleagues, including Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol and Eric Rhomer (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020) rejected the canonical approach which produced films that 'were dry, recycled, inexpressive and out of touch with the daily lives of post-war French youth' (Hitchman, 2008, para. 6). They made their assault in print as acerbic critics on the status quo, and later as filmmakers where they put their radical ideas into practice, earning them the label of the *French New Wave* (Hawyard, 2018).

Although initially only applied to those who both wrote and directed their own films, such as Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau and Abel Gance (Brody, 2019), the definition was later expanded to include directors who did not generate their own screenplays but whose work 'brought the same sense of personality and consistency to their work as writers by ... using the camera as a writer would wield a pen' (Buchanan, 2018, p. 32). This expanded definition accommodated the New Wave's admiration of American cinema, including the work of Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford and Orson Welles, while also acknowledging other international directors such as Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa (Griffin, 2017) and Roberto Rossellini (Buchanan, 2018). Contemporary

directors nominated as auteurs include David Lynch, Martin Scorcese, Wes Anderson and Quentin Tarantino (Hawyard, 2018). Griffin (2017) laments the dominance of males on these lists, noting that 'women rarely, if ever, are included in any notable lists of auteur filmmakers, despite several female directors more than qualifying [including] Jane Campion, Maya Deren and Julie Taymor' (p. 13).

The focus of the auteurists on a single member of the team making the movie is somewhat paradoxical because 'it suggests that the director's work is key to a movie's artistic identity. But in a field that involves a collaboration between many artists, from actors and writers to editors and designers, the notion ... is not intuitive' (Brody, 2019, para. 1). Yet the notion that directors *are* the creative focus that began in the 1950s with Truffaut et al. still holds sway today (Griffin, 2017). In Europe directors are even legally recognised as the authors of their films by the European Union (European Commission, 2002).

Unsurprisingly, given their status as 'author', the role of the director is an overarching one, often beginning in the scripting phase with 'notes' to the writer about changes to be made to the screenplay. This is despite the fact that the writer often originates the story and has honed it over many drafts (Goldman, 2000), and could perhaps be presumed to know better than anyone how to best realise it. Nonetheless, the requirements of the director take precedence; the writer may be the author of the screenplay but the director is the author of the movie.

In the lead-up to filming—the preproduction phase—the director carefully assembles a core group of specialists, such as cinematographers, production designers, set designers, costumers—and, of course, actors—who will help deliver their vision for the project (Cleve, 2017).

The filming or 'shooting' phase of the production is usually the shortest and most expensive (Webb, 2019). The director works closely with the actors, cinematographer and other crew to obtain the performances and camera angles required for each scene, usually shooting multiple versions or 'takes' of every shot in an attempt to achieve a result that is as close as possible to their creative vision for the scene (Dmytryk, 2018).

The editor

The editor's task is to assemble the film from the various shots or 'rushes' (Dmytryk, 2018). This involves 'selecting the shots, angles and takes that will make up the completed movie [including] choosing when to cut away from one performer or one element of physical action to another' (Harris, 2008). A key part of an editor's role is ensuring consistency of performances. Editor Thom Noble explains that there might be 'maybe seven moments in each scene that are brilliant. But they're all on different takes. My job is to try and get all those moments in and yet have it look seamless, so nobody knows there's a cut in there' (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020, p. 110). This seamless cobbling together of disparate elements to make a unified whole is one of the reasons that editing is sometimes referred to as the 'invisible' art (Harris, 2008).

Not only invisible; according to editor-turned-director Edward Dmytryk, editing is also unique in that it has no antecedents.

> Film editing or, as it is commonly called, 'cutting' is unique. It is the one art or craft that is indigenous to motion pictures. All other film arts are borrowed or adapted. Stories and acting are as old as civilization, at least. So is music. Photography has its antecedents in pictorial art, and chemical means of recording images date back to the early nineteenth century. Film editing, which owes little except nomenclature to literary editing, was brought to life by motion pictures and it, in turn, brought motion pictures to life. (Dmytryk, 2018, p. 111)

Depending on the working relationship with the director, the editor might initially undertake this work on their own, producing the first edit or 'assembly' (Dmytryk, 2018), with the director weighing in later with their own choices and opinions, or the director might dictate specific takes and cutting strategies from the outset. Regardless, when differences of opinion arise, the final choice always lies with the director (Longwell, 2008).

Choice is the director's prerogative. The director's overarching control of the project from the very outset results in many vital creative decisions having been taken before the raw material arrives in the cutting room, including decisions about the script,

casting, location, lighting, camera angles, art direction, and performance (Cleve, 2017). Alongside these aesthetic choices, directors must also involve themselves in other less glamorous but equally critical decisions relating to the practicalities of shooting, such as budgets, schedules, the availability of key 'creatives' including actors and heads of department (cinematographers, production designers, editors, sound mixers, etc.), and access to locations (Cleve, 2017). An editor wanting to move into directing must be prepared to engage with this unceasing assault.

The mainstream production paradigm

Castle (2016) cites Stanley Kubrick as saying that every film, regardless of its pedigree, is a one-off, with its own unique and often onerous set of production demands. Yet ironically the strategies for planning and implementing a production are deceptively straightforward and have remained largely unaltered over the last century (Landry, 2017). Landry describes the process as 'a great puzzle', with its central focus being

> resource management: effectively identifying, organising and scheduling, locating and pricing, and budgeting and securing everything needed to create a film, so that each is available as needed, when required, for the best price possible. (p. 11)

For example, it makes sound organisational sense to group together all the scenes featuring a key actor, especially if the actor is expensive or has limited availability, in order that their scenes be captured efficiently within a single block of shooting. But what if some of these scenes involve a difficult-to-obtain or expensive location that is also required for scenes not involving the actor? Or if pivotal scenes across the production, only some of which involve either the actor or the difficult location, necessitate the hire of a specialised, hence expensive, item of equipment? Efficiently resolving these conflicting and often mutually exclusive issues is one of the challenges of scheduling a production, hence the notion of 'a great puzzle'.

A key element of the puzzle is how best to use the labour of both the crew and the performers. The working conditions of Australian film crews are protected under the Motion Picture Production Agreement (MPPA), negotiated and monitored by the local

film union, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance. Production operates on a standard 50-hour week, worked as five 10-hour days (Motion Picture Production Agreement, 2021). This mode of working is far removed from my previous filmmaking activities, which have involved shooting films intermittently in my spare time, sometimes over many months, with me taking on as many crew roles as were required to get the film 'in the can'. During the twelve-months of shooting of *Absolute Zero*, for instance, in addition to operating as the writer and director I was also at various times the production manager, director of photography, assistant director, art director, sound recordist, props and wardrobe.

Central to this investigation is a commitment to depart from this 'jack of all trades' approach, and to instead shoot a short film under MPPA conditions, involving a tightly scheduled production period of five 10-hour days, operating only as the director, with the other production roles (Director of Photography, Assistant Director, Sound Recordist, Wardrobe, etc.) to be undertaken by specialist crew members.

THE CHALLENGES OF THIS PROJECT

I'm not unfamiliar with the mainstream production model; I've seen it in operation across the three decades I've spent in screen production. From my earliest days as an assistant editor, my interest has always been not simply about how to best cut the rushes together but also to understand the rationale behind the generation of this raw material. The focus of much of my interest was 'blocking'—the choices made by the director relating to camera angles and shot sizes (e.g. wide shots, medium shots, close ups) together with the choreography of both actors and cameras—that decide how a scene is to be recorded.

This curiosity stayed with me as I evolved to become an editor of feature films, documentaries and TVCs. I knew I'd finally made it as an editor when I realised that along with my postproduction skills I'd also developed the curse of 'editor's hindsight': the ability to see, from the relatively unpressured comfort of the cutting room, what the director *should* have done. Why shoot this too-loose wide shot instead of a tight two-shot? Or why is the coverage all in close ups? Or where *are* the close-ups? Smug,

unhelpful questions, all posed with 20/20 complacency, without any cognisance of the pressures and limitations of the shooting environment.

My early directing experiences were sobering in this regard. I learned two lessons in quick succession: first, there is no such thing as a perfect shooting plan—anything can go wrong and does, even on the most meticulously planned shoot; and, second, many of the 'obvious' solutions seen in the cutting room would simply not be achievable under the circumstances of the shoot. And when a shot seen in the cutting room *does* actually suggest a better, achievable, version of itself, it's sobering to remember that the original, disappointing though it may be, was decided upon in the high pressure, time-poor environment of a film shoot, probably after innumerable options had been considered and discarded. The vantage points of editor and director are not—cannot be—the same; if the view from the cutting room is sometimes clearer, it's because the editor is standing on the shoulders of the director.

Given that much of my own production experience has been conducted in the absence of deadlines, I've had the luxury of being able to reshoot sequences that haven't worked or where the perspective of the cutting room has inspired a better idea. During the filming of *Absolute Zero*, for instance, I shot the picnic scene three times before I was satisfied. The first two attempts, despite being thoroughly planned, resulted in rushes that were disappointing. I took advantage of the lack of deadlines to shoot the scene again (and again) until I was satisfied. Another scene in the film featured a freight train rattling indifferently through an abandoned railway station. Although I knew the basic coverage I was after, I was unsure how to create the sense of moody disengagement that I felt was required in this crucial final scene. So, I shot the sequence piecemeal, cycling through intervals of filming and editing, using the work-in-progress edit to determine the shots required in the next wave of filming, until I was satisfied. In all, it took seven, four-hour round trips to Central Victoria to generate sufficient material for this scene. The travel time alone is the equivalent of three regular shooting days!

There's no doubt that both I, the nascent practitioner, and the production itself benefited from this reflexive, shoot-and-review approach. However, the strategy falls far outside even the most relaxed mainstream model. Given that my longer-form projects are

conventional stories requiring substantial budgets to produce, if I am to have any chance of directing them I need to demonstrate my ability to operate within the orthodoxy.

I regard the test of working within the usual production paradigm with its tight constraints of time and budget as a cornerstone of this research. Other essential elements include the ability to work with a full complement of crew and to be effective in guiding actors toward performances that are credible and engaging.

Taken separately, I find each of these criteria quite daunting. Taken together, I find them somewhat terrifying yet at the same time not a little bit exciting. While my jack-of-all-trades approach to making films has served me well in the past by allowing me to make films pretty much on my own terms and in a relatively unstressed way, it has also occasionally involved prolonged periods of loneliness where I've felt trapped and isolated in productions that are seemingly without end, making the idea of 'coming in from the cold' and working inside the usual paradigms very tantalising, despite my concerns.

THE EXEGESIS: Finding my voice

My previous engagement with postgraduate study had been a Master of Film and Television (Screenwriting). I was required to deliver a feature film screenplay together with an exegesis that was unrelated to the screenplay yet dealt in some way with an aspect of scriptwriting.

Lillis (2003) refers to this fixed approach to student writing pedagogy as 'monologic', arguing that it reflects 'institutional and pedagogic practices [that] are oriented to the reproduction of official discourses of knowledge' (p. 193). This rigid one-size-fits-all form assumes a homogeneity across the higher education cohort and its pursuits (Lillis, 2003). As a practitioner I'm uncomfortable with the sort of academic writing I was required to deliver. I found it alienating and unhelpful—and frequently impenetrable. I feel my experience of the Masters would have been significantly enhanced had I been able to follow what Lillis refers to as a 'dialogic' approach, where the goals are 'oriented towards making visible/challenging/playing with official and unofficial discourse' (p.

194), pursuing the breakthroughs I'd made instead of producing an 'academic' report of doubtful value.

METHODOLOGY

From the outset I was drawn to the use of the personal voice despite the conviction that it would likely make an already uncomfortable and anxiety-ridden experience even more so. Frank (2016) says, 'storytelling requires a commitment to speaking the truth—not merely to acknowledge truth obliquely … but to speak it directly and publicly' (p. 21). This harsh reality is supported by Pensoneau-Conway & Valenta (2021) who state bluntly that 'autoethnography involves painful self-reflection' (p. 232). Yet despite my anticipated discomfort I felt that if I truly committed to telling the story of my journey as 'I' the resulting self-scrutiny would yield valuable data both for my own development and for my investigation of the other practitioners who feature in this project.

This qualitative approach is not without critics who maintain such a strategy is too subjective to be of merit, dismissing researchers as 'journalists or soft scientists' and their work as 'unscientific, or only exploratory, or entirely personal and full of bias' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 100). But given that I am the object of my own research as I make my short film I can't see how I *could* stand aside from myself in some posture of objectivity. Nor, despite any potential discomfort, do I see any advantage in such a stance except, of course, self-protection.

I was affirmed in my approach by the work of Laurel Richardson (2017) who writes that

> [researchers] don't have to play God, writing as disembodied omniscient narrators, claiming universal, and a temporal general knowledge; they can eschew the questionable meta narratives of scientific objectivity and still have plenty to say as situated speakers, subjectivities engaged in knowing/telling about the world as they perceive it (p. 820).

Autoethnography readily accommodates such a researcher-centric approach. This is particularly so in the case of evocative autoethnography, which Adams and Herrmann (2020) describe as comprising three interrelated components: 'auto', 'ethno' and 'graphy'. 'Autoethnographic projects use selfhood, subjectivity, and personal experience

('auto') to describe, interpret, and represent ('graphy') beliefs, practices, and identities of a group or culture ('ethno')' (p. 2).

Part of the process is to connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, social, political understandings (Poulos, 2021). So, I, an editor, have undertaken the process of directing a short film in order to understand the journeys of other editors who have made the move from editing to directing. As Ellis & Bochner eloquently put it, I use my own 'experience of exploring a particular life in order to understand a way of life' (Ellis & Bochner, 2011, p. 737). Having placed myself at the centre of the research I am 'both the observer and the participant, the researcher and the subject, and an insider using an outsider's view' (O'Hara, 2018, p. 14).

Adding to my already considerable discomfort was an early commitment to keep a journal throughout the entirety of the writing-directing-editing process using a combination of text and audio recordings. I felt that the data yielded by these contemporary accounts would allow for a more authentic analysis of my experience than would be possible by reliance on memory alone. 'Reflection, dependent as it is upon memory, and conducted after the creative act rather than during (or as close to as possible), can be an unfortunately fallible method, and often fails to offer insights into the cognitive processes of creation' (Skains, 2018, p. 86).

Memory *is* fallible. It can sometimes blunten the intensity of events, while at other times it can operate self-protectively to shield the subject from intensely negative recollections—or, in the case of positive events, it can introduce distortion through selection and embellishment (Chang, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to the data collected during the creative act as 'field texts', which they assert is immensely valuable to researchers because it 'help[s] fill in the richness, nuance, and complexity of the landscape, returning the reflecting researcher to a richer, more complex, and puzzling landscape than memory alone is likely to construct' (p. 83). Skains (2018) concurs, saying that the approach, 'in which the creative process and products, and the analytical process and products are deeply intertwined, offer[s] opportunity for insight and nuance into the creative practice through a necessarily subjective record' (Skains, 2018, p. 86).

I felt that each of my strategies for collecting 'field texts' had strengths that suggested their suitability for different phases of the production. The use of text seemed appropriate for the earlier, more measured, scripting and preproduction stages where I could directly append my thoughts and reflections to working documents, such as drafts of the script, schedules and shooting plans, in addition to keeping a separate journal. Once shooting commenced, audio recordings using the voice memo function on my phone allowed for efficient, on-the-fly progress accounts that could be made without compromising the time-pressured filming process (such as when driving to and from locations), and without the constraint I always feel when writing text of the need to produce complete, connected sentences. Moreover, a bonus of this data is that it did not merely document the salient facts of the events at hand; by directly capturing my voice, my emotional response to these event—whether anxious or sanguine or anything in between—was directly evident *in my voice*, and available for later scrutiny and analysis.

THE CONTENT

Chapter 1

The focus of the introductory chapter is the genesis of this practice-based project. I discuss my background as an editor who has occasionally written and directed small, self-funded projects, and my parallel interest in the journeys of those editors who have made the transition to full-time careers as directors. I identify the editors-turned-directors who may be of use in my research and discuss their reflections about the value of their cutting room origins (Dmytryk, 2018; O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002). I also formulate the research questions that form the centre of this investigation, designed to explore the specific challenges faced by a transitioning editor together with the viability of a short film as a suitable vehicle to explore these challenges.

Chapter 2

Ahead of writing the screenplay, I investigate the criteria it must deliver in order to fully respond to the research questions. I discuss the difficulties of attempting the counter-intuitive task of designing a story to fit these criteria instead of the usual model of beginning with a story and moulding the production parameters to suit. I also discuss how my editing background added to my difficulties because of my natural inclination to prioritise story structure over characterisation when what is required in this short-form

project is an emphasis on character (Cooper & Dancyger, 2017). I investigate strategies to redress this shortcoming through the use of intensive, character-focussed writing exercises (Alessandra, 2010), before finally achieving the breakthrough that delivered an appropriate screenplay.

Chapter 3

I explore strategies for planning the shooting of the film within an industry-standard paradigm while allowing maximum focus on the key areas of directorial concern: directing actors and camera placement (Mamet, 1994). I discuss the director's crucial role in this preproduction phase in order to ensure that the script is filmed as envisaged (Ruchti, Taylor & Walker, 2000). I investigate a strategy for directing actors after analysing various approaches used by other editors-turned-directors (Dmytryk, 2018; O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002). I also investigate approaches to the filming process, again analysing strategies used by other editors-turned-directors, which I hope will compensate for my lack of directing experience (Rabiger & Hurbis-Cherrier, 2020).

Chapter 4

I discuss my early loss of optimism about the outcome of the shoot in the face of mounting production difficulties and its impact on my outlook (Berbert, 1973). I reflect on the impact of my editing background, including the frustrations I felt directing the main actor, who proved resistant to even the simplest of instructions regarding his exaggerated performance (Weston, 1999). I also explore the unanticipated advantages of my editing experience, such as the ability to intuit that a proposed scene would not be viable as scripted, together with the knowledge—acquired in the cutting room—to resolve the issue in a cinematic way (Mamet, 1999).

Chapter 5

I reflect on my decision to edit the film myself as a means of both furthering my directorial vision for the project (Ginna, 1999a) and to formulate a realistic assessment of my performance during filming through a close analysis of the rushes (Proferes, 2018). I describe the ameliorative work undertaken to bring the film closer to my directorial vision while at the same time remaining open to unforeseen opportunities that suggest new directions (O'Steen, 2009). I also explore the capacity of visual effects

(VFX) to not only repair or improve deficient shots but to respond to other production issues in creative and unusual ways that increase the production values of the project beyond those suggested by my modest resources (Dmytryk, 2019b).

Chapter 6

I discuss the chronology of the project from the formulation of the research questions and their driving influence on the script, through the preproduction and production phases, and until the completion of editing. I explore my response to the different challenges of each phase from the perspective of an editor with limited direct filmmaking experience, especially in the areas of performance and cinematography (Mamet, 1994). I also explore the unanticipated advantages resulting from my time in cutting rooms, such as the ability to foresee that a scene has been written to unfold in a clumsy and non-cinematic way (O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002).

SUMMARY

In response to my research investigation, *Towards Directing: An editor's journey*, and in electing to frame my topic as creative practice research, I have produced an artefact in the form of a short dramatic film and an exegesis chronicling my progress through the process of making the film, in which I incorporate the experiences and observations of other editors who have successfully made the journey to directing.

The research questions have been formulated to investigate an editor's ability to handle those aspects of directing that cannot be learned in the cutting room—in particular, directing performers and camera placement. A second, equally important component of the research is a test of my ability to operate within the framework of industrial filmmaking.

In Chapter 2 I focus on the development of the script which, counter to the usual approach of being propelled by a story idea, is in this instance driven by the strict need to respond to the research questions. I begin by formulating the criteria essential to the research, including the need to operate within the mainstream production paradigm and demonstrate an ability to direct actors. I then commence the ungainly and

counterintuitive task of developing a story that incorporates these criteria while at the same time delivering to viewers a satisfying narrative experience.

CHAPTER 2
Scripting

> 'The guy says to the girl, "That's a lovely dress". He does not say, "I haven't been laid in six weeks".'
>
> David Mamet, writer-director (Mamet, 1994, p. 373)

The research nature of this project requires a complete inversion of my usual approach to filmmaking that, until now, has always followed the sequence of idea-script-production. However, in this instance the production stipulations central to the investigation are the priority and need to be privileged over story; instead of writing a screenplay and then pondering the production issues, it is incumbent on me to do the reverse.

I began the seemingly counterintuitive task to build a list of elements I felt were essential for a full exploration of the research questions. My anxiety lessened as the list grew and the parameters of the production became clearer. I find comfort in the Aristotelian notion of poetics as a way 'to describe how basic elements might be assembled to produce a successful composition' (Lasky, 2013, p. 17). How I might turn these production requirements into a story was still perplexing but the process, both as practitioner-led research and for future dissemination, allowed for 'reflection upon the knowledge integral to the composition of a piece of creative writing' (p. 21).

My approach to writing has always been the same: I seem to know how the story starts and ends, and I also know to a fair degree what happens in the middle. I map out these elements on a pinboard and I keep adding new elements until I have the plot of the story tightly locked down. I agree with screenwriter William Goldman that 'screenplays are structure' (Horrocks, 2019, para. 1), and I feel a strong affinity with the writings of Linda Seger, especially her book *Making a Good Script Great* (2010) that also places structure

at the centre of screen stories. Seger, in turn, references pioneering structuralist Syd Field who argues, 'Simply put, structure holds the story together' (Field, 2013, para. 2).

Subsequently, the structure of my screen stories emerges first, and in the case of my feature scripts the structure naturally falls into the paradigm championed by Seger and Field, featuring three acts: set-up, confrontation and resolution (Seger, 2010; Field, 2005). I recognise the importance of creating engaging, multi-dimensional characters but it's the case with my practice that the characters only begin to emerge with any clarity during the plotting process. I also concur with Seger's (2010) assertion that a properly dimensionalised character 'gains something by their participation in the story, and a story gains something from the character's involvement' (p. 180).

I am also influenced by the work of Pilar Alessandra, in particular her book, The Coffee Break Screenwriter (2010), which offers strategies to assist time-poor writers develop and refine stories. I find her focussed exercises, often only ten-minutes long, very effective in developing insights into stories and characters.

BACKGROUND TO THE SCRIPT

When writing *Absolute Zero* (Woodruff, 2010), I'd experimented with an eclectic style, a mix of semi-documentary, re-enactment and surrealism that I hoped would suggest various perspectives of the decline of the central character as he succumbed to hypothermia (see Appendix A for the *Absolute Zero* screenplay). During the extended production and editing phases, I further extended the experimentation through the incorporation of additional surreal material using the VFX knowledge I gained during my time working on *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Osborne, Jackson, Walsh & Sanders, 2001).

My goal had been to deliver an unusual story told in an unusual way, a major challenge to my nascent conceptualisation and implementation skills. The film's festival successes seemed to confirm that I'd achieved this. However, a more sobering perspective was provided by the producers who, having heard about the success of *Absolute Zero*, approached me for the feature scripts I'd written. To my occasional detriment, I included a DVD of *Absolute Zero* with each script, and while the producers seemed genuinely

impressed with the film *per se*, often singling out its 'unusual structure' and 'visual inventiveness' for praise, they were united in the observation that it went only a small way towards demonstrating my ability to direct a conventional narrative.
The opinion of these industry professionals mattered a great deal; I saw a strong alliance with a producer as a crucial first step in securing production funding for one of my feature scripts which, naturally, I also wanted to direct. It's entirely reasonable that a producer would not want to begin this arduous process without total confidence in my technical and aesthetic abilities to deliver the film.

Despite my immense disappointment I could see their point. By its very design *Absolute Zero* provided only limited opportunities for the interactive performances and camera choreography that is the mainstay of conventional drama. The producers seemed to have no issue with the way I'd directed the actors and camera, rather, their concern was that the results couldn't readily be extrapolated to more orthodox screen stories. Perhaps the narrative style of the film, with its drama-doco-surrealist amalgam, also fell too far outside the norm to mitigate their anxieties. This feedback from producers drove my decision to engage in this PhD and has been an essential consideration in the design of the research questions.

If judged as a 'calling card' film designed to showcase the directing skills required to operate in the mainstream, *Absolute Zero* is an abject failure. But more important here is that the performance and camera issues cited by the producers militate against the usefulness of a film in a similar style for the purposes of researching editors journeying into mainstream directing. As prosaic as it seems, a more conventional narrative appears to be called for, one that allows for a more familiar and, for producers at least, a more straightforward and reassuring directorial style.

FORM OF THE SCRIPT

What form should the script take? 'Short' is the obvious answer. My resources didn't extend to the production of a feature film and, unless stamina is considered a major determinant of a transitioning director, the reduced running time should not necessarily infer reduced research opportunities. I agree with Rabiger (2013) that good short films 'require their makers to conquer the full range of production, authorship, and stylistic

problems poetically and in a small compass' (p. 8). From a production standpoint a short film may be viewed as a longer-form project in microcosm. However, the reduced running length should not be regarded as an excuse to deliver an emasculated version of a story best told in a more substantial form. Instead, the reduced running length calls for narratives that are more straightforward and single-stranded, involving fewer characters, with less complex 'journeys' (Cooper & Dancyger, 2017).

The producers' feedback gave me the focus I needed to help develop the research questions for this practice-based project. I began the scripting process by prioritising opportunities for the incorporation of conventional performance and camera techniques. I decided the script must, at its very foundation, be able to showcase my abilities as a transitioning editor to:

- operate with actors in a conventional manner, in sequences featuring multiple actors interacting in the same temporal and spatial zone (i.e. in the same time and place)
- use a camera or multiple cameras to cover conventionally staged drama of the sort above, incorporating multiple camera angles and shot sizes in the usual manner.

Additionally, to heighten the parallels between my production and the industry model, I decided the script and the subsequent production should also:

- deliver technical values that reflect high-end production values, including shooting in an industry standard high-definition video format, and featuring professional-quality lighting and audio, yet have a budget commensurate with my resources
- be achievable using a small, professionally structured crew operating according to industry protocols, and which should include a separate cinematographer and camera assistant/s, one or more production assistants and a location sound recordist
- feature multiple scenes in multiple locations, including locations chosen to increase production values and/or featuring reasonable production challenges

- potentially allow for the inclusion of VFX but only if I steadfastly commit to not doing them myself and instead drive the VFX design/implementation process as a director
- involve an intense shooting period of around seven days, with the production being managed and scheduled in accordance with industry-standard practices.

THE WRITING PROCESS

So I began the task of scripting the film with a set of specific technical parameters but without any idea whatsoever of what the story of the film might be. This is a complete reversal of the way I have worked in the past, and a process I'm unlikely to repeat in the future. For me writing begins with an epiphany—a 'light bulb' moment—where a story or a key part of a story is delivered in an emotionally charged flash of inspiration so powerful, so insistent, and with a searing, emphatic certainty that it drives me to the keyboard. I consider myself to be curious and rational to a fault, yet in this instance I admit to a deep superstition about any attempt to 'unpack' or 'own' these visitations. Here I'm content with the clichés—shallow and as un-enlightening as they may be—that these ideas simply 'come out of the blue', 'like lightning', with content 'I would never have thought of in a million years'. I'm in good company, including, J.K. Rowling (Byrne, 2012) and J. R. R. Tolkien (Serck, 2013), both of whom were driven to write some of their famous works by similar epiphanies.

At this stage of scripting I had my shopping list of dry, industrial-type outcomes but no epiphany. I trawled through my director's journal looking for appropriate story ideas but found very little. Unsurprisingly, really, given that I seldom get 'flashes' about ideas for stories. Instead my journals are filled with ideas that potentially assist in *delivering* stories, such as snippets of dialogue, character traits and camera angles. The only substantial resonances I found were a couple of entries from the time of *Absolute Zero* (Woodruff, 2010): that the next script I write should feature a strong female lead, and that a future script should end with the main character laughing. These I added to the list together with several lesser finds so that, in addition to the above requirements, the production:

- should feature a strong female character, a reaction to my two previous scripts, including Absolute Zero, both of which feature a predominance of male characters
- should end with the main character laughing
- be designed to obviate the need for fades and dissolves, including even the fade-up and fade-down traditionally used to denote the start and end of the film
- should feature no opening titles whatsoever, not even the name of the film
- should feature a diegetic-only approach to delivering the music score, using onscreen sources such as CD players and radios instead of the usual non-diegetic approach where the music is 'represented as coming from a source outside the story world' (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020, p. 285).

DEVELOPING THE STORY: STRUCTURE vs CHARACTER

I still needed a story, of course, and I took little comfort from Haseman's (2006) view that 'many practice-led researchers do not commence a research project with a sense of 'a problem' (para. 17), that instead they may be led by what is best described as 'an enthusiasm of practice: something which is exciting, something which may be unruly' (para. 17). I felt strongly that I did have a problem, and that any potential enthusiasm and excitement would emerge only after a suitable script had been written.

I was preoccupied with the issue of how to twist the flimsy story strands into a narrative. I began with the idea of the main character laughing. I remembered a Charlie Chaplin film, *The Idle Class* (Chaplin, 1921), I'd seen as a teenager and then more recently at a film history symposium. Chaplin plays an alcoholic who arrives home to find a note from his long-suffering wife telling him she's moved out, with no intention of returning unless he stops drinking. Stony-faced, he turns away from us to a photograph of her on a table behind him. He holds it aloft, convulsing in pain, shoulders heaving, a study in grief. He continues this way until finally he turns to face us again and we see that the photograph has been replaced with a cocktail shaker, his paroxysms having been seamlessly transformed into the business of mixing a celebratory martini—an hilarious double-cross.

The twist really appealed to me—take a character to the point of crying, perhaps even have them begin to cry, then have them laugh somehow. But unlike Chaplin, who was playing a trick on the audience, I wanted both emotions to be genuine, and I didn't want the more usual scenario where it is the woman who cries, therefore I rejected it; I wanted her to be a strong character. So, I decided there had to be a man and a woman, and the man had to cry. Really cry. Then laugh. Really laugh. But why would he cry—and why would he laugh?

Should the script focus on structure or character? The novelist Henry James, writing in pre-cinema times, refused to differentiate between these two vital story elements, insisting instead that the only worthwhile distinction was between good and bad work: 'What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?' (Hoover, 2016, para. 5). Yet the character/structure debate extends back to at least the time of Aristotle (Horton, 2000), and two millennia later the dispute still dominates screenwriting instruction. Syd Field (2006), an early proponent of structuralism, devised his 'paradigm', a tightly prescribed sequence of three acts corresponding to set-up, confrontation and resolution, bluntly insisting that structure is the most important aspect of a screenplay: 'Without structure you have no story; without story you have no screenplay' (p. 17). Others regard Field as the 'bogeyman' of modern screenwriting, asserting that he and his acolytes, including Linda Seger and Christopher Vogler, 'have had a profoundly negative effect on the quality of American screenwriting' (Horton, 2000, p. 14). Horton argues that character and action are inseparable, and that strong, multi-dimensional characters have been an essential element of classical American cinema until recent times.

In my own practice I recognise that I began my excursions into screenwriting very much in the thrall of structure. In particular, I was greatly influenced by the stance of Seger (2010):

> Dramatic composition, almost from the beginning of drama, has tended toward the three-act structure. Whether it's a Greek tragedy, a five-act Shakespearean play, a four-act dramatic series, or a seven-act Movie-of-the-week, we still see the basic three-act structure: beginning, middle and end – or set-up, development, and resolution. (p. 19)

It is moot whether I was drawn to Seger and her writings because of my editing background or if I was drawn to editing in the first instance because of an innate interest in structure. Regardless, I've always found that the ability to manipulate structure is the most exciting aspect of editing.

Sometimes the process might involve shifting a scene to another spot in the film, or removing it entirely, to enable the story to unfold in a more coherent and dramatically potent way. At other times a character might be entirely removed. Or a subplot. Or, as in the famous instance of Woody Allen's Annie Hall (Joffe, 1977), a relatively minor subplot might be retained while everything else is removed. Editor Ralph Rosenblum recounts that after the film had been assembled he and Allen decided that the only aspect of the story that seemed to be working was a minor strand featuring the relationship between the characters played by Allen and Diane Keaton (Rosenblum, 1986). The film was restructured to foreground the relationship, and then largely rewritten and reshot to consolidate its prominence as the centre of the story.

Editing may be under-appreciated by audiences and even devalued by some egocentric directors who want to claim authorship over every frame of their projects (Rosenblum, 1986) but there are others, such as Sydney Pollack, who compare the process to writing for the opportunities it provides to reshape and recontextualise material already 'in the can' (Ressner, 2006). David Lean, who transitioned to directing after a highly successful career as an editor, went so far as to refer to the editor of a film as 'the second director, for he again is the teller of a story in pictures' (Rosenblum, 1986, p. 92).

The nature of the craft emphasises structure but it is not the case that editors are without influence over character. Beyond its widely understood ability to improve an actor's performance, and therefore a character's credibility, through the careful selection of 'takes' (i.e. the different versions of the shots that comprise the performance), editing can also be used to nuance the perception of a character (Pape, 2016). For instance, a facile, 'easily read' character can be made more interesting and enigmatic through the shrewd pruning of dialogue and action to make the character less 'open', less easy-to-read, or an unlikeable character can be made more 'accessible' or

audience-friendly by using takes that soften the hard kinks in their personas, even when those kinks were intended in the first place (O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002).

Paradoxically, much of my early writing journey was a journey away from structuralism, learning to populate my too-tightly ordered stories with credible, engaging characters who both belonged in the story and to whom the story 'belonged'. A major test of this came toward the end of my first feature film script when I realised my main character would simply not respond to events in the story in the way I'd planned. I wrote and rewrote but failed abjectly to devise a plausible scene in which he did what I wanted him to do. The situation was only resolved after I wrote two drafts of the script, each with its own divergent ending, the first following my original intention and the second giving the character full rein of his personality. Needless to say, the version I'd steadfastly resisted, where he operates autonomously and not like the proverbial mouse stumbling about in a maze, is the only one that left my computer. It is perhaps the biggest single lesson I've learned about writing.

Over time the structure/character dichotomy has evolved to represent other divergences—real and imagined—centred around structuralism's 'bogeyman' reputation: 'Hollywood' movies vs. 'art' movies, 'VFX extravaganzas' vs. 'painterly compositions', '"guns for hire" directors' vs. 'auteurs', 'big budget' vs. 'low budget', 'the star system' vs. 'ensemble acting' (McKee, 2010), a litany of easy slurs through evocation of the 'blockbuster' stereotype, with its clichés of visual excess and 'cookie-cutter' characterisation.

Of concern for this project is that the binaries at the centre of my investigation, character and structure/action, could be easily conflated to place them in opposition to each other (Horton, 2000). However, as a result of the lessons I've learnt through work on my own projects and those of others, and through the reading I've done, I believe strongly both to be vital, and will strive to incorporate them equally into this and any future projects. Even Horton, while championing character-based writing as a reaction against what he terms 'microwave scripts' assembled using easy-to-follow, structure-based 'recipes', does not prioritise character over structure, saying instead 'there can be no fully drawn character without a narrative point of view, a story structure, a sense of

time and place' (p. 11). Vivid, compelling narratives need vivid, compelling characters, and vice versa.

In the case of short films, Cooper and Dancyger (2017) note a tendency of writers to neglect characterisation on the basis that the smaller running length reduces character requirements. They assert the reverse is the case—that the short film relies principally on character, suggesting instead that writers begin with familiar, 'easily read', characters who are then nuanced away from two-dimensionality while still remaining readily identifiable.

In the absence of any epiphany I'm attempting to begin this project with just a sliver of character: A man who cries and then laughs. I have a 'schtick' looking for a character, and a character looking for a story – and a looming deadline. Not a comfortable place to start. I can't wait for an epiphany, either for my character or for myself, so I trawl through my screenwriting books for help, settling on Alessandro's character exercise, searching for a usable flaw in my hazy protagonist.

I start with the only thing I have, the crying and the laughing. But it's culturally unacceptable for men to cry, perhaps having been taught from a young age that 'big boys don't cry', except as a response to a catastrophic event such as death, in which instance he wouldn't follow up with a laughing jag. Impasse.

OK, so what about the laughing? When I think of the laughing, I see him laughing maniacally, like a lunatic, in an explosive and self-deprecating way, the sort of laughter one reserves for one's own stupidity. So perhaps he's laughing at himself.

Perhaps at his own hubris?

Maybe that's his flaw: he's essentially a good guy but lousy at expressing himself, hiding his true feelings behind bluff and arrogance until they erupt in an inappropriate and public way. (Perhaps this also suggests a positive character trait: that despite his bloke-ish rigidity he has a sense of humour about himself.)

Personal journal extract
March 2017

TOWARDS A PROTAGONIST

As a consequence of this reflection, I used Alessandra's (2010) 'Public, Professional and Public Rules' exercise (p. 64) to explore the different aspects of my hazy protagonist and the different 'faces' he presents in each of these spheres: in his public life, his professional life and, of most interest to me, his private world (i.e. when he's alone). The exercise inspired the following sequence, driven by my perception of his deep need not to show his feelings:

- The worst situation he could find himself in would be one where he has to act with sensitivity and candour, involving someone he cares for deeply.
- His first reaction would be to lose his temper, resentful at having been pushed into a corner where he has to reveal himself.
- This action would backfire by alienating him from the other person.
- He realises he's behaved appallingly but, still unable to respond in a reasonable way, his frustration becomes pain, then tears.
- And finally, after the breakthrough, laughter.

Buoyed at having found an emotional through line, I returned to my director's journal; perhaps other ideas would now suggest themselves. I find a copy of an email sent to me by mistake some time ago, intended for the bane of my inbox, Anita Woodruff, a resident of Inglewood, California. Woodruff, a complete stranger despite the shared surname, has been miscommunicating her email address to all and sundry for almost as long as I've had a Hotmail account. Across the years I've received countless messages intended for her from financial institutions, employment agencies, even car-pooling teams, as well as from friends and acquaintances. For a time I sent polite emails to the originators of these messages alerting them to the problem. The personal emails ebbed away but the other

material, including sensitive (and potentially critical) communications from banks and medical clinicians, continues to arrive undiminished.

The email that rose above the dross and made it into my journal dates from the early 2000s. One of Woodruff's friends shares a cloying yet humorous story about a mother and father dealing with their son's 'sick' pet lizard. Perhaps true or perhaps merely some kind of small-time urban myth, the story was nonetheless sufficiently engaging for me to set it down. And now it catches my eye.

I give my characters a son, Sam, aged ten, who springs into my mind in crisp focus, who struggles with his father's reserve, and who has a lizard. The father (no name yet) works maybe for a construction company, running large building jobs where his truculence serves him well. The mother (also nameless), in contrast to her partner, is middle class, university educated (a teacher? a lawyer?), and the emotional centre of the family. Inevitably, she's closer to Sam than his father. She sees beyond her partner's emotional obtuseness to the decent man he is, although she would readily admit she could do without his macho self-protectiveness. And so on…

Detail upon detail begins to declare itself but, in this instance, in the absence of that mysterious of any epiphany, these wayward specifics only serve to fuel a mounting anxiety, producing clutter not clarity. (Is the lizard clutter? I'm not sure at this point.) I'm worried that the real story might never emerge from beneath this avalanche of ideas for shots and dialogue and myriad other technicalities, all of which are untestable without the touchstone of a strong, unifying idea, with the end result being a story where, as a writer colleague so eloquently puts it, there's 'Too much sizzle, not enough steak'.

Personal journal extract
May 2017

I tried another approach: a 'stalker's diary', in which I imagined I was shadowing the father at work, with friends, with his parents and siblings, and especially with his partner and Sam. At this stage I wasn't hunting for scenes to write into the story; I was simply observing him, looking for insights into his character as he moved through the

various worlds he inhabits. He emerges as a man held captive by a childhood with unengaged 'blue collar' parents who passed their low expectations for themselves down to their children, where it was OK to be clever but not 'too smart for your own good', and to 'always stick up for yourself' but to otherwise 'not make a song and dance' about feelings and emotions. I came to see him as having transcended his parents' and his own expectations yet still dragging the detritus of his childhood behind him. Then came the realisation that I'd based him on myself, exemplifying Jean Cocteau's self-assessment that 'an artist always paints himself' (Chauvat, 1983, 0:05:49).

I turned to psychiatrist Rollo May's book, *The Courage to Create* (May, 1994), in which he explores the nature of creativity, hoping for an insight into my dilemma. He tells of an incident from his student days where an elegantly formed hypothesis he'd formulated would not yield to his endeavours to prove it. Nothing worked, until at the end of yet another day of frustration he abandoned his efforts and headed home. It was then, while walking to the subway, away from conscious engagement with the conundrum, that the solution suddenly revealed itself 'out of the blue'.

May (1994) posits that his intense efforts to resolve the problem were a crucial precursor to the 'flash' or 'breakthrough' that delivered the solution, and that 'the new form which suddenly became present, came in order to complete an incomplete Gestalt with which I was struggling in conscious awareness' (p. 62). He refers to the 'incomplete Gestalt' as being 'this unfinished pattern … constituting a "call" that was answered by the unconscious' (p. 62).

The breakthrough, when it came, was so counterintuitive that, had it not been delivered with the signature 'out of the blue' flourish, I wouldn't have taken any notice. It was delivered, with appropriate mundanity, during a late-night excursion to the supermarket: I was to imagine that the script is being written not by me but by Sam, the fictitious son of the story, looking back from some time in the future.

The notion felt about as far removed from a breakthrough as possible; it felt opaque and aggravating and pretentious. But the more I tried to dismiss it as stupid, the more it stuck. Story elements I'd been grappling with for months began coalescing into a structure that

held them precisely in place with clarity and certainty, and somehow the parameters of the yet-to-be-written material emerged in crisp focus.

My head said no but my gut said yes. I hurried back to the keyboard. The scenes tumbled out in a steady, cohesive stream, building into a more-or-less complete story so 'tight' and self-contained that it's difficult to imagine there ever was an impasse.

And sealing the deal is an unexpected bonus, the gift of an additional scene at the end of the story that shifts the focus from father to son, neatly steering the conclusion away from the glib sign-off of serendipitous closure to one where the viewer is left with the sense that little has actually been resolved. This new final scene shows that the dramatic-comedic 'can' has simply been kicked further down the road, foreshadowing a much larger trajectory, and signalling that an authentic resolution to the father's dilemma will be substantially more difficult to achieve.

Personal journal extract
July 2017

I was buoyed to realise that the resulting twenty-five page screenplay delivered all the items on the lists I'd made at the start of the scripting process. But even more gratifying was the feeling that it did more than simply deliver the challenges necessary to this investigation. At the risk of sounding immodest, I felt the story to be somewhat engaging, with solid characters and featuring moments of poignancy and humour. I was excited at the thought of making it; I felt that with only the usual amount of luck I ought to be able to bring it to life, despite my modest resources (see Appendix B for the final version of the screenplay).

SUMMARY

The process of developing the story of the film that forms the centre of this research demanded a complete reversal of my usual approach to writing a screenplay. Instead of being driven by an idea, here the story is secondary to the need to respond to the research questions.

I began by developing a list of key elements the film needed to deliver in order to respond to this challenge, including the tests of working with actors, camera placement and an industry compatible production schedule. However, the list, though essential to the research process, did nothing to inspire a story.

The demands of this 'wag the dog' requirement was destabilising, and the writing process stalled in the absence of a suitable story idea. The deadlock was resolved only after I added to the already daunting list a number of ideas I'd found while trawling through my writer's journal. These items were not story ideas in themselves but had the potential to contribute to a story. They were random yet nonetheless tantalising and, as counter-intuitive as it seems, the need to accommodate these extra demands somehow resolved my writer's block, and the characters and the story emerged quickly thereafter.

In Chapter 3 I explore the preproduction process in the context of the research questions, with particular emphasis on the creation of a shooting schedule that emulates the industry paradigm while also delivering opportunities to test and extend my abilities with actors and camera placement. I discuss the director's central role in this crucial planning phase, which is essential to ensure the likelihood of the director's vision being realised. I also investigate the directing strategies of other editors-turned-directors in preparation for the shoot.

CHAPTER 3
Preproduction

> 'I went to see [Ernst] Lubitsch. I said, "I'm going to start work in the morning on the first scenes of my first film. I'm scared shitless". And he said, "I've made seventy movies, and I'm still scared shitless"'.
>
> Billy Wilder, director (Junkersdorf, 2006, 0:07:37)

In this chapter I investigate the preproduction process, a vital period of activity in preparation for the arduous process of shooting the film. This is particularly relevant to my research questions because it represents a major departure from my usual editing activities. In particular, I will concentrate on casting and blocking as these processes fall outside the domain of the editor, and the choices made during this stage are crucial to the success of the short film. These are processes where cutting room experience has no advantage.

I will focus on analysing my own process as I engage in preparing the film for production. I will also draw upon a range of theorists, including the work of other editors who have made the transition to directing, in particular the writings of Edward Dmytryk who spent almost twenty years working in cutting rooms, beginning as a projectionist and then progressing through the ranks to become an editor before transitioning to directing, where he remained for the rest of his career, helming over fifty feature films (Dmytryk, 2018). In later life, he wrote a series of specialised books on various aspects of filmmaking, including screenwriting, directing, acting and editing, drawing heavily on his extensive career (Dmytryk, 2018).

Preproduction 'includes all components of the filmmaking process that will take place from the inception of the project up to the first day of principal photography' (George, 2010, p. 45). Thus begins the process of transposing the words of the script into a structured series of images and sounds that 'communicate and dramatise the concept

and [which] should be as carefully selected as are the words of any master writer, be it Poe or Proust, because ... they must deliver the original message, but not in the original words' (Dmytryk, 2019a, p. 97). The work undertaken in preproduction is wide-ranging and can include the writing of a final version of the script, scheduling and budgeting, recruiting a cast and crew, rehearsal, securing equipment, location scouting, props and wardrobe and planning any special postproduction requirements such as visual effects (VFX) (Honthaner, 2010).

This is where the rubber meets the road. The differences between directing and editing are already very apparent. If my involvement with this production was only as the editor there would have been a meeting or interview with the director and perhaps a conversation after that about setting up the cutting room and that would be it. I would then have nothing to do until the start of shooting. But instead I've already had countless conversations about all aspects of the production, with surprisingly few of them having anything directly to do with creative or aesthetic matters. Most are about assembling the essentials required for the shoot. Of these, the most productive so far is the offer of the university where I teach sessionally to provide access to equipment and studio space, and to release a technician I regularly work with as a classroom aide from his usual duties so he can act as the director of photography. I've also been bombarding friends and colleagues, and not a few strangers, with wide-ranging questions about every aspect of the imminent production, including possible cast and crew, potential locations, shooting references (especially for the car interior scenes), 2D and 3D visual effects strategies, keeping lizards as pets, etc. At the end of each day I'm acutely aware of how much talking I've done and I'm already heartily sick and tired of it, with no doubt, a lot more to come.

Personal journal extract
April 2018

Given the modest size of the production, I had also taken on the duties of producer instead of trying to recruit another person into the role. Larger productions feature at least one producer (often more) with the various producers each assuming responsibility for different aspects of the production and receiving specific credits, such as executive producer, producer, co-producer, associate producer or line producer (Honthaner, 2010). Although the focus of my project was the directing component, it

seemed that even at that early stage I was also operating according to Honthaner's definition of a producer, as 'the one who initiates, coordinates, supervises and controls all creative, financial, technological and administrative aspects of a motion picture' (p. 2). Consequently, I felt that, like it or not—and I didn't like it at all—I was the producer and that, given the size of the production, there was little benefit in sharing the role with someone else.

However, I recognised the value of someone to help with planning and implementing the shooting schedule. This could have been a line producer who would be 'responsible for all of the day-to-day matters that go into keeping the production running smoothly, while striving to make sure it remains on schedule and on budget' (Honthaner, 2010, p. 3). Or perhaps an assistant director (AD), whose duties would include 'preparation of the shooting schedule and call sheets, tending to logistical elements, … tracking progress throughout the [shooting] day [and] maintaining order and efficiency of the workflow of the set' (George, 2010, p. 50). Once again, the small scale of the production obviated the need for both and although my instinct told me that an AD would be preferable, I postponed the decision until after interviewing potential crew members, hoping that a suitable candidate for one of the options would present themselves and the question would be resolved in that way.

Part of the university's conditions for use of its facilities is that I recruit media students into ancillary roles such as assistant directors and camera assistants and other 'grunt' positions. I begin approaching students I've taught and been impressed by to ask if they would be interested. Many accept immediately, even before hearing details of available roles and shooting dates. I'm buoyed by their enthusiasm and their willingness to give up a week of their break for the experience. The contact list quickly swells to over twenty names and I realise that I've swapped 'I' for 'we' and 'me' for 'our' when talking about the film. It might be my script— but it's now our film.

Personal journal extract
April 2018

However, despite their enthusiasm and energy, none of these students had the skills necessary for the line producer/AD role. I resigned myself to taking on the AD role,

hoping that I could perhaps involve a couple of students as junior ADs to help lessen my expanding workload. For the first time, I began to feel anxious. I wondered if I was perhaps too overcommitted to properly inhabit my role as director.

However, a chance encounter with a mature-age student changed things in an instant. He not only offered his assistance but floored me by *asking* for the AD position, saying that his experience as a props builder and prosthetics and special-effects make-up artist in the film and television industry (about which I knew nothing) had exposed him to both good and bad ADs, and he was keen to give it a try for himself.

Dmytryk (2018) describes the title of AD as a misnomer:

> He is not an assistant in the creative sense, but is instead the set foreman. He sees that the set is efficiently organised and that everything the director needs is at hand, whether it be actors, extras, or special equipment; he also marshals the set for the director during rehearsals and shooting. (p. 19)

Scheduling is directly linked to budget (Schenk & Long, 2015), and key to many decisions was the necessity to keep costs as low as possible. Crew and cast were asked to work for nothing. The cameras, lights and other equipment were supplied by the university. Both of these measures resulted in considerable savings, however there were still expenses, including feeding the crew and cast, the hire of an appropriate car, the purchase of a lizard and cage, costumes and dry cleaning, and art direction expenses. In keeping with George's (2010) assertion that maximum effort and attention paid to detail during preproduction would be rewarded in the final product, we worked hard to push our production values beyond that suggested by our meagre resources. Stanley Kubrick (Ruchti, Taylor & Walker, 2000) compares the process to a military operation:

> You've got to have what you want, where you want it, and at the right time, and you have got to use your resources (money and people) in the most effective way possible because they are limited, and when they are seriously stretched it always shows on the screen. (p. 13)

The demands of preproduction are unrelenting. For much of the time I felt that I was doing, at best, the second-most important thing. Dmytryk (2018) says, 'The director is a

problem solver, and problems rarely march in single file' (p. 13). Every problem, every consideration (locations, transport, costumes, shooting formats, microphones, batteries, etc.) is somehow vital to the film and rightly demands attention. As director Ridley Scott puts it, 'you'd better be able to enjoy or tolerate that. Otherwise don't do the job' (Sammon, 1998, p. 141). Most of this unending barrage of questions are without significance for this investigation and so will not feature here except to record that their combined mass eats significantly into the time available for concerns that are of consequence to both the production and the investigation, and which are pithily articulated by David Mamet (1994): 'The main questions a director must answer are: "where do I put the camera?" and "what do I tell the actors?"' (p. 347).

ACTORS

My approach to the issues of actors and performance was of necessity shaped by the need to get five pages of script 'in the can' (i.e. recorded) each shooting day. In order to achieve this, my strategy was to 'block' each scene in preproduction. 'Blocking' refers to decisions made about the placement and movement of both the characters and the camera during a scene (Honthaner, 2013). I felt that blocking ahead of time, away from the stresses and distractions of the set, would increase the likelihood of getting all the shots I needed for the scene instead of trying to work them out in the high-pressured environment of the shoot. Such a plan also reduced the risk of being forced to 'cut in the camera', a desperate strategy used when time is running out in an attempt to obtain, at the very least, the absolute minimum number of shots required to cover the scene. Cutting in the camera 'signifies that the director, in any particular "take", shoots only that portion of the scene which he expects to use' (Dmytryk, 2019b, p. 13). For Dmytryk, who spent almost twenty years in cutting rooms before becoming a director, the practitioner who adopts this practice as a deliberate shooting strategy is 'the greatest sinner of all' (p. 13).

> The technique is self-defeating for two reasons:
>
> 1. It depends on sticking to strict 'story-boarding' or cutting to script, thus 'setting' the film prematurely and obviating any opportunity for later improvement or enhancement [in the cutting room].

> 2. It is clearly bad directional technique, since it affords the actors little or no opportunity to 'get into the scene' [because only a few lines at a time are being shot] and results in superficial, often stiff, performances.
>
> (Dmytryk, 2019b, p. 14)

This impact on editing options and performance makes the practice acceptable only as a last resort, and drove my decision to block ahead of time. But the strategy of pre-planning the shots, while maximising shooting time, has the disadvantage of reducing opportunities for the actors to contribute to the way the scene is played. This 'wait and see' approach was the strategy of another editor-turned-director, Hal Ashby, who made it a practice never to block in advance (Garnett, 2010):

> I just go in there and wing it … [I'd say] to the actors 'Why don't you sit down over there, and we'll see what happens'. Then you start working it down to pretty much where you've got it pretty much in line with what you're thinking. It all depends on what the scene is, how intimate the scene is, but I basically want the actors to work it out in some free form. I don't want to come in and make them fit the camera. I would rather make the camera fit the actors. (Powers, 1980, p. 93)

Stanley Kubrick regarded the practice as crucial. 'The important thing is not to put the cart before the horse and to set things up for the camera before you've made something worth filming' (Ruchti, Taylor & Walker, 2000, p. 26). However, Kubrick's access to resources greatly exceeded ours. Nicole Kidman (Harlan & Harlan, 2001) quotes him as saying 'Time is gold' during the production of *Eyes Wide Shut* (Kubrick, 1999). His reputation and resources gave him time in abundance, and the resulting 159-minute-long film holds the record for the longest continuous film shoot at 400 days (Power, 2019). Applying his shooting rate to our production would have resulted in our five-and-a-half-day shoot blowing out to over sixty-five days!

In the past my experience of working with actors has been mixed, as exemplified by the two lead actors in a previous short film I'd made. Playing the character of an elderly doctor was an actor who'd appeared in a film I'd edited several decades earlier in which he had a minor role playing the protagonist's grandfather. Despite his lack of screen

time, his performance was a standout, restrained and empathic, and I wrote the doctor's character with him in mind, not even knowing if he was still alive or not. I managed to track him down; he was in his eighties and seriously unwell by the time we shot the film, at the tail end of a long career performing in feature films, television and theatre. He'd worked with many directors, including several who'd gone on to international careers, yet despite his vast experience he saw his job as being to give me—the awkward neophyte—what I wanted, even when he had misgivings. For instance, it seemed to me that he occasionally fell into the habit of unnecessarily emphasising the age of his character by effecting a self-consciously feeble delivery of his lines. I was canny enough not to remind him that his own circumstances, especially his advanced age and ill-health, rendered any amplification unnecessary, but I was frustrated that I had no strategy for moving him away from the practice. Finally, desperate, I gauchely asked him to speed up the delivery of his lines. He complied uncomplainingly and the gamble paid off, however there were still moments when my inability to communicate what I was after—and to help him find it—frustrated us both. At other times he'd respond to my clumsy direction by saying that his training told him that what I wanted was wrong but I was the director and he was the actor, so he had to trust me. Such was his professionalism that, against his instincts, he gave me that trust and followed my instructions as best as he was able. I was greatly touched when, after seeing the completed film, he commented favourably on his performance and praised my efforts that had steered him toward it.

The other protagonist was in his twenties, keen, enviably confident and ambitious in his pursuit of a career as a film and television actor. He had trained at a private academy where the tuition had been very actor-centric. 'Why would my character do that?' was his mantra. On one particularly vexing occasion, I'd set up a shot that required him to stand with his back to the camera, watching a steam train pass through the frame in front of him. The shot was straightforward, however, because it involved a steam train, over which we had no control, it was a one-off; there could be no retakes. The action had been rehearsed several times while we waited for the train and all seemed well. Finally, we heard the whistle signalling its imminent arrival. The train appeared around the bend, I rolled the camera—and the actor turned to me and said, 'Hang on, what am I thinking?' I responded with an urgent, 'Just look at the train!' He did as instructed and

we got the shot, but afterwards he complained that I needed to learn how to talk to actors. He wasn't persuaded by my observation that we were only seeing the back of his head, so he could have been thinking about anything at all. Nor did he appreciate being reminded that he'd had over thirty minutes to ask questions about his motivation while we waited for the train. For the remainder of the shoot he regularly reminded me that my skills with actors needed attention. It was humiliating and enervating and did nothing for my confidence.

The research I've done since then has given me some perspective on these two very different experiences. I had cast the role of the doctor well. I'd seen the actor do good work, and he *was* elderly and this suited the character in every way—his physicality, his voice, his mannerisms—there was no need to embellish this. As Dmytryk (2019a) says, 'a "performance", so recognised, rings falsely. ... The actors on the screen must "be" the human beings the viewers watch' (p. 1). In 'acting' elderly, the actor drew attention to his performance, but after this was checked he instead used his craft to become the poignant and empathic character viewers remember with fondness. And my prosaic adjustment, simply suggesting that he speed up his delivery, although not steeped in arcane language of character or motivations, was easily understood and incorporated, and side-stepped a potentially sensitive and unnecessary conversation about his advanced years.

The behaviour of the younger actor suggests that he was protecting himself from scrutiny by both me and the camera. During the twelve months we worked together he exhibited an extreme self-consciousness that manifested on both exterior and interior levels: his performance was wooden and immovable, leaving me no choice but to scale back what I asked of him; he resisted conversations about his character's actions and motivations beyond the passive expectation that I should supply his interior thoughts and motivations. Most disappointing of all, he never made any suggestions about his character, such as what he might or might not do in a scene. Performance coach Judith Weston (1999) cites self-consciousness as a major problem for an actor:

> It means he is uncomfortable about being watched. Self-conscious acting is fussy, strained, thin, actorish; it lacks texture and spontaneity. ... Great actors love to give, love to perform. Lesser actors hide. They refrain from

> giving over their whole, flawed, idiosyncratic selves to every role. … They make safe choices. (p. 50).

What safer choice is there other than making the director responsible for his motivations, for what he's thinking? At this remove, I'm somewhat confident that my nascent skills with actors weren't the only issue here but at the time I felt his criticisms sharply. And while I'm indebted to him for the gift of his time during the course of the shoot, I'm unsurprised that he has since commenced a new career unconnected to acting.

I met with a theatre director 'friend-of a-friend' at an outside café to talk about casting strategies. By an extraordinary coincidence we're joined by an actor acquaintance of his, John, who just happened—literally— to be driving past and saw us having coffee. As the

two caught-up, I watched John from the sidelines, and my anxiety about the casting process began to ebb. I'd been concerned that I wouldn't know what to look for when auditioning actors, and that I wouldn't see it when I found it. Yet as I observed John I spotted the key elements I considered essential in my protagonist: in particular, a 'rough diamond' quality that suggested that despite his blue-collar, almost petulant, manner he possessed an underlying sensitivity that was key to the character in my story.

After he left I shared my observations with the director, who confirmed that my intuition was strong, and that consequently I shouldn't worry about mis-casting. Instead I should relax and enjoy the process. Easier said than done! The following day he called to say that, having read the script, he concurred with my appraisal of John as the father character, and also to say that he'd emailed him the script, and that John had replied to say he was willing to play the role.

John and I met up, although not for an audition; I'd seen his work previously in several plays and knew his calibre as a theatre actor, an appraisal I'd augmented by watching clips of his film and TV work online. I knew he could do the role but did his availability fit our shooting dates? Our schedule, shoe-horned into the university's mid-year break was

immovable. He was available, he said, even though he was helping a friend produce a micro-budget feature during that time.

There was, however, a catch: he wanted me to use a child actor he knew to play his son. He said he'd worked with the boy before and felt strongly that he'd be good in the role. I felt cornered. Although the mechanism that saw him recruited to the project was somewhat unorthodox, I was nevertheless in charge of the process. i.e. despite the serendipitous circumstances of our meeting, I still exerted the same authority I'd bring to a conventional audition – and I expected to apply that same authority to the selection of all of the characters.

But, without saying so directly, he seemed to insinuate that with him came the boy; I felt he was saying that he was doing me a favour and that I should respond in kind.

Personal journal extract
April 2018

The chance encounter that became John's 'audition' was unorthodox yet it allowed me the opportunity to see him as a person, and not simply as an actor trying to secure a role. Unknowingly, I was pursuing the strategy of Elia Kazan, who believed there needs to be a strong nexus between the actor and the character they are to portray, and he would engage with actors in informal ways to learn whether they were right for the part (Proferes, 2018). Kazan, whom Stanley Kubrick had described as being 'without question, the best director we have in America' (as cited in Ciment, 2003, p. 34), asserted that 'for all but a handful of actors, the character had to be somewhere inside the actor' (as cited in Proferes, 2018, p. 124):

> The trick to casting then is: Does the actor under consideration embody the core of the character? At the very least, the actor must be able to relate to and understand the core of the character. Many times, with a very good actor, that is more than sufficient. (Proferes, 2018, p. 125)

Buoyed by the process of casting of the protagonist/father, I moved through the rest of the auditions with new-found confidence. The rest of the cast came together without too many problems, despite being let down by several actors who'd signalled an interest in

playing the role of the mother before pulling out for vague or specious reasons—they had auditioned well, seemed to genuinely like the script, but then withdrew. Finally, an acquaintance of my theatre director contact—an actor I'd never met previously or seen in any of his plays—Tara, secured the role. She auditioned well, was poised and articulate and, crucially, possessed an innate patrician outlook and confidence that I felt would make a good foil for John's blue-collar, chip-on-the-shoulder persona.
There, however, was a problem. Both actors, although available for the shoot, had commitments beforehand that severely limited the opportunity for rehearsals, either singly or together. In the end, there was only time for a single, shared, rehearsal.

Ameliorating my disappointment is Tucker's (2019) observation that although 'there are many books, courses, and classes about working with actors that all assume a rehearsal process and what that would mean to the director and the cast … they do not tally with the majority of film work as we know it today' (p. 98). Most modern productions simply do not have the resources of time or budget or both to allow for rehearsals, and that the reality of contemporary screen production is that 'sometimes the next time you meet an actor after casting them from an audition is when they walk on set in costume, to be fitted into the scene about to be shot' (p. 98).

I set out to make the one rehearsal available to me as productive as I could. With no time to work through each scene in detail, I used editor-turned-director Hal Ashby's approach to preparing the actors:

> We'll basically do read-through rehearsals about a week before, so we can all talk about each other's characters, and so-forth. If we can get the relationship of the characters established in the read-throughs, then I think the spontaneity will happen on its own, which is important to a film. (Crane & Fryer, 2012, p. 147)

We began by reading the script through in a casual, uninflected way. Another read, this time with the actors stepping into their roles, brought the story to life. Unsurprisingly, given the straightforward nature of the story, there were few questions about the plot, allowing me to manoeuvre the discussions toward the characters. I was especially keen to find parallels between the histories of the actors and their characters, an approach

inspired by Proferes (2018), who suggests that 'although films are told in the present, the characters come out of the past. Character *is* the past. It is everything that goes to make up who your characters are: family, social/economic background, and so on' (p. 124, emphasis in original). Dmytryk (2019c) reinforces the importance of this nexus, saying that actors cannot and should not try to divorce themselves from the characters they are playing, 'It would seem to be wise for the actor to bring as much of himself to his screen character as that character can accommodate, and to avoid most attempts at 'creating' characters whose involuntary habits and attitudes are the reverse of the actor's own' (p. 66).

During the rehearsal I was also looking for strategies I might use to adjust—to *direct*—the performances during the shoot. This was by far my greatest concern about the imminent production *and* is deeply embedded in both of the research questions. My anxiety about the approach to actors echoed that of editor-turned-director Sam O'Steen ahead of his first film: 'I didn't like it. I was intimidated because I didn't know what I was talking about. I just knew what I liked … and I wasn't sure it was right' (O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002, p. 111). However, he quickly found that actors responded to simple instructions using everyday language: 'I'd say "Just act naturally, just say the words, and then we'll take it from there". They could sit up, cross the room, do whatever they wanted to do – and then I'd push it tighter if they started wandering around' (p. 111).

I was hugely relieved to find that John and Tara also used everyday language when talking about the story and the characters. Their questions and observations were clear and direct, and they responded when I was similarly straightforward. My anxieties fell away, and whereas I'd previously disregarded director Patrick Tucker's (2019) advice about working with performers as slight and unhelpful, it now rang true:

> Sometimes it works just to tell the cast what you want the results to be and let them work it out; or to give them an end result of emotions or moves and let them build the stepping stones to achieve it. After all, it is the job of the director to make them want what it is you want them to do – not just to dictate orders. (p. 88)

There remained the issue of casting the role of the son. Reluctantly, I agreed to test the actor John was keen for me to use. He showed me a short video featuring the boy that he'd made in the hope of attracting investors for a feature film project he wanted to produce. Sam features as a minor, mostly passive, character in a few sample scenes from the screenplay. To my disappointment, and in sharp contrast to my vision of the son in my story being in every way an 'average kid', Sam was incontestably 'cute'. I was unsurprised to learn he'd done some modelling work and even a couple of television commercials.

When I shared my thoughts with John he was adamant that the boy would work in the story, insisting he wouldn't have suggested him otherwise. Privately, I was suspicious of his motives. I felt he was repaying a favour to Sam's parents, trying to get him other acting opportunities as repayment for using him in the promotional video. I didn't have an issue with such a *quid pro quo*, if indeed that's what it was; my concern was that John's promotion of Sam felt less like a casting suggestion and more like a directive.

Dmytryk (2018), a veteran of over forty feature films, says a confident director will listen to suggestions but usually 'will discard them because they do not fit his overall conception, with which the suggester is probably not familiar. A suggestion, even when not inappropriate in itself, may muddy values more important to the film' (p. 15). I struggled with Sam's cuteness—how did it 'muddy' things? Rabiger (2020) warns trenchantly against comparing potential actors to an idealised concept of the character 'because each actor is being held up against an ideal, as though the characters were already formed and each candidate is either far or close. This, like searching for the ideal spouse, invites disappointment and misjudgements' (p. 252). He argues that the correct approach is to ask what *kind* of son would Sam bring to the film, 'This anticipates myriad possibilities in the role, and lets you see the actor's physical and mental being as a new and active contribution to the process of building drama. This makes casting developmental rather than image fulfillment' (p. 252). The chance encounter that led to John being cast in the film had operated in precisely this fashion; as I watched him interact with his friend over coffee, I saw the qualities he would bring to the role of the father, and I could see that this version of the character would work well for the story. It

was a salutary lesson, and I resolved to keep an open mind when meeting Sam, and to look beyond his physiognomy.

But there was now another issue. How did John's 'suggestion' that I cast Sam muddy things? His casual disregard for my creative prerogatives made me wonder about his attitude to the project. Of particular concern was his preparedness to accept my directorial authority during the shoot. Would he be content to deliver nothing more than his version of the father, irrespective of my wishes? Or would he engage in a creative partnership with me and the other cast and crew in a collective effort to produce the best possible version of the story? Proferes (2018) asserts the 'director's job description requires him to be the undisputed narrative voice' (p. 135), yet already John's quiet manipulations had challenged my authority, fuelling my growing anxiety about the imminent shoot.

I met with Sam and his mother in the park outside his acting school. He seemed cute and shy in equal measure. His unexpected shyness was disarming; I was glad of it because it focussed my attention on Sam the actor and his potentiality, instead of the idealised concept of the character Rabiger warns against. He and I moved to a nearby bench with a pared-down copy of the confrontation scene between the son and his father. Weston (1999) advises that the key when casting children is to look for some experience or understanding of life that fits them for the role, to 'make sure that what you're asking them to do is close to who they are and that it is simple. Tell them to talk to the other person as they would in real life' (p. 295). We read the scene aloud a couple of times without acting, with me taking the role of the father. I asked him what he thought was going on in the in the scene.
'He's angry at his dad.'
'Do you ever get angry at your dad?'
'Sometimes.'
Let's pretend it's your dad you're talking to.'
We ran the scene a couple of times but he delivered his lines timidly, without the required heat. I asked if he ever yelled at his father the way the son does in the scene. 'Sometimes', he said somewhat feebly. We tried a couple more times; I increased the truculence in my impersonation of the father, hoping to draw him out, but still he held

back. I consoled myself that this reticence would work well for the earlier scenes in the story where the son is too intimidated to speak up, but in this pivotal scene—the confrontation between the pair at the conclusion where he asserts himself vociferously—I needed to know that he could do it.

I was acutely aware that we were in a public park next to a busy café/shopping precinct on a Saturday morning, hardly an ideal location for an audition, and that this was probably inhibiting Sam somewhat. I was somewhat uncomfortable myself, especially when I ranted and raved in the role of the father, yet I needed to hear Sam yell at me. I recall Weston's (1999) advice that improvisation techniques can be helpful when casting children, 'to find out if they can get to the places you need them to go via imaginative suggestions … You want to tap into their imaginations, because that is their strength' (p. 294).

'Do you ever yell at your sister?'
'All the time.'
'About what?'
'She takes my stuff, and won't give it back.'
'What sort of stuff?'
'Everything.'
I snatch the half-eaten pastry out of his hand. 'Mine!'
'It is not. Give it back!'
'No!'
'Give it back!'

He was really yelling now. I returned to the script, delivering the father's lines as aggressively as I could. He followed me into the scene, this time giving full-voice to his anger. We finished and I handed him back the pastry, but before he could take a bite I ripped it out of his hands again. We ran the scene a second time and I was relieved to see that his performance was as good as the first. We rejoined his mother and, to their mutual delight, I offered him the part.

In truth I'm conflicted about the casting of Sam. Sure, he proved he can do the role, but I'm still uncomfortable with his good looks. I wanted an ordinary-looking kid because I find that screen stories featuring 'average-looking' people are more engaging. John, for instance, strikes me as being a more-or-less regular-looking person and this makes him more interesting to me. And, Tara, although beautiful, doesn't look like a classic movie star. As a viewer, I've always found actors who look like 'real' people can be powerful conduits into stories in a way that movie star-types simply cannot be.

On the other hand, I'm glad to have avoided a possible confrontation with John about using Sam. I recognise that he's doing me a huge favour by giving me a week of his time but I'm still the director and he needs to recognise this. Issues of Sam's looks aside, I was somewhat tempted not to audition him simply to make the point to John that casting is my prerogative.

Personal journal extract
April 2018

CAMERA

With the issues of casting finally resolved I turned my attention to blocking. Faced with the need to shoot five pages of script each day, I decided that a thorough shooting plan was essential for navigating the conflicting demands of staying on our necessarily rigid schedule while at the same time obtaining the shots required to provide maximum options in the cutting room later. In contrast to the 'wait and see' approach favoured by Hal Ashby outlined earlier—where the director decides the shooting strategy only after the actors have explored and rehearsed the scene on set—I planned the blocking of each scene in preproduction, with the intention of replicating these pre-visualised shots during the shoot. That is, whereas Ashby's approach was to 'make the camera fit the actors' (Powers, 1980, p. 93), I elected to make the actors fit the camera. Ahead of the shoot, my plan was to draw each shot as a simple line drawing, assembling the shots for each scene together as a series of storyboards. Halligan (2015) defines a storyboard as 'the first look at a work about to go into production that has hitherto only existed as words' (p. 8).

To be effective, a storyboard must deliver, as accurately as possible

> a shot-by-shot rendering of a scene from the perspective of the camera and visualized in editing order like a comic strip. Storyboards are drawn in frames that duplicate the aspect ratio of the shooting format and reflect, as precisely as possible, the shot sizes, perspectives, camera angles, characters, and camera movement. (Rabiger & Hurbis-Cherrier, 2020, p. 346)

Adherents of this approach to blocking include Steven Spielberg, Alfred Hitchcock and David Lean (Halligan, 2015). Spielberg says of Hitchcock:

> [He] storyboards everything, and everything is done by the numbers in the order that he places them. He paints by numbers. Hitchcock's most brilliant work is done privately, with the sketch artist, and so I think he spends the greatest amount of creative energy on the planning stages, and then when he goes to make a movie, he sticks very closely with the battle plan.
>
> (Windolf, 2008)

Hitchcock's close reliance on storyboards is exemplified in Figure 1 which shows the comparison between the images created by storyboard artist Saul Bass (Bass, n.d.) and the resultant shots for the shower scene in Psycho (Hitchcock, 1960):

Figure 1. Collage. Comparison between the storyboard images by Saul Bass and the resulting shots from the film *Psycho.*
(*Sources:* Bass, n.d; Hitchcock, 1960)

Director and animator Terry Gilliam, cited in Halligan (2015), uses storyboards extensively for both planning and collaboration. 'I can see the film before I shoot it and the storyboard is the image I have in my head. It's the best way to communicate your ideas and give your team ideas too' (p. 138). As the film moves from preproduction into production, Gilliam finds that the boards acquire a second, critical function. 'When I start to shoot the film, these boards are the thing I can hang onto as the chaos descends

around me. With them I know what I have to do in the shot. I can see through the disorder' (p. 138).

Rabiger and Hurbis-Cherrier (2020) emphasise that a useful storyboard is not reliant on artistry, but that instead 'inexpert sketches using stick figures are good enough to work out compositions that are interesting and relevant' (p. 347). Spielberg makes the point that despite his very rudimentary drawing skills, as shown in Figure 2, he still roughs out his storyboards in his own hand before turning them over to an artist for finessing (Windolf, 2008).

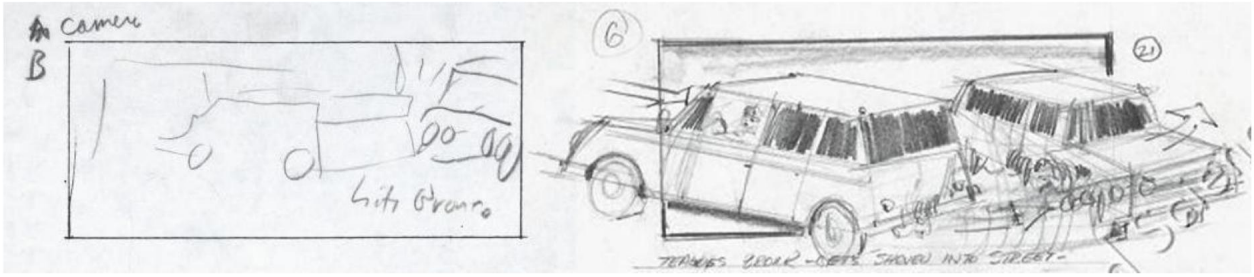

Figure 2. Collage. Comparison between Steven Spielberg's original storyboard sketch and a completed storyboard frame by artist Richard Lasley for the film *Poltergeist*.
(*Sources:* Spielberg, n.d.; Lasley, n.d.)

The biggest storyboarding challenge I faced was the multiple car sequences, which we intended shooting in the university's television studio against a bluescreen background, with the streetscapes being added in later. I needed a strategy that delivered these scenes in a way that avoided repetition (and viewer fatigue) while also operating in a cinematic way to heighten the dramatic intention of each particular episode.

My research drew me to the film *Collateral* (Mann & Richardson, 2004). With much of the story set in and around a taxi, I was keen to investigate how the filmmakers were able to produce such a hugely varied series of camera angles and shot sizes. I learned that the filmmakers built seventeen separate versions of the taxi interior, each specially modified to allow placing cameras in positions that would be impossible to obtain using a complete cabin (Davis, 2004).

Such measures were obviously beyond our resources, so instead I focussed on selecting camera angles that emphasised the shifting connections between the characters, with particular emphasis on John, the father and protagonist of the story. Dmytryk (2018)

opines that blocking is often a difficult area for the beginning director, suggesting somewhat unhelpfully that the camera should be placed 'where it will record what the director wants the viewer to see. The director controls the viewer's attention. It is largely a matter of instinct and experience' (p. 100). Acutely aware of my lack of experience and decidedly unsure of my instincts, I sketched out as many possible camera angles as I could imagine for the car scenes, and then set about developing a rationale for their use. I focussed on the mood of the characters in each scene, how this might be apparent in their body language and which camera angle would best capture this.

For instance, the first travel scene features John brooding in the car on the way home after a terse reunion at the airport. I wanted to emphasise his lack of eye contact with Tara, his partner. I felt that front-on shots would highlight this by showing him looking either directly ahead or out of the passenger window—anywhere but at Tara (Figure 3).

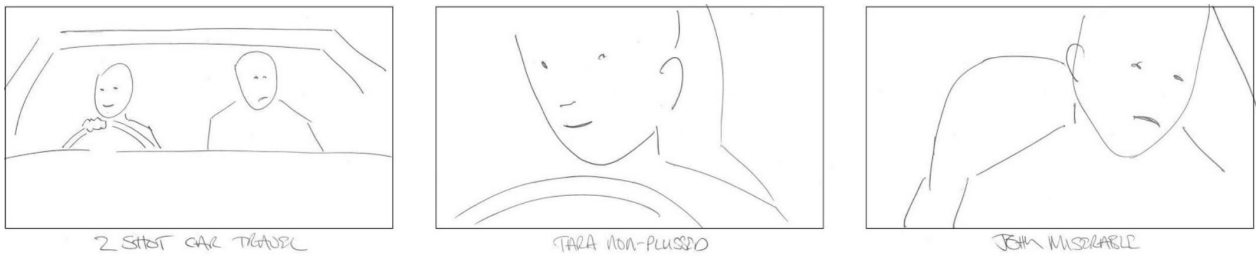

Figure 3. Collage. Sc. 2: Storyboard images showing John brooding on the way home. (*Source*: Author's own notes.)

Later, as the pair head to the veterinary clinic with the lizard there's a thaw. John relaxes somewhat, and they begin talking. John even manages a joke or two. I decided to move the camera around to the side of the car to shoot angles that included both of them, one of John looking at Tara (shot from the driver's side) and a matching shot of Tara looking at John (shot from the passenger's side) (Figure 4). I felt that these complementary angles would best capture their open faces as they engage with each other through conversation and eye contact, signalling John's change of mood.

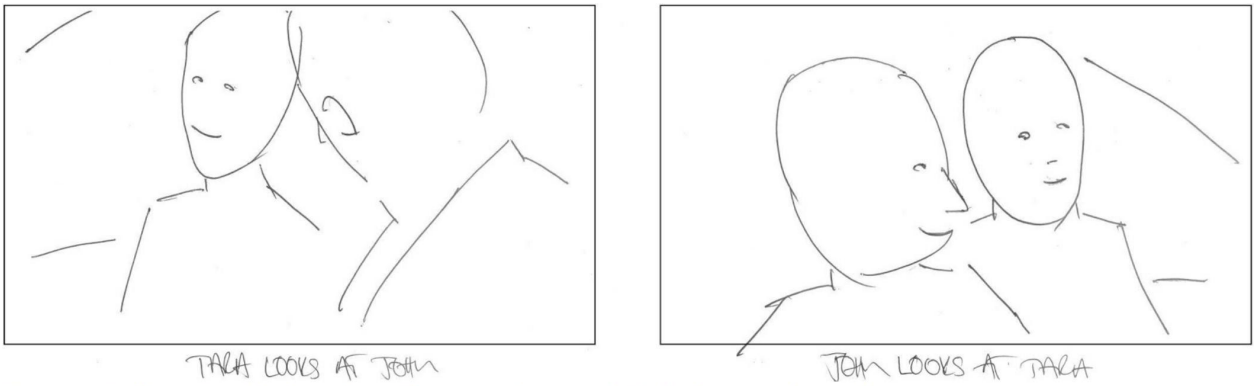

Figure 4. Collage. Sc. 10: Storyboard images showing John's change of mood.
(Source: Author's own notes.)

After returning home to collect Sam, they again head off to the clinic. I wanted to use the usual seating arrangements in a family car, with John in the front, Sam in the back, to show that John's mood had soured once again and that Sam was the focus of his anger. I envisaged a shot that showed them both in the same frame but with only one of them being in focus at any one time to illustrate their mutual detachment. This effect is achieved through the use of a camera technique known as a 'focus pull'. A focus pull involves the manipulation of focus

> to shift visual emphasis from one subject plane to another by adjusting which area along the z-axis is in focus. You can, for example, shift the plane of critical focus (and the attention of the audience) from a subject in the foreground to a detail in the background. (Rabiger & Hurbis-Cherrier, 2020, p. 417)

So initially Sam's acute discomfort would be shown in sharp focus with John rendered as a blur and then, after the focus pull, John's anger would be foregrounded with Sam becoming a blur (Figure 5).

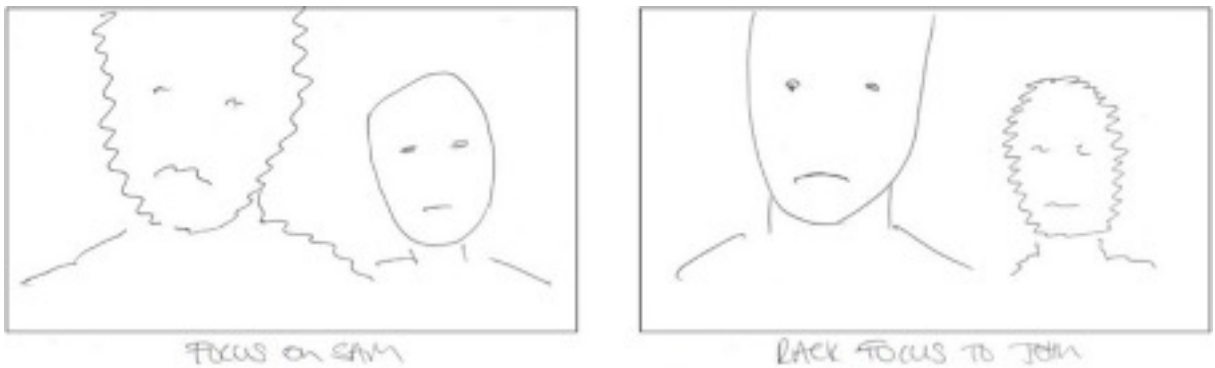

Figure 5. Collage. Sc. 14: Storyboard images showing focus pull from Sam to John.
(*Source:* Author's own notes.)

In the pivotal confrontation scene at the end of the film between Sam and John I wanted to show John's aloofness by having him refuse to engage with his son directly, instead addressing him only through the rear-view mirror. But later, at the height of the argument, I wanted him to spin around suddenly and unleash a tirade of face-to-face abuse at Sam (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Collage. Sc. 18: Sam cowers from John in the back seat.
(*Source:* Author's own notes.)

I wanted Sam's reaction to his father's diatribe to be shot tightly, as a close-up. Thompson and Bowen (2017) describe the close-up as an intimate shot 'showing all detail in the eyes and [which] conveys the subtle emotions that play across the eyes, mouth and facial muscles of an actor' (p. 19). According to Dmytryk (2018), 'the actor's eyes are unquestionably his most effective means for transmitting emotion' (p. 73), so I reasoned that a close shot of Sam's face, especially his eyes, would heighten the drama at this incendiary moment of the scene. However, I'm also aware of Dmytryk's belief that the power of the close-up has been depleted through its overuse in television production:

> The shoddy way the close-up has been misused and overused by the great majority of TV directors has done this special shot a great disservice. Like any valuable technique, the close-up should not be used indiscriminately lest it lose its value. At its best, it is climactic, and it should be reserved for climactic moments. (p. 73)

I checked the completed storyboards for the overuse of close-ups. Where possible, I added alternative, wider, versions to provide options later during editing. However, the realities of the tight schedule meant I was unable to quell my insecurities by adding options to cover every possibility. I had to trust that my storyboards were adequate or, at least, to act as though they were. Editor-turned-director David Lean, recalling his insecurities at the start of *Lawrence of Arabia*, provides some comfort. 'I simply walked

out onto the sand and bluffed: "I want Peter [O'Toole] over there and I want the camera over here". Why? I couldn't say why. I was quivering with nerves. Fortunately for me no-one ever asked' (as cited in Bowers, 2012).

Preproduction is over; ready-or-not we begin shooting next week. My feeling at this point is that if we'd had three months to prepare instead of just three weeks, we would've used the full three months – and I'd still be complaining that there hadn't been enough time. The big lesson of the past few weeks is that preproduction is far more than the mere assembly of the components needed during filming. The pragmatic decision to film on campus, for instance, has saved us at least half a day of travel time, time that now becomes available for extra shooting. I can see the truth in Kubrick's assertion that planning is critical to what ultimately ends up on the screen. I can also understand Alexander Walker's observation that, after the intensity of preproduction, Kubrick finds shooting a relief. I'm not sure that it's relief I feel right now but I'm glad the assault of the past three weeks is over. There's a comfort in knowing that from here on the battles will be fought one day at a time, one scene at a time.

Personal journal extract
May 2018

SUMMARY

The overarching insight during the preproduction phase of production was its pivotal role in maximising creative opportunities during the chaotic filming process that followed.

A key aspect of the process is the need to develop solid working relationships with the performers, hence my disappointment when the actors playing the parents had time for only a single rehearsal before shooting. However, I was relieved to find that they stepped easily into their roles, and had very uncomplicated expectations of me as director, simply wanting me to speak to them in a straightforward way about their characters and motivations.

I also used preproduction to create storyboards for each scene instead of waiting until filming had commenced and attempting to choose the shots 'on the fly' in the highly pressured environment of the shoot. I felt that losing opportunities for extemporised coverage was preferable to the efficiencies gained by having a clear vision of the shots required ahead of time.

In Chapter 4 I discuss the shooting process and my early loss of optimism due to mounting production difficulties, mostly centred around the lack of professionalism of the key actor. I also explore the unanticipated advantages of my editing experience, including the ability to intuit that a proposed scene would not be viable as scripted, together with the knowledge—acquired in the cutting room—to resolve the issue in a cinematic way.

CHAPTER 4
Production

> 'Shooting a movie is like a stagecoach ride in the Old West. At first you hope for a nice trip. Soon you just hope to reach your destination.'
>
> François Truffaut, *La Nuit Américaine* (Berbert, 1973, 0:13:32)

The shooting phase of the filmmaking process diverges even further than its predecessor from the largely solitary and reflective activities that define an editor's role. The challenges I faced working with the cast and crew to shape and capture the performances in a way that maximised options in the cutting room later, all within the constraints of a tight and inflexible schedule, are the subject of this chapter. These challenges—so at odds with my usual postproduction activities—make this phase of the production of key relevance to my research questions.

'Production begins with the first day of principal photography, or shooting, and ends when the final shot is captured' (George, 2010, p. 71). For our first day of principal photography we chose to shoot for only half a day, guided by editor-turned-director Edward Dmytryk's (2018) strategy of easing as gently as possible into the production period by scheduling the easier scenes at the head of the production to help 'shake down' the crew and cast, so that 'the director, the cast, and the crew can get rid of their butterflies and be ready to settle down to serious filmmaking' (p. 54). I chose to start with the airport scene which, although requiring no less of the actors than those that followed, is short and straightforward and could easily be accommodated within the half day allocated, giving the relatively unrehearsed actors, John and Tara, some additional exploratory time to settle into their roles as husband and wife.

Doubling for the airport was the transit station at the university, a drop-off and collection point for buses and taxis. It had rained heavily throughout the day and the rain continued into the evening while we were shooting. The implications for the rest of

the production period were substantial. While much of the airport scene takes place undercover, shielded by the pedestrian flyover, the crucial establishing wide shot that opens the film showed the buildings, cars and roads slicked with rain. As a result, we faced a major logistical headache: given that the film unfolds over a couple of hours, every exterior would now have to reflect the wet weather of this opening scene. A larger production, with its greater resources of time and budget, would have considered rescheduling the scene to avoid the complications caused by the rain. 'It must be remembered that the schedule is not a constitution; it is merely an estimate, a hope. It is safe to say that not one film in a hundred moves exactly to schedule' (Dmytryk, 2018, p. 54). However, the key elements of our production—the actors, equipment and studio access—were only available during our tightly scheduled shooting period; our schedule *was* a constitution. There was no choice but to shoot in the rain and deal with the consequences later.

PERFORMANCE

Central to my approach to working with the actors during the shoot was the stance that 'a perfect rehearsal is a wasted take' (Bare & Garner, 2000, p. 68). I wanted the camera rolling any time there was a possibility of generating usable material, including designated rehearsals, to ensure that good performances were not lost through omission. From my postproduction experience, I knew that this somewhat profligate approach would result in considerable extra work in the cutting room later, in time spent viewing and evaluating this extra material, but I hoped the additional options generated would justify this additional effort.

My strategy was to set up the shot using the storyboards created in preproduction and then run through a couple of technical rehearsals so that the cast and crew understood the requirements of the shot, including the predetermined actions of the actors (such as moving around the set, or entering or leaving frame), and the size of the shot and any camera moves. The focus of the rehearsals would shift to performance and recording would commence. I was unsurprised to see the actors referring to their scripts during the technical run-throughs but I was disappointed that John seemed overly-reliant on his, spending more time looking down at the page than at Tara. His preoccupation with

the script suggested he hadn't learnt his lines and was trying to cram them at the last minute.

This was confirmed when we began recording and the actors went 'off book' (i.e. having to rely solely on their memories). The scene centres around John's frosty reunion with Tara as he loads his luggage into the family car. To my dismay, he played the scene as a caricature of apoplexy; his performance was histrionic and cringe-worthy, far removed from the impressive work I'd seen him do in theatre and on television. Exacerbating matters was his tendency to stare bug-eyed at Tara during her dialogue, obviously trying to summon up his next line which, far too frequently, was the wrong line. At other times he'd stop in the middle of a take, break into a self-conscious and infuriating grin—as if his lack of professionalism was somehow funny—and ask for his next line.

His lack of preparation had reduced the scene to an egregious version of what performance coach Judith Weston (1999) calls 'my turn to talk, your turn to talk', self-focussed behaviour that produces 'a scene about two actors' performances instead of a scene about a relationship and an event in the relationship' (p. 77). Her straightforward solution in such instances is to involve the other actor:

> Probably the most powerful and also readily available tool an actor has for staying in the moment is the other actor in the scene. Listening to the other actor(s) in the scene gives a simple task and a focus for his attention. *Listening* is the best technique an actor has for anchoring himself in the moment. … It absolutely prevents overacting. (p. 77, emphasis in original)

Obviously, the strategy would not help John remember his lines but I hoped it might bring him properly into the scene and perhaps make his performance more credible. I took him aside and told him to direct his anger toward Tara, to 'punish' her, in the hope of shifting his focus to her. According to Weston (1999), 'This shift in concentration allows and encourages actors to *listen* and to *engage*' (p. 33, emphasis in original). But when the next few takes failed to produce any significant change in either his performance or his attitude I began to panic. He was the central character of the film. Without a credible performance from him the story would fail utterly. I took him aside

again and said bluntly, 'What you're doing is simply not believable. You need to engage with Tara. I need you to stop acting and start listening'.

We limped through the remainder of the scene. Unsurprisingly, John's recall of the lines improved substantially through the iteration of countless retakes necessary as I pursued a credible, sustained performance. And to my relief his performance became somewhat less of a caricature, though not, I suspect, in response to my attempts to direct him; I felt he was intimidated into some kind of compliance by my thinly disguised anger. My head was in two places: at the transit station in the rain trying to bully John into doing his job *and* in the cutting room, mentally assembling the night's lacklustre shots in the hope of finding enough usable material to produce a half-way acceptable scene. It was only after I was confident I could salvage the sequence that we stopped shooting.

John's appalling attitude is like tonight's rain: unwanted and unwelcome, but now I'm stuck with both. The rain I can deal with; it won't be a major issue until after principal photography is finished, when we set about shooting the exterior car travel shots. These shots, such as the car heading home from the airport along the freeway and the journey to the vet, will now have to match tonight's downpour.

The immediate problem is John, and I simply don't know how to deal with it. Not only does he not listen to Tara, he doesn't listen to me. The only times he truly heard me tonight were when I could no longer contain my anger, and I don't want to spend the next six days trying to intimidate an acceptable performance out of him.

At the other extreme, I'm so impressed with Tara. She showed tonight that she is as professional as John is unprofessional. I can't imagine how difficult it must be trying to act with someone who gives you nothing, especially when the two characters are supposed to be intimates. As much for her sake as for mine, I hope the situation improves.
I called the theatre director through whom I found John. His opinion is that he's overcommitted, trying to juggle his obligations to the feature film he's involved with and my project. Then why take on my project, I ask. Because he liked the script, he says. Not enough to learn his lines, I can't resist saying.

I ask him what should I do? What would he do? He says my only option is to go to Tara and tell her that her job on the production is to make John look good, so that no matter what he does, no matter how unprofessional his behaviour, her role is to make him look as good as she possibly can.

I say to him, a relative stranger who has been generous with both his time and his insights, that I'm appalled by his advice and categorically will not follow it.

Personal journal extract
May 2018

The following morning saw the commencement of the studio component of the production, which involved shooting the interior car scenes. The car was surrounded with blue screens that would be replaced later in postproduction with moving streetscapes to suggest that the car was in motion. Where possible, I covered the action with two cameras, each with its own monitor. Weston (1999) decries the practice of some directors, 'including directors who should know better', watching the actors during a take from behind the monitor, insisting instead that they 'must be next to the camera, watching their [actors'] naked faces' (p. 83). Others concur, including so-called non-creatives such as AD, Liz Gill (2020):

> My personal opinion is that the monitor is brilliant for rehearsals but that the director should watch the actors from beside the camera so s/he can see the subtleties of their performances ... and it also gives the cast a powerful audience to play for and a great feeling of trust and support. (p. 154)

I chose to watch from beside whichever of the two cameras I considered to be recording the most important camera angle at that time. I never used the monitors to review performances but I found them useful when it became necessary to check technical aspects of a shot, such as framing or focus.

I was disappointed but not surprised when John, again, arrived on set not knowing his lines. I resigned myself to this being his practice for the remainder of the shoot—and so it turned out to be. I swallowed my feelings of betrayal and tried to make the best of it. His lack of preparation quickly became the dominating issue of the shoot—a major concern given his central role in the story. Not knowing his lines meant it was almost impossible for him to truly engage with the other actors. Takes were frequently aborted due to his lapses. The other actors—notably Tara—were worn ragged as they attempted to keep shots going by responding on-the-fly to his randomly delivered, mangled dialogue. He was unable to heed Weston's advice (channelled through me) to *listen* because he was too busy trying to remember his next line. Dmytryk (2019c) captures the magnitude of the problem: 'Listening, really listening, not just pretending to, is the necessary prerequisite for nearly every other facet of screen acting; most of the actor's other skills – reacting, speaking dialogue, even movement – are inspired by what he hears' (p. 32). He adds that the tighter the shot, the greater the problem.

> If the actor is concentrating on his next line instead of listening to the speaker, it can be easily seen, especially in a close-up, but also, to somewhat less effect, in a medium shot as well. And by far the greater part of the average film consists of medium shots and close-ups. (p. 33)

Another sign of John's lack of focus was his occasional tendency to flick his eyes around the set during a take. Not every take but often. Sometimes he'd lock eyes with a crew member. At other times it would be the camera. Each time it would be for a few frames only, no more than a fraction of a second, but it was very evident. An editor's nightmare. I guessed the glances were driven by anxiety, and my concern about pointing it out was that it might exacerbate the issue. But ultimately I decided he was a trained actor with extensive camera experience who knew better than to indulge such amateurish lapses. Disappointingly, telling him had no effect; the glances continued unchecked. I simply had to hope there would be sufficient material to allow us to deal with this additional encumbrance in postproduction.

Tara's difficulties were not limited to John. Sam, unlike John, came to set knowing his lines but, as with his mentor, his eyes had a habit of finding the camera. Whereas John's looks were fleeting, almost subliminal, Sam, at his worst, would gape openly into the

camera for seconds at a time as illustrated in Figure 7. Or look listlessly about the set. He was floundering, unresponsive to even the simplest of directions such as, 'Just listen to Tara'. Tara worked tirelessly to connect with him, both on and off the set, and as he relaxed with her his performance improved somewhat. But his inattention remained a problem throughout the shoot, thus becoming another unwelcome issue for the cutting room.

Figure 7. Screenshot. Sc. 18: Sam looks directly into camera. (*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

As the shoot ground on it occurred to me that I'd lowered my expectations for John and Sam but not for Tara. I began to feel almost guilty about this until I realised the gift she'd given me. While it wasn't the case that I'd accept anything from John or Sam, my post-take conversations with them usually lurched wildly between triage and relief. But with Tara the dialogue was what I imagined a director-actor conversation should be like, such as positioning her response to John's petulance within the context of their relationship, the friction caused by their different backgrounds and careers (Tara: middle class, a lawyer; John: blue collar, project manager), and her unconditional love for Sam.

The only time I felt let down by her was when for no clear reason she wanted to drop a line from a scene early in the film. The scene takes place in Sam's bedroom. John's eye has been caught by the sight of one of Sam's lizards, Bert, apparently giving birth. Tara, trying to get the vet on the phone, is unhappy at the prospect of an explosion of lizard babies (Figure 8).

TARA
Bert's a girl? I just want to remind you at this point that it was you who insisted on getting two lizards, not one.

JOHN
You can't have just one. It'd die of boredom.

TARA
Well, as glad as I am that Bert and Ernie have found a way of distracting themselves from life's existential void, I really don't want to go into the lizard breeding business.

Figure 8. Script. Sc. 6 (excerpt). (*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

She came to me during a quiet moment, when the crew were setting up for a shot, saying that she couldn't say the 'existential void' line, that she'd tried and tried but simply couldn't get the words out in a believable way, so she wanted to lose it. I acknowledged that the line was a bit of a tongue-twister and talked about its purpose in the scene, namely to reflect Tara's university education, where she'd probably completed a semester or two on philosophy, and how this was in sharp contrast with John's blue-collar background, as exemplified by his bemused response.

I asked her to read me the line. A couple of run-throughs only deepened my confusion. I felt that with the usual amount of practice, nothing more than any actor would bring to dialogue from outside their usual lexicon, the words would roll readily off her tongue. I wondered if the issue was that *she* didn't speak like that and didn't want her character speaking like that, either. Dmytryk (2019c) regards it as 'essential that the validity of a line be judged by its relationship to the character who says it, not the actor who speaks it. One of an actor's most baseless complaints is, "I wouldn't say it that way"' (p. 50). Had Tara couched her objection in terms of what her character might or might not say (if indeed this was the issue) we could have talked about the line from this perspective. As Dmytryk notes, when discussing dialogue with an actor, 'The only valid criticism would be, "I don't think the character would say it that way", and such a judgment would, of course, be debatable' (p. 50).

As gently as I could, I let Tara know that I wanted the dialogue delivered as written. When we shot the scene later that day I was disappointed to see that her performance suggested she hadn't done the work necessary to truly 'sell' the line. Her delivery was satisfactory, but only just so. I never found out for certain what the problem was.

Despite the chaos and aggravation of John's undisciplined performance, he could occasionally surprise. One such instance was during the confrontation between father and son at the end of the film when John and Sam are alone in the car outside the animal hospital. In the previous scene, inside the clinic, John had learned from the vet that the lizard he'd rushed there wasn't in labour after all. Instead, the lizard was masturbating. Whereas his initial reaction had been humiliation and embarrassment he now finds the situation hilarious. He convulses uncontrollably with laughter while Sam squirms with

embarrassment in the back seat. Mid-paroxysm, he wonders if Sam knows what the lizard was really doing (Figure 9).

He tries to pull himself together. He clears his throat, wipes the tears from his eyes, and forces down a few deep breaths before turning to face Sam – but Sam's stony disapproval only sets him off again.

Suddenly he stops mid-laugh, and shoots Sam a grin, both mischievous and patronising.

JOHN
You know what he was really doing?

SAM
Dad! [Stop it!]

But Sam's discomfort only fans the flames of his hilarity.

Figure 9. Script. Sc. 18 (excerpt).
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

In the first take, John played the scene slightly differently. He began the shot half laughing, half shaking, as scripted. But part-way through his turn to Sam he stops as though arrested by a thought—an epiphany—and a mischievous look flashes across his face that then propels him fully around to Sam (Figure 10) where he delivers his line.

Figure 10. Collage. Sc. 18: Screenshots of John turning to look at Sam.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

John's mischievous look is an electric moment; barely perceptible yet instantly readable—little more than a flicker of his eyelids. He has a thought and his reaction makes the thought available to the viewer. Dmytryk (2019c) cites reacting as being paramount in screen acting, 'From a director's point of view, the reaction to a stimulus is perhaps the most important element in a film' (p. 139). Elsewhere he says, 'Reaction is transition, change, movement – and movement is life. … In films, the reaction is where most things happen' (2019b, p. 65). John's understated reaction would have been lost in a wider frame, making the choice of shot size a critical consideration ensuring that such subtleties are captured by the camera. Dmytryk cautions that 'the reaction is not always heralded by a movement in facial muscles. The most subtle reactions may show a barely discernible glint in the eyes' (p. 67).

Those few seconds were, by far, the most exhilarating of the production. And, ironically, this standout moment came from John, the actor who spent most of the shoot *not* listening, *not* reacting.

Unfortunately, after the look he opened his mouth to speak and totally mangled the line. Instead of 'You know what he was *really* doing?', he said '*You know* what he was doing!' The humour was still there but the change of inflection had shifted the reading from playful curiosity to a proclamation, dulling its capacity to fully embarrass Sam. I was flabbergasted. How could John generate that perfect epiphany yet not know how to deliver the line it inspires? Surely the look and the line sprang from the same source?

I called for another take. My instruction to John was to find out if Sam really *did* know what was going on. I wasn't surprised to see that his magical look wasn't repeated but, disappointingly, the line was still wide of the mark. I felt another take would have been futile; I had little confidence things would improve. Instead I called for the cameras to keep rolling and asked John if it was okay to give him a line reading.

Rabiger and Hurbris-Cherrier (2020) describe a line reading as when 'the director reads the dialogue with the emotional inflection they wish the actor to provide and then tells the actor to "say it like that"'. They go on to condemn this practice, insisting that it is 'insulting for an actor and reveals a director's lack of imagination' (p. 281).

I was unsure how John would react but I was now desperate. We were running over time and, crucially, my experience of him so far was that he didn't respond to the usual approaches. I felt a reading was probably my only hope of getting the result I was after. To my relief, he agreed with alacrity.

With the cameras still rolling I gave him my interpretation of the line and we went for another take. Unsurprisingly, the nuances of his previous performance were gone now that he was now imitating me, however he delivered the dialogue exactly as I'd hoped. *Exactly*. Afterwards, I took him aside and thanked him, saying that I knew a lot of actors resented readings. He replied he had no issue with the practice whatsoever.

I knew Tara loathed line readings; she had told me previously in conversation that she refused to do them. Performance coach Judith Weston (1999) also rails against the practice and other result-oriented instructions but adds the caveat, 'I need to admit that result direction sometimes works, but usually only once. Letting the actors in on the effect you want to produce may give you the take you need' (p. 285). Line readings may be contentious with some actors and acting coaches, but directors do use them, including high-profile director Roman Polanski, despite having begun his career as an actor.

> Roman does give line readings, he did with Jack [Nicholson], too. An actor may say it one way in the first take and then Roman might tell them to say it a certain way in the next take. And he's tough, very direct, no bullshit. But he's that way with everybody, with Jack and later with Harrison Ford, and it didn't seem to make them crazy. (O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002, p. 125)

John's excellent mimicry meant I got the performance I wanted *and* it allowed us to immediately move on to the next set-up instead of losing time in pursuit of a performance that was probably otherwise unattainable.

It turns out that the micro-budget feature John is involved in is shooting at the same time as us! Little wonder he's been so preoccupied. The effect of this news was to temper my anger at his lack of professionalism somewhat. But, still, he's letting me down badly. He should never have offered to be in the film, and instead directed the entirety of his energies towards the onerous task he'd already committed to, and allowed me to find a less time-poor replacement.

Personal journal extract
May 2018

CAMERA AND CREW

Editor-turned-director Edward Dmytryk (2018) cites the cinematographer (DP) and AD as being the two people the director relies on most during the shooting of a film but 'not necessarily in that order' (p. 13). This was the case with our shoot.

The AD, also known as the First AD or First, leads a team of secondary ADs, and 'creates and manages the schedule, runs the set, and executes the director's vision within the parameters of the production's resources. The First AD is largely responsible for making sure that the day's work is completed' (Gill, 2020, p. 1).

Completing the day's work involved shooting five pages of ambitiously storyboarded script, no easy task for a novice director and crew. 'The First's currency is time, and a good First makes things happen in the most efficient way possible, like the manager of a highly efficient factory' (Gill, 2020, p. 1). But unlike a factory, where large quantities of identical items are manufactured using the routines and efficiencies of mass-production, each shot in a film is a one-of, potentially creating tension between the overlapping but different agendas of the AD and director: the AD wants the shot done; the director wants the shot done *right*. 'It's the ultimate collaborative process, in which the First AD manages the balance between creativity and forward motion' (p. 2).

My time in the cutting room had not prepared me for the intensity of the relationship between director and AD. Despite our diverging priorities we both shared a common goal: to get the shots we'd planned in preproduction 'in the can'. The AD shouldered the burden of organising the crew and cast, marshalled the set during rehearsals and shooting, kept us on schedule and, crucially, through his unflappability and boundless enthusiasm, helped ease the transition from the monasticism of the cutting room to the noise and chaos of the set. Without doubt, he was the most professional asset of the production. My awe is best reflected by Dmytryk's (2018) observation about the measure of a good AD, 'If he is exceptionally able he will leave the director free to do nothing but direct' (p. 19).

Of the other key on-set relationship—that between the director and the DP—Dmytryk (2018) says 'An experienced, talented and trusted cinematographer [DP] is essential' (p. 144). Disappointingly, the quality of the footage delivered by the DP was less than I'd seen him deliver on other occasions where perhaps the schedule, and perhaps too the director, was less demanding. For example, the sequence in Figure 11 shows first John then Tara entering Sam's bedroom:

Figure 11. Collage. Sc. 5: Screenshots showing framing error.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

The shot illustrates one of the most basic camera errors: failing to adjust the camera to accommodate the height of the actor. 'Headroom specifically refers to how much or how little space exists between the top of an actor's head and the top edge of the recorded frame' (Thompson & Bowen, 2017, p. 25). As John left the shot the DP should have tilted the camera down so that as Tara entered she would have around the same amount of headroom as John had previously. Instead she languishes at the bottom of the frame, looking feeble and inconsequential. Alfred Hitchcock used to boast he had no need to look through the camera because 'the cameraman knows very well that I don't want to have any air or space around the actors and that he must follow the sketches [storyboards] exactly as they are designed for each scene' (Truffaut, 2017, p. 222). His confidence in his DP was absolute.

Another regular transgression by the DP involved his inability to maintain focus. Over the course of the shoot he delivered an inordinate number of shots that were out of focus or 'soft', rendering otherwise acceptable performances by the actors unusable, and adding yet another element of uncertainty to each take. These student-level errors, egregious and amateurish, shook my confidence in his abilities, and sorely tested my commitment not to watch the monitor during takes.

Part of the challenge I set myself when storyboarding the film was to design a sequence that was centred around a moving camera. Such shots involve mounting the camera on a dolly—a platform on wheels that 'is used when your shot requires a dynamic move (when the camera itself moves through space) and you want it to be smoother and more controlled than what you can achieve with a handheld camera' (Hurbis-Cherrier, 2018, p. 261).

However, Hurbis-Cherrier (2018) argues that these shots tend to be overused because they're seen as being 'cool', cautioning that 'deciding if your camera should move during

a shot, and how you want the camera to move, is as important to the tone, style, and meaning of your film as the lighting, locations, costumes, or any other creative element' (p. 255). Accordingly, I resolved that any moving shot had to be justifiable in terms of its contribution to the narrative, and not simply be self-conscious and 'cool'. It was imperative that the story 'be about what happens to the characters and not about what's happening with the camera' (p. 65).

I selected the scene where John and Tara arrive home from the airport. Tara has just tried to call Sam when John bursts into the room demanding to know where he is. I felt that tracking alongside John as he storms across the room to Tara would heighten his truculence. The script for the sequence is shown in Figure 12.

INT. HOUSE - LOUNGE -- NIGHT

Tara pauses in the doorway of the darkened room, wondering, then flicks on the lights and enters. As she walks, she skims the menu of her phone.

John strides into the room.

JOHN
Well?

She raises the phone to her ear…

TARA
I did say we're out of milk.

… and a mobile phone starts ringing somewhere nearby.

JOHN
Great!

He marches off in pursuit of the phone.

Figure 12. Script. Sc. 5 (excerpt).
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

In the previous shot we'd seen Tara enter, look around concerned, and fish her phone out of her bag. John then storms into the room and the camera travels with him over to Tara, who raises her phone to her ear. A phone rings off screen, and the camera travels with John as he retraces his steps in search of the phone.

It was a complex shot—the most audacious of the film—and we never quite got it right. Figure 13 is a composite made of various frames taken from the seven takes we shot in an attempt to best represent the effect I was after.

Figure 13. Collage. Sc. 5: Screenshots of the dolly shot.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

Central to the success of the shot was a coordinated effort involving both actors, the DP and the two people pushing the dolly. This coordination proved challenging and, despite the best efforts of the crew and cast, we achieved only an approximation of what I was after.

However, my key disappointments are two major lapses on my part. Crucial to my visualisation of the shot was Tara timing the raising of the phone to her ear to coincide with John's arrival, so that the action (raising the phone) would be caught by the camera. This detail was lost early in the clamber to get the larger elements of the shot working, with the result that all seven takes show Tara with the phone *already* at her ear when John arrives. This sounds like a small matter but seeing her raise the phone would have paid off her scrolling through the menu of the phone in the previous shot and added to the momentum of the sequence.

The other issue relates to performance continuity. In the previous shot Tara was appropriately concerned at Sam's absence. But the next time we see her (when John arrives) she's eyeballing him with a look somewhere between a smirk and a sneer (Figure 14), which is totally inconsistent and inauthentic. Had I been less involved with trying to resolve the problems of the camera move I hope I would have noticed and corrected these errors.

Figure 14. Screenshot. Sc. 5: Tara smirks at John.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

The shot, although disappointing, is far from a failure. What I was attempting to achieve is still evident, although not as

finessed as I would have liked. And attempting the dolly shot was an appropriate challenge for an editor wanting to test his nascent camera skills and, for the same reason, of direct relevance to the research questions.

I take some consolation from Edward Dmytryk (2018), who promotes creative risk-taking over safety and timidity, 'The important thing is to take a crack at it, to risk the big gamble rather than settle for the small sure thing. It is often better to be creatively 'wrong' than to be technically right' (p. 89).

Another disappointment was the focus pull shot in the car on the way to the vet. I wanted to show father and son together yet separate—but united in their misery. The intention was to start the shot with Sam in focus and John out-of-focus, and then use a shift in focus to reverse the situation, as shown in the storyboards in Figure 15.

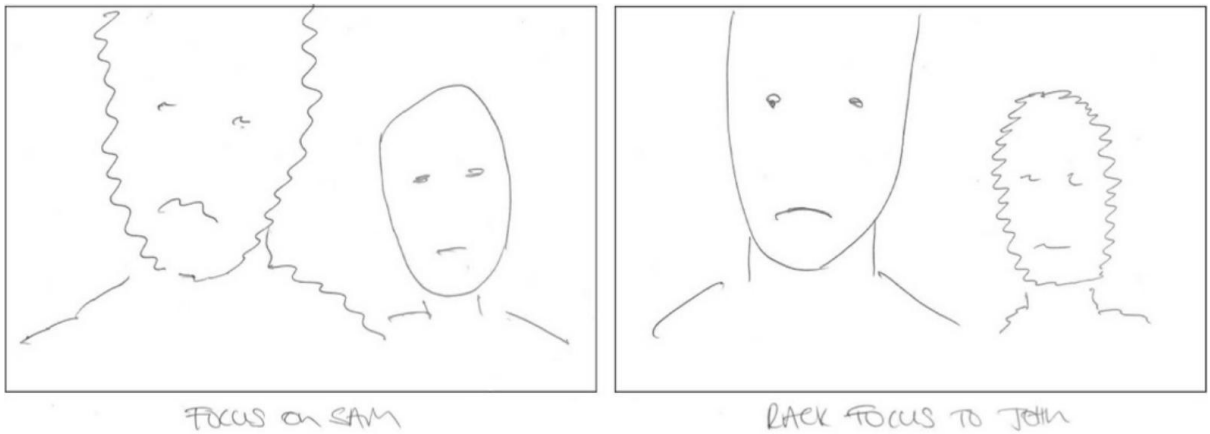

Figure 15. Collage. Sc. 14: Storyboard images showing focus pull from Sam to John. (*Source:* Author's own notes.)

However, technical factors relating to lenses and exposure that were beyond our capacity to respond to on the day meant we were able to achieve only marginal shifts in focus (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Collage. Sc. 14: Screenshots showing focus pull from Sam to John. (*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

The effect I was seeking is evident as the focus is shifted from one character to the other, but for maximum impact the out-of-focus character needs to become even more out-of-focus. Despite my disappointment, I felt that the shot demonstrated the potential of the effect to help deliver the narrative. I resolved to return to this shot later during postproduction, and explore the potential of VFX to increase the separation between the two characters.

In the evenings, after a long day on set followed by a debrief with the AD, I returned again to the storyboards of the scene where the family arrive at the veterinary clinic. Whereas the storyboards for the other scenes had been relatively easy to prepare, this apparently simple sequence had so far resisted all my attempts. We'd scheduled the scene as late as possible to buy more preparation time but, with the end of the shoot looming, time was running out.

Figure 17 shows that the script for the sequence is deceivingly straightforward.

> EXT. ANIMAL HOSPITAL -- NIGHT
>
> The car pulls up outside the hospital. The trio head inside and are immediately ushered into a consulting room.

Figure 17. Script. Sc. 15 (excerpt).
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

Despite its apparent simplicity, my cutting room experience suggested that unless I was very careful with my shooting strategy the momentum of the story could be lost. The brevity of the two short sentences describing the sequence masks the scope of the action it covers:

1. The family car arrives outside the hospital.
2. The family exit the car and make their way inside the hospital.
3. They're met at reception, where they explain their issue.
4. They may possibly have to wait briefly at reception until the vet appears.
5. The vet arrives and shepherds them into a consulting room, and the story resumes.

Were the above sequence of shots actually filmed as scripted, the result would have been what writer-director David Mamet (1999) disparagingly calls '"following the protagonist around" – i.e., using the *camera* to tell the story rather than the cut' (p. 10,

emphasis in original). He aligns himself with the Russian pioneers of the 1920s, including Sergei Eisenstein, who asserted that the shots themselves, the recordings of what the actors did during the shot, are only of secondary importance in the telling of a screen story. Instead, both Mamet and the Russians prioritise editing in the delivery of screen stories, specifically, the effect created when two shots are spliced together. This juxtaposition of images, or 'cut', can generate a totally new thought or idea in the mind of the viewer that has nothing to do with the content of the images, and the generation of this new idea can be exploited by the filmmaker to advance the narrative.

> Eisenstein theorises, and I believe his theory is borne out in example, that the idea so created is *vastly* stronger – i.e. more effective – … because it is the viewer who creates the idea – who, in effect, tells herself the story. (Mamet, 1999, p. 10, emphasis in original)

An example of this approach is the famous experiment conducted by a contemporary of Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Collage. Screenshots of the Kuleshov montage experiment. (*Source:* Toscano, 2015)

Kuleshov interspersed identical shots of an actor with three unconnected images: a bowl of soup, a baby in a coffin and a beautiful woman. The actor had been directed to 'make no response as he gazed into the lens' (Rosenberg, 2017, p. 11). Viewers interpreted the disparate images as though connected.

> In the first case, the audience interpreted the scene as meaning that [the actor] Mozzhukhin felt hungry. In the second instance, the audience experienced sadness over the grief Mozzhukhin exhibited for the dead

> child. In the third, the audience saw the stirrings of desire in the actor's eyes. At the time, the great Russian director Vsevolod Pudovkin commented that the audience 'raved about the acting … But we knew that in all three cases the face was exactly the same'. *The viewer had unknowingly supplied the emotional connection in his own mind* [emphasis added]. (Rosenberg, 2017, p. 12).

Through my editing experience I felt that the Kuleshov strategy was the key to getting the family from the previous scene where they're driving to the animal hospital to inside the consulting room. I also knew that only the first and last of the five steps outlined above served the story the way I wanted to tell it. Anything else would have been simply 'following the actors around'.

For the umpteenth time I went through the recce photographs I'd taken of veterinary clinics during preproduction when I was scouting for possible locations. I noticed that a couple of the clinics used roadside sandwich boards to announce they were open for business and this gave me an idea. What if I began the sequence with a shot of the vet retrieving such a sign, signalling that the clinic was about to close? He's almost back at the door when he hears the car arrive behind him. He spins around to face the interlopers, his plan of heading home broadsided (Figure 19).

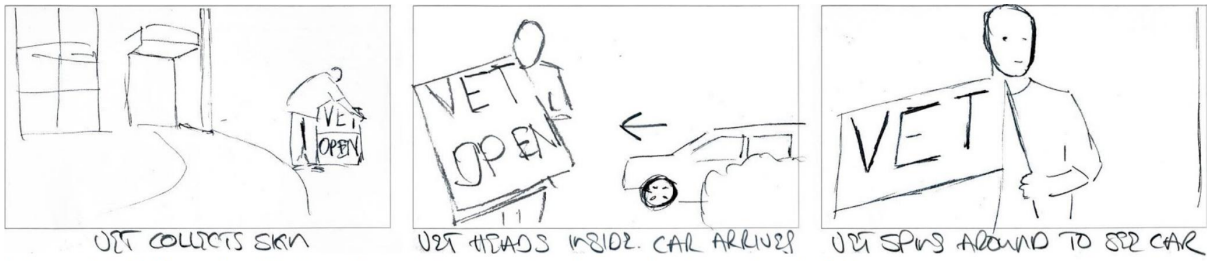

Figure 19. Collage. Sc. 15: Storyboard images showing arrival at animal clinic.
(*Source:* Author's own notes.)

I could then cut directly from his disappointment to the lights flickering on inside a darkened consulting room, with him entering followed by John and his family.

It's always the same. The answer, when it finally arrives, seems so blindingly obvious that it mocks the time and pain expended sweating the question. Even more aggravating is that, given each storyboarding problem is a one-of, the experience is unlikely to be of any direct use in the future.

On the other hand, I knew intuitively at the outset that this transition would be problematic if not handled well, an insight that came directly from my time in the cutting room where I've experienced the frustration of trying to edit similar poorly-thought-out sequences. So I was able to respond to this insight by pushing the scene to the end of the production to facilitate the search for a solution.

This deceptively small sequence has been by far the most difficult storyboarding exercise I've ever attempted. However, I feel that my three-shot solution resolves the transition in a way that is directorially efficient and eloquent. And it's a solution that arises directly out of my editing background: I knew immediately that some elements of the scene as written were redundant; I knew that an absolute minimum of shots was required in order to maintain the momentum of the story and viewer interest; and I knew I needed a juxtaposition worthy of Kuleshov to leap-frog over the 'following the actors around' middle section of the script. I'm really excited by the work I've done here. I hope the shots work as well in the film as the storyboard suggests.

Personal journal extract
May 2018

The last major issue of the shoot was the realisation (too late) that the end scene of the film, showing the family about to head home from the animal hospital, was missing a pivotal shot. In my preproduction storyboards I'd envisaged covering the sequence from two angles: a front-on shot of the family as they prepared to travel home, ending as John started the car; and a side view that would reveal first the tail lights and then Sam as the car reversed into frame (Figure 20).

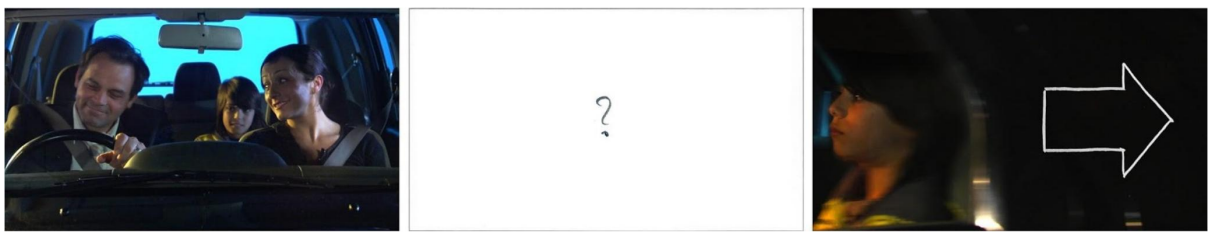

Figure 20. Collage. Sc. 18: Screenshots showing the location of the missing shot.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

Our limited VFX capability meant that the car had to remain stationary at all times, otherwise we wouldn't have been able to swap out the blue screen window views later

with appropriate background images. So, the first shot ends as John reaches for the ignition. This cuts to the shot of Sam where the car is already in motion, creating the need for an intermediate shot to cover the car starting and beginning to reverse.

This hole—an *egregious* mistake for an editor—had to be plugged somehow.

The ideal solution would be to insert a wide exterior shot showing the car in front of the clinic starting and then reversing. However, I didn't recognise the problem until after we'd finished shooting, by which time the equipment had been returned and the crew and cast disbanded; it would be very difficult to reassemble these resources in order to pick up the missing shot. Equally disheartening was the realisation that the location was not particularly suited to the sort of shot required.

As Figure 21 shows, in closer views the building is convincing as a veterinary clinic but a wider perspective reveals that it sits in a semi-industrial area of the university campus, making it difficult to pass off as a shopping centre car park. The deathblow to any possibility of additional shooting was the news that the building, which houses the university's printing facility, had been repainted shortly after the shoot.

Figure 21. Collage. Sc. 18: Screenshot of animal hospital and location recce photograph. (*Sources:* Woodruff, 2020; Photograph by author.)

The resolution for this dilemma (and other dilemmas yet to emerge) would have to be found in postproduction.

I think it was Steven Spielberg who said he goes into a fugue state whenever he directs a film. My recollection of those six days of shooting was that it was unlike any experience I've ever had. I can't recall a single thought or conversation from that time not directly connected to the process of making the film. Afterwards I fell into a deep slump, a kind of

depression, I suppose, where I felt disoriented and purposeless, from which I'm still trying to recover.

I'm in no hurry to think about postproduction. Perhaps it's just the fatigue but it's difficult to see the shoot as anything other than a numberless series of exigencies, each one another blow to my ambitions for the project. My key disappointments – the lack-lustre performances by several key actors and the erratic cinematography – were reflected in the mantra I'd say at the head of each take. To the actors I always say something like, 'OK, let's take it easy, let's just connect with each other', channelled directly from performance coach Judith Weston. But to myself I was much more pragmatic, saying, 'Let's just get the shot in focus and let's have John not fuck-up his lines'.

Personal journal extract
May 2018

SUMMARY

This phase of the production process, directing the film, was not without frustration and anxiety yet it also proved to be challenging and rewarding. These frustrations and challenges, and my response to them, are directly connected to the research questions at the centre of this investigation. In particular, camera and the performance issues, key concerns for an editor attempting the process of directing a film, dominated the six-day shoot, yielding much data for later review and analysis.

A major disappointment was the unprofessionalism of the main actor who daily arrived on set without having learned his lines, a dereliction that significantly diminished his performance. By contrast, his co-actor was professional and responsive, and the actor-director relationship we established, seemingly with minimum effort—a key research challenge—was a highlight of the shoot.

The filming benefitted greatly from the work done in preproduction to create storyboards that showed the shots required for each scene. I felt that the alternative, attempting to choose the shots later during the pressured and time-poor environment of the shoot, would be risky and time consuming. A further benefit, arising directly from

my editing background, was the confidence in knowing that these carefully planned shots would come together easily in the cutting room later.

In Chapter 5 I reflect on my decision to edit the film myself to both further my directorial vision for the project and also to gain deeper insights into my performance as director through a close analysis of the rushes. I describe the ameliorative work undertaken to bring the film closer to my directorial vision, including the use of visual effects to repair or improve deficient material. I also describe the use of visual effects to increase the production values of the project beyond those suggested by my modest resources.

CHAPTER 5
Postproduction

> ‘From shit you get shit’
>
> Paul Falkenberg, editor (Rosenblum & Karen, 1986, p. 3)

In contrast to the three phases of the film production process so far—writing, preproduction and production—all of which, appropriately enough, involved considerable time both in their preparation and execution, I came to postproduction without having undertaken any preparation whatsoever. Having spent over three decades working in cutting rooms I was confident that the working methods and editing strategies I’d acquired during that time would be sufficient preparation. However, I was less sanguine about the task of facing the reality of a shoot that in my darker moments I regarded as little more than a series of endless disappointments. The task of addressing these disappointments during this final quadrant of the film production process—postproduction—is the subject of this chapter.

> Postproduction, often simply referred to as post, is the process that includes all components of the filmmaking process that starts from the time the last shot has been captured on the final day of production and continues until the final output of the project is seen to completion. (George, 2011, p. 75)

My plan was always to edit the film myself. Some practitioners, including editor-turned-director Edward Dmytryk (2018), cite objectivity as a major concern during the editing process, ‘After months of living with it, it is difficult to know if the lines are real, if the characters are truly developed, or if the film as a whole has the hoped-for impact’ (p. 114). Although I recognised that over-familiarity with the project might be a concern, I incline to the perspective espoused by Proferes (2018), that beginning directors have too much to learn about the craft of telling screen stories to *not* edit their own work:

> The feedback necessary to grow in one's craft – what works and what does not, what is the relationship between the director's visualisation before shooting and what appears on the screen – is never more available for study than in the uncut camera takes. (p. 136)

Conversely, there are also directors of the calibre of Stanley Kubrick—already accomplished and without the need for instruction—who nonetheless insist on personally editing their own movies. Kubrick regarded the edit as a vital part of the artistic process, over which he insisted on total control:

> When the picture is shot, it's only partially finished. *I think the cutting is just a continuation of directing a movie* [emphasis added]. I think the use of music effects, opticals and finally main titles are all part of telling the story. And I think the fragmentation of these jobs, by different people, is a very bad thing. (Ginna, 1999a, para. 16)

I concur with Kubrick. But while I see both roles as parts of a continuum, I acknowledge a career-long difficulty in analysing and justifying the myriad decisions involved in a process that I find defies direct analysis. I'm not alone in this. Kubrick, for instance, allowed that while there *are* aspects of filmmaking that can meaningfully be talked about, editing is not one of them. 'The questions of taste involved and the decision-making criteria are essentially nonverbal, and whatever you say tends to read like the back of a record album. … They are just down to the director's taste and imagination' (Strick & Houston, 1972, para. 18). Dmytryk (2019a) agrees, 'If asked why he cut a sequence in this fashion, a creative cutter [editor] would cite no rules; he would probably answer, "It just seemed the right thing to do"' (p. 73).

However, much of the post work that needed to be done on my film was remedial in nature, readily generating before-and-after illustrations of problems and solutions. Taken together, these examples provide a representative account of the post process of the film and, in turn, deliver a commentary on both my directorial efforts and my response to the research questions.

How bad can the rushes really be? This is a question I've been asking myself since the end of filming a couple of weeks ago. It's a question easily answered by firing up the editing software and reviewing the footage from the shoot. But, as cowardly as it sounds, I simply don't have the courage to face the cold hard reality of the shoot. I don't want to see John endlessly messing up his lines, or Tara's mounting anger at his lack of professionalism, or Sam's constant looks into the camera, or the mediocre camera work, etc.

After decades in the industry I know, of course, that editing is built around choices: the best take, the best camera angle, the best reaction, etc. It was the challenge of solving these gigantic jigsaw puzzles that drew me into post in the first place. But, with this project where I'm doubly invested as both director and editor, I fear that too many decisions will involve choosing not the best option but the least egregious.

Editing as triage. Far from ideal.

Personal journal extract
June 2018

According to Dmytryk (2019b), 'The glib phrase "saved in the cutting room" is heard not too infrequently in film circles. It sounds clever, but it hardly conforms to the facts. At the least, it is an exaggeration' (p. 4). Another editor-turned-director, Sam O'Steen, bluntly concurs, saying that when a movie is claimed to have been saved in the cutting room, 'it's usually because it was fucked up in the cutting room to begin with' (O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002, p. 236).

Even if it were possible, and necessary, to 'save' the film, this was not my first priority. My prime obligation was the research questions, and this necessitated making my directing endeavours fully available for scrutiny and evaluation. In order to achieve this—and counter to my editing instincts—I committed to retaining material that I might otherwise delete if I felt its inclusion was significant to the investigation, such as shots of inferior focus or framing, or performances of dubious verisimilitude.

In this chapter I feature two scenes, one from early in the film, the other from the tail, to illustrate the challenges I faced in shaping the rushes toward my directorial vision. Driving me forward was Dmytryk's (2019b) observation that during editing 'a great deal of time is spent in disguising lapses in taste or judgment, in fleshing out missed opportunities, or simply in correcting mistakes, *and this is "cutting territory"* [emphasis added]' (p. 66). Simply put, such repair work is routine and an integral part of the post process. I knew this already, of course, but Dmytryk's words delivered a direct challenge to my diffidence. He also notes that the editing process *always* produces discoveries and insights that operate to embellish the director's vision for the film, 'If an editor is willing to look for, and accept, the challenge, this aspect of the craft can be a good deal more rewarding and pleasurable than the amelioration of a film's mistakes' (p. 66).

SCENE 2: RETURN HOME FROM THE AIRPORT

Scene 2 covers the drive home from the airport. Of all the scenes in the film, this was the most altered during the editing process. The scene was planned to open with a pan from the city nightscape to a front-on shot of John and Tara showing John sulking and Tara doing her best to ignore the imminent storm. The frames in Figure 22 illustrate how the shot was created in the studio; the intention was to use VFX to add the cityscape later.

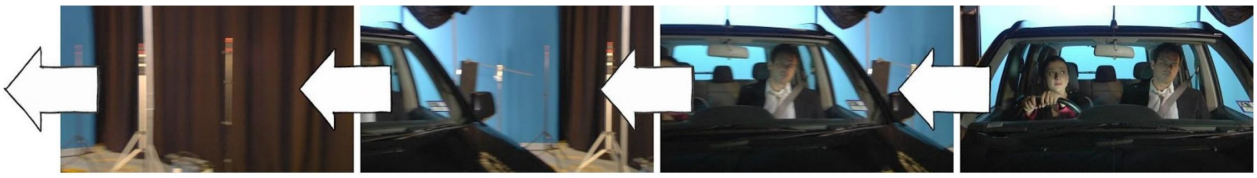

Figure 22. Collage. Sc. 2: Screenshots from the opening shot.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

Taken alone, the pan works well, and the addition of the cityscape would have resulted in a shot of considerable production value. However, the shot itself does little to advance the story. John's anger, on full display in the previous scene as he threw his bags into the car, has been diluted by the time spent away from the characters. An alternative opening shot is required, one that builds on the context established in the airport scene.

Pepperman (2004) notes that early-career directors often overlook the use of context when editing their screen stories, and that the issue is often 'most difficult to steer clear of when the director is also the screenwriter: The editing becomes an assembly of precise (screenplay) pieces of the jigsaw' (p. 144), with the writer-director in blind

pursuit of an inflexible vision of the story that was formed—and fixed—during the scripting process, and is not open to the possibilities that emerge during editing.

Dmytryk (2018) argues that this rigidity is self-defeating, and that recontextualising material to solve story problems is a common strategy in the cutting room:

> An editor must often reinvent and re-purpose footage to solve problems and not simply rely upon its originally intended placement. The order of shots in a scene and the order of scenes in a film must be reconceived in the edit room. (p. 158)

I located a static shot of John sulking, originally intended for later in the sequence (Figure 23), and moved it to the front. The scene now opens strongly with an unambiguous image revealing that John's foul mood has not lessened since the airport.

Figure 23. Screenshot. Sc. 2: John sulking. (*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

The script then calls for him to launch into a tirade about his absent son but, inspired by the power of the new opening, I decided to hold the scene silent for a little longer by adding the radio sequence originally intended for the end of the scene. Rosenberg (2017) tells us that 'the often pronounced prescription of "show, don't tell" is particularly important with regard to a film story. What a viewer sees with her own eyes holds much more validity than what she's told' (p. 185). We watch John as he sullenly tunes through several stations, his anger mounting, until he finds an 'easy listening' channel. But after Tara comments that the music reminds her of being at the dentist, he punches the radio off and only then, considerably angrier than before, he begins to vent about Sam.

The power of this new opening arises directly from its use of pictures, not words, to deliver the drama, successfully exploiting

> the image's superior potential for dramatising a scene, and the opportunity it offers the viewer to think along with the film's characters. … [A] silent

> shot, or one with purely supporting dialogue, will encourage the viewer to interpret, to think, as the scene unfolds, and thus more fully grasp its theme and its emotional thrust. (Dmytryk, 2019a, p. 70)

Delivery of the story through image wherever possible yielded an additional advantage: it decreased the reliance on John's erratic performance, which inevitably came to dominate post, just as it had dominated the shoot. The situation was not helped by his prominence as the central character of the story. Further exacerbating the problem were the many shots he shared with other performers. Frequently, the best take for John (often the *only* take for John) was not the best for the other actors in the shot, notably Tara, who had been worn ragged by his unreliability. As Rosenberg (2017) puts it, each actor 'depends on the other's performance as well as her own to make the scene succeed. … If one character's performance is spot on but the other's is not, the take is either rejected or used with its compromised performance' (p. 186).

Wherever possible, I used the tools available in my digital editing system to minimise this inequity. Figure 24 illustrates an example of this. By splitting the screen in half I was able to combine together material from two different takes, so that an 'offending performance can be removed and a better performance substituted for one character while not affecting the other character in the shot' (Rosenberg, 2017, p. 186).

Figure 24. Collage. Sc. 2: Screenshots illustrating the use of split screens.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

A key adjustment to Scene 2 during post involved the exchange between John and Tara shown in Figure 25.

John continues to stare out the window.

JOHN
What did he say, exactly?

TARA
Exactly?

He shoots her a dark look.

TARA
We were just talking one night and
and he came out with it.

JOHN
No pun intended.
(Tara grins)
Tara, this is not funny.
(he sulks some more)
Talking about what, exactly?

TARA
Oral sex, if you really want to know.

JOHN
Oh, jesus.

TARA
Not oral sex, exactly. 'Oreole' sex.

JOHN
Talk sense, will you?

TARA
Oreos. Those biscuits he likes.
(John shrugs)
The ones he's always getting you to
bring home from the supermarket.
(another shrug)
Anyway, some kids at school were
talking about it. I guessed he meant
oral sex, so I said it's when you
use your mouth to...

JOHN
Yeah, yeah. I know what it is.

TARA
So, I was careful to be clear but
clinical, and I thought I was doing
a pretty good job until he said...
(she laughs)
... 'You mean like a blow job?'

John grimaces.

TARA
Come on, John. It's funny. You'd
think it was hilarious if it was
someone else.

JOHN
Then what? He just blurted it out?

TARA
Pretty much. Yeah.

Figure 25. Script. Sc. 2 (excerpt).
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

Sam O'Steen (2009) developed a strict rule to remind directors not to become too attached to material. 'The order of importance for everything: movie first, scene second, moment third' (p. 44). That is, the story is the first priority and the individual components—the scenes, the shots, the moments—must *serve* the story, otherwise they're a liability, no matter how much the director likes them. The rushes show that Tara's performance as she recounts Sam's Oreo story is terrific. It's a great moment, one of the few occasions where she gets to drive the story, to reveal herself, instead of merely reacting to her petulant, solipsistic partner. Moreover, I felt she deserved the moment, given her unflagging professionalism despite the difficulties of the shoot.

However, it fails O'Steen's test of relevance; the original cut shows it sitting gratuitously in an already too-flabby scene that was hurting the film. Rosenberg (2017) concurs with O'Steen, insisting that the crucial test is always 'How does a scene influence the eventual outcome of the story?' (p. 28). The scene itself is important, providing vital story information (the possibility of Sam being gay, John's homophobia, Tara's lack of fuss, etc.), but it was simply too long. Rosenberg is unsparing, 'An often applied metric goes something like this: "If the audience isn't going to miss it, it should not be there"' (p. 29). Like it or not (and I didn't like it at all) the Oreo story was unnecessary and had to go, period.

By the end of editing, Scene 2 had been completely transformed. The flashy VFX-heavy opening shot was gone, the structure had been radically changed, and a substantial amount of dialogue—good dialogue, I felt—had been dropped. The scene was now vastly improved, despite losing more than half of its original length. Rosenberg (2017) salves my chagrin at not having anticipated the issues during the writing process:

> If we look back at the script where original scenes were laid down, we find that every scene and portion of a scene was deemed essential, probably after months of rewriting and polishing. So what changed when the film reached the editing room? *The act of visualisation. The moment the text gained texture through the visual medium, things changed* [emphasis added]. (p. 172)

It's a valuable lesson: what works on the page doesn't necessarily work on the screen, and a full evaluation can't be made until the cutting room. Dmytryk (2019b) offers further

consolation by emphasising the positive role of the director in these situations.

> In any case, the editor works only with the material handed him by the director. Even if the editor creates a 'miracle', the fact remains that that material carries all the ingredients of that miracle except, of course, for the creative ability brought to the cutting process by the editor. (p. 4)

Work of the sort I did on Scene 2 is an everyday activity for an editor, but experiencing this familiar process from a director's perspective has been sobering. My directorial investment in the material didn't prevent me from seeing the need for the adjustments, nor the nature of the adjustments needed. Yet I was unable to operate with the alacrity I usually bring to the task. Although being satisfied with the outcome, I was also inconsolably miserable at the same time. Easily recognised was my regret at the resources wasted, mainly precious time, in shooting this jetsam in the first place. But there was also a nagging concern (the observations of Rosenberg and Dmytryk notwithstanding) that I, with my considerable editing knowledge, ought to have been able to anticipate the excess beforehand and trim the script accordingly.

Personal journal extract
August 2018

SCENE 18: AFTER THE VET

The confrontation between father and son in the car outside the veterinary clinic is the climactic—and the longest—scene in the film. It is also the scene we spent most time shooting, involving John and Sam running through a gamut of emotions, including anger, confrontation, epiphany and reconciliation. It's not an overstatement to say that the success of the story depended on this one scene. Adding to the pressure was the exasperating unreliability of the two key actors.

The rushes confirmed my memory of an especially trying day in the studio—a day that had delivered a tsunami of the usual disappointments, the result of both the increased shooting time (with the inevitable increase in mangled lines and looks into camera) together with the difficulties of coaxing the actors through the emotional highs and lows required by the

scene. I began editing with little confidence in the outcome. However, among the dross there were a few pleasant surprises.

One of those surprises came from Sam during the exchange shown in Figure 26.

SAM
I know he wasn't having babies.

JOHN
You said that already.

SAM
Because it's true.

JOHN
Let me guess - maybe he's gay too.

SAM
(angrily)
Maybe he is.

JOHN
Yeah, maybe.

Sam explodes.

SAM
YEAH, DAD! MAYBE!

Figure 26. Script. Sc. 18 (excerpt).
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

The intention was that Sam, who had so far endured John's aggression in silence, would finally snap. The tipping point was John's line, 'Let me guess, maybe he's gay too'. The scene was covered from four different camera angles, yielding a total of thirteen takes, and each time, with one exception, Sam responded with an appropriately angry, 'Maybe he is'. The exception was a complete surprise when I saw it in the cutting room weeks later. Instead of anger, Sam delivered the line with a voice that was quiet but steady, whisper-soft yet assertive; a poignant and visceral interpretation, which he'd achieved without any guidance from me. The take was aborted early because of a camera problem, so I can only assume the pressure to reset in preparation for another try pushed the performance from my mind.

Editor-turned-director Hal Ashby stresses the importance of editors being able to intuitively respond to the rushes, '*The film will tell you what to do* [emphasis added]. … All we have as filmmakers are our instincts. I have nothing else. In other words, what I feel about something – it's the only thing I know' (Beebe, Janssen, Lynch & Morrow, 2018,

0:31:50). Sam's unprompted variation made me see that I'd been too closely focussed on John in the scene—a bias I'd nurtured since the inception of the project. With this single utterance the scene became a compelling encounter between father and son and not merely a series of carefully plotted escalations intended to make John angrier. Sam's delivery of the line is electric and authentic, and stumbling across it was one of the highlights of post.

> The truth cannot be shaped by a blend of editing 'ingredients'. Each time you work on a film you are obliged to unearth what it is about a moment, a scene, a sequence, and the entire form of that specific scene that is a 'one of a kind'. (Pepperman, 2004, p. 122)

Of course, the line *had* to be incorporated into the scene. But there was a problem: just before saying the line Sam shot a look directly into the camera (Figure 27), rendering the gap I wanted between John's previous line and his unusable. I felt that a moment of inaction—and, crucially, *silence*—was essential for the line to have maximum impact. 'Trust the quiet moments. Silence and stillness are usually more powerful than their opposites' (O'Steen, 2009, p. 11). In this case, a beat after John's inflammatory line, 'Let me guess, maybe he's gay, too', provides the viewer with space to speculate about how Sam will respond. 'Awaiting an answer while 'resting' on a reaction shot prompts the thinking/feeling response in the audience' (Pepperman, 2004, p. 173). Fortunately, I was able to use the VFX tools in my editing system to invisibly extend the tiny gap between the end of the look and the start of the line to almost two seconds, and the tension created adds substantially to the impact of Sam's already powerful delivery.

Figure 27. Screenshot. Sc. 18: Sam looking into camera. (*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

A second surprise when viewing the rushes came from the other recalcitrant, John, although this was one I remembered vividly from the shoot. At the end of the argument with Sam, he succumbs to a crying fit. I'd seen John cry before in a theatre production and he was very good. However, after the serial disappointments of the shoot I was concerned

about how he would perform this difficult feat in the all-important climactic scene. To my surprise, and that of the crew, he delivered two stellar, unbroken takes (Figure 28).

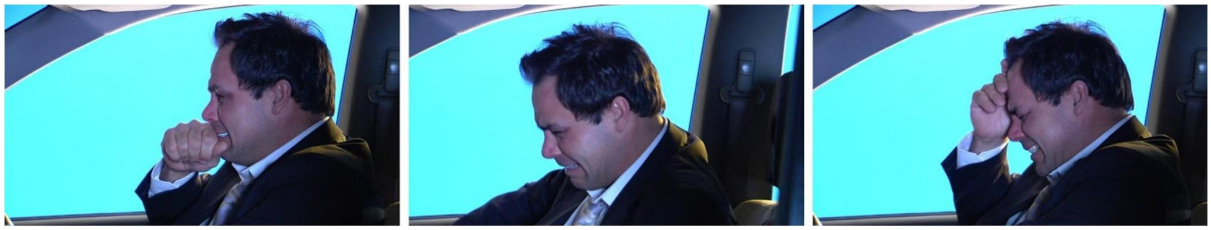

Figure 28. Collage. Sc. 18: Screenshots of John crying.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

Although I'd been careful to give myself options, as soon as I saw John's performance that day in the studio, I knew precisely how I'd approach the scene in post: I would foreground his performance by cutting the sequence the least possible amount. 'Editing is not snip, snip, snip. It's doing the opposite, pausing, and watching, and waiting' (O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002, p. 237). Or, as Dymtryk (2019b) puts it, 'as long as the scene is playing at its best in the selected angle, leave it alone! The only reason for using another cut is to improve the scene' (p. 25). Instead of improving the scene, further editing would only weaken it by diminishing the power of John's performance. During the post on this project, where much of the cutting has been, of necessity, interventionist and remedial, this sequence provided a welcome exception.

Later in the scene John's tears are followed by crazed laughter after he realises what a fool he's been, with Sam watching on uncomfortably from the back seat. I was unhappy with Sam's reaction shots for this sequence; his responses were consistently forced and unconvincing, and I was reluctant to use them. In such situations Dmytryk (2019b) promotes innovation and re-invention, 'If it is necessary to correct a fault, or if it is possible to improve the dramatic quality of a sequence, and the proper material is not at hand, explore all possibilities or invent a few' (p. 70).

I began hunting through similar shots intended for other parts of the scene. I found footage of Sam and John at the head of a take that had been paused while a technical problem was being sorted out. The camera had continued rolling and caught John teasing Sam mercilessly as they waited to resume the shot (Figure 29).

Figure 29. Collage. Sc. 18: Screenshots of Sam glowering at John's pre-take antics.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

John was only being playful but the camera shows Sam decidedly unimpressed by his behaviour. His real-life reaction is exactly that required by the scene. But there was an obvious problem: John's out-of-focus carryings-on.

Using the VFX capability of my editing system, I was able to remove John completely from the shot and then re-insert his left shoulder so that his position matched the surrounding shots of him laughing in the scene (Figure 30). Sam's real-life scowl fitted seamlessly into the edit and powerfully signals his discomfort at his father's antics.

Figure 30. Screenshot. Sc. 18: Sam's scowl, repurposed.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

Another technique I made frequent use of throughout this sequence was dialogue substitution. This involves replacing actors' lines in a particular take with lines from elsewhere in order to improve performances. So, faced with a take that included a poorly read line of dialogue, I would hunt for 'the very best reading of the line, no matter what angle it was shot at, and then use that reading to replace the lesser quality performance' (Rosenberg, 2017, p. 188).

The power of this technique is demonstrated in the sequence shown in Figure 31 (which was also referred to in the previous chapter).

John tries to pull himself together. He clears his throat, wipes the tears from his eyes, and forces down a few deep breaths before turning to face Sam – but Sam's stony disapproval only sets him off again.

Suddenly he stops mid-laugh, and shoots Sam a grin, both mischievous and patronising.

JOHN
You know what he was really doing?

SAM
Dad! [Stop it!]

But Sam's discomfort only fans the flames of his hilarity.

Figure 31. Script. Sc. 18 (excerpt).
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

John begins the shot facing-front, half laughing, half convulsing, as scripted. But as he turns around to Sam he stops part-way as though arrested by a thought. A mischievous look flashes across his face—an epiphany—that then propels him fully around to Sam where he delivers the line.

Figure 32. Collage. Sc. 18: Screenshots of John's epiphany.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

As discussed in Chapter 4, the epiphany was an electric moment and I was determined to use it, but the delivery of the line, 'You know what he was really doing?', was poor. However, through the use of dialogue substitution I was able to replace the inferior read with the stronger version I'd obtained after giving John a line reading (as detailed in Chapter 4). This ability to combine the best take for picture with the best take for dialogue has its technical limitations (both performances need to be delivered with approximately the same cadence, for instance) but, when successful, the technique can deliver powerful, synergistic improvements in actors' performances.

Towards the end of the scene, Tara joins John and Sam in the car. Some of her shots are 'two shots', shots that include both her and Sam. Unfortunately, Sam's tendency to look into the camera or lose concentration (as shown in Figure 33) or simply grossly over-act during takes rendered many otherwise good moments potentially unusable.

Figure 33. Collage. Sc. 18: Screenshots illustrating Sam's inattention.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

Initially, I attempted to 'cut around' his transgressions (i.e. only use those parts of the shot where he was looking properly at Tara) but I quickly realised this was costing me access to some of her best performances. I couldn't use the split screen technique I'd used earlier because here the actors were too close together. So, driven by Dmytryk's (2019b) cry to 'explore all possibilities or invent a few' (p. 70) in the face of difficulties, I tried some makeshift repair work; I began laying good images of Sam over his unsatisfactory performances (Figure 34). The idea was sound but it pushed my workaday editing system and VFX capabilities to the limit. A more powerful computer running specialised VFX software *and* a skilled operator would have resolved the problem with relative ease.

Figure 34. Collage. Sc. 18: Screenshots illustrating the VFX work to address Sam's inattention. (*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

Nevertheless, despite their crude manufacture, these shots succeeded in allowing Tara's best performances in the scene to be incorporated into the edit.

Sam's wayward performance made the task of finding appropriate shots for the overlays very difficult. Such was my desperation in one instance that I froze a single frame of him looking at Tara—the only suitable image I could find—which I then inserted into the take so that he stares at her with a frozen, slightly crazed smile throughout the duration of the shot (Figure 35).

Figure 35. Collage. Sc. 18: Screenshots showing the frozen image of Sam. (*Source:* Woodruff)

Even a casual glance at Sam by a viewer would see this flagrant cheat undone, yet it always escapes notice. As O'Steen (2002) tells us, 'as long as you're conscious of where the audience's eyes will be, you can cheat, so they aren't looking at the mistake' (p. 165). All eyes are on Tara as she animatedly recounts her conversation with the vet. The frozen image of Sam, despite its close proximity, slips by unseen.

This strategy plays a vital role in a key non-verbal exchange that flags both the end of the scene and also the end of the film. Having returned to the car, Tara quickly intuits John's change of mood, which she confirms with a look at Sam. She and John then exchange warm smiles; hostilities are over, and the family, reunited, head off for pizza. The original version of the scene favoured John. After a tight shot of him smiling at Tara, I cut to a wider view of the family from the front of the car that begins with Tara returning his smile, followed by the cry for pizza. My logic was that the smile from John—the central character of the story—serves a dual purpose, announcing his return to normal *and* (therefore) the end of the film. Both are affirmed in the following shot, a wider, more detached view of the family from outside the car that signals to viewers imminent disengagement from the story, and that begins with Tara returning the smile before moving to the mundane business of setting off for home. Or so I thought. When I reviewed the cut I realised that her response to John's smile (and change of mood) was as important as the smile itself.

> [Wide shots] can too easily 'hide', or 'mis-represent', what is vital to the scene, and performance. It is in the Close-Ups that the editor – later the audience – can see the varied, changing, and most subtle expressions in the eyes, lips, and posture of the actor's face. (Pepperman, 2004, p. 160)

I returned to the rushes only to find that each take showed Tara responding to John's smile in a blatantly perfunctory way. The scene had been shot last, at the end of the final day of shooting; I was exhausted and angry, and John was the focus of much of that anger. Perhaps six days of enduring his egregious behaviour had also gotten under Tara's defences, hence her thin-lipped smile. Whatever the reason, I was determined that her reaction be as large and as convincing as possible—and that it be seen in a shot the equal of John's.

I found the smile that features in the edit early in another take of the same shot. Tara has just returned to the car to find the mood much changed. She archly queries Sam about it,

and John playfully jumps to his defence. As Tara watches her son, a warm smile sweeps her face, and remains in place as she turns to look at John. The smile lingers just long enough to provide a snippet that suggests it was intended for him (Figure 36).

Figure 36. Collage. Sc. 18: Screenshots showing the exchange of looks between John and Tara. (*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

The only potential issue is that John is looking at—and *speaking* to—Sam. I removed his dialogue and relied once again on Sam O'Steen's assertion that viewers

> can only look at one thing at a time, and I know where their eyes are going to be onscreen, and it's not on the [mis]match. The [mis]match is only a detail the director or editor would notice. (O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002, p. 236)

The cheat works well. Viewers see Tara warmly 'return' John's smile, and the connection delivers a dramatically satisfying conclusion to the story.

This was the toughest scene in the film to edit, by far, a function of both the varied performances and the pressure I put on myself to make this climactic scene succeed. I was conflicted as the editing proceeded, torn between a director's disappointment at the lacklustre performances, and an editor's delight by the challenge of helping the scene rise above these same disappointments.

Personal journal extract
October 2018

VFX IN SERVICE OF THE DIRECTOR-EDITOR'S VISION

The self-conscious opening shot of the film, featuring a tilt down from a plane flying low overhead to reveal the airport below, with the end of the tilt precisely timed to accommodate John's entrance, makes it easily recognisable as an effects shot (Figure 37).

Figure 37. Collage. Sc. 1: Screenshots showing the opening shot of the film.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

The shot proved to be as difficult to implement as it had been easy to design. In all, it involved four people, each with specialist VFX skills, swapping material to-and-fro for several months of part-time work. Despite this disproportionate effort, I believe the shot was worth the trouble. Not only does it deliver the brief by closely matching the storyboards I drew during preprocduction, it also succeeds in creating an engaging and impressive opening to the film.

However, my chief interest here is the other ninety or so VFX shots that are spread throughout the film, working, hopefully unnoticed, to support the delivery of the story. Some of the techniques I have used, such as split screens and face replacement, have already featured in this chapter. Following are examples of other VFX strategies that were used. Some operated to embellish my vision for the film while others were ameliorative, used to resolve problems that had originated during the shoot.

Airport traffic

Originally there were no vehicles flashing past the actors in the airport scene. Trying to incorporate this extra demand into the shooting plan would have been unwieldy and potentially dangerous. Instead, the traffic was added in post with the benefit of economy and safety, and with the added bonus that buses and extra taxis that were too prohibitive to hire, could readily be included (Figure 38). A further advantage was that the passage of these VFX-generated vehicles through the sequence could be controlled with a precision that would have not otherwise been possible.

Figure 38. Collage. Sc. 1: Screenshots showing VFX-generated airport traffic.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

U-turn to home

The black Nissan, X-TRAIL that served as the family car was a rental car and had to be returned immediately after the shoot. The hire had been the single-most expensive cost of the shoot; rehiring it to shoot the car travel shots in post was not an option. We dealt with the situation in various ways. Sometimes we simply set up the camera at a vantage point over a freeway and waited for a similar-looking car to come along. Although very inefficient and frustrating, the practice nonetheless worked surprisingly well for acquiring general travel shots. No-one notices that the 'X-TRAIL' featured in these sequences is actually a series of loose approximations.

For shots involving specific actions, such as the U-turn where Tara and John head back home to pick up Sam, a more controlled approach was required. The only realistic solution was to use computer animation. I purchased a 3D software model of the X-TRAIL and hired a VFX animator to create the turn, using a still image of the road as the background (Figure 39). Creating this effect was time consuming and expensive but the final result is worth the trouble and the cost. The software-generated X-TRAIL is completely convincing, and the shot delivers the necessary link between the two adjacent scenes.

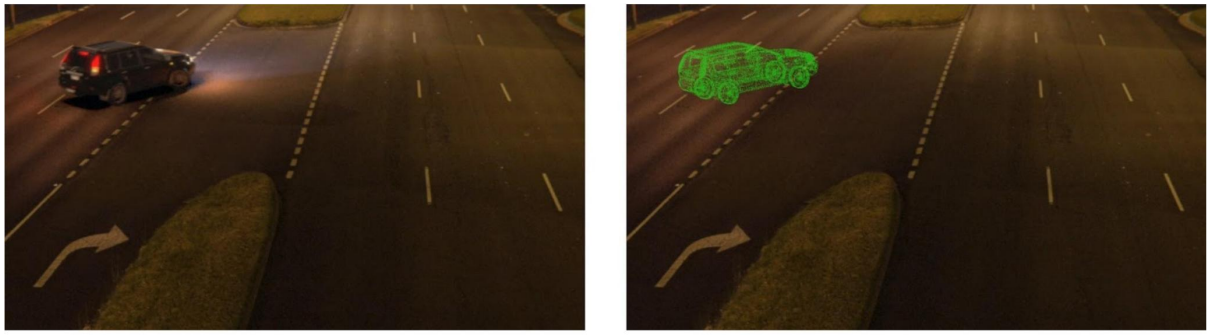

Figure 39. Collage. Sc. 11: Screenshots of completed and work-in-progress versions of the VFX-generated car. (*Sources:* Woodruff, 2020; Screenshot by author.)

Pull focus

The focus pull from Sam to John in the car en route to the vet had been designed into the film at the storyboard stage. The shot opens with Sam in the back seat and John in the front. Sam is in focus; John, in the foreground, is not. After establishing Sam's misery, the focus shifts so that now John is in focus and can be seen to be equally miserable, with Sam now blurry in the background (Figure 40).

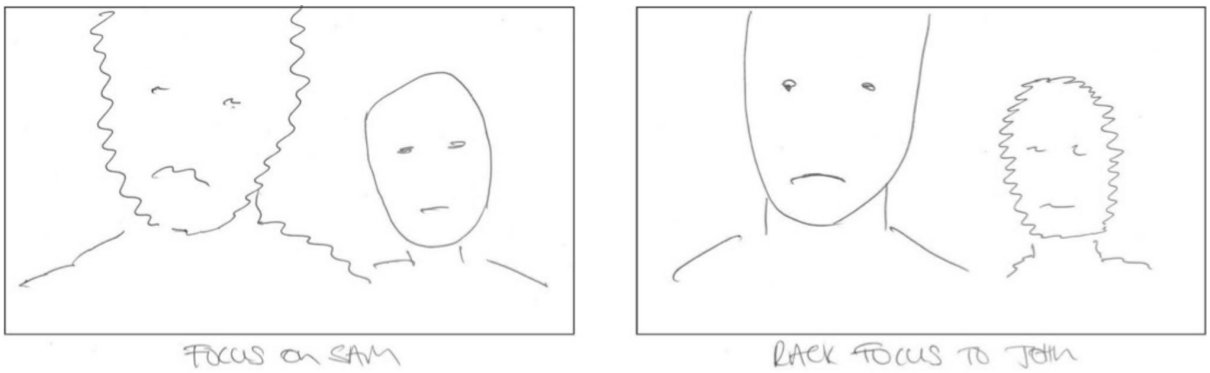

Figure 40. Collage. Sc. 14: Storyboard images showing the focus pull from Sam to John. (*Source:* Author's own notes.)

As discussed in Chapter 4, technical issues relating to arcane camera functions such as lens length and aperture prevented us from realising the shot as I'd hoped. The focus shift can be seen, and its dramatic effect inferred, in the frames from the rushes in Figure 41, but for maximum impact the effect needs to be more pronounced (i.e. the shift from in-focus to out-of-focus and vice-versa should be greater).

Figure 41. Collage. Sc. 14: Screenshots showing the focus pull from Sam to John. (*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

VFX software was used to separate Sam and John into separate planes, and the focus of each plane controlled independently so that the focus differential could be increased. The resulting increase in separation, particularly apparent when the shot is seen in real time (instead of as still images as shown in Figure 42) works well to deliver the drama, heightening the gulf between John and Sam, and delivering the shot as planned.

Figure 42. Collage. Sc. 14: Screenshots showing the VFX-enhanced focus pull from Sam to John. (*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

Missing vet car park shot

I realised too late that I'd missed a crucial shot in the final sequence of the film: a shot to bridge the action of John about to start the car and the side shot of Sam wiping into frame as the car reverses (Figure 43).

Figure 43. Collage. Sc. 18: Screenshots showing the location of the missing shot.
(*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

The obvious solution is a wide shot of the car park. This would readily contain the missing action of the car starting and the commencement of reversing. However, as shown in Figure 44, the space in front of the building used as the clinic did not suggest the shopping centre car park referred to in the story. The only option was to source a substitute car park image and insert the building and the car using VFX.

Figure 44. Photograph. Sc. 18: Wide perspective recce photograph of the animal clinic building.
(*Source:* Photograph by author.)

I began scouting shopping centres, other universities and sporting grounds for a suitable car park. I also built a cardboard model of the clinic and a paper 'car park' grid (Figure 45). These helped to develop concepts for the shot and were also useful in evaluating the potential of each of the possible locations. Disappointingly, none of the car parks I investigated delivered the trio of elements essential for the shot: an unobstructed expanse of parking spaces, a nearby elevated vantage point (to shoot from) and a layout that would allow me to locate the clinic on the right-hand side of the shot. The latter was necessary so that an off-screen barrier could be

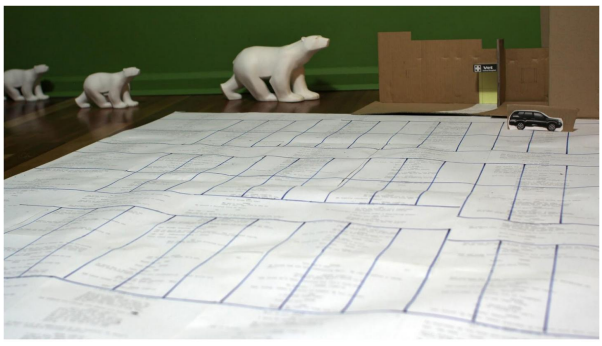

Figure 45. Photograph. Sc. 18: Exploratory model of the clinic and car park.
(*Source:* Photograph by author.)

inferred, justifying the need for the car to reverse back instead of driving forward, in order to match Sam's entry in the following shot.

My search finally ended when I chanced upon a shot online that featured drone footage of an empty car park that precisely suited my needs (Figure 46). Given my lack of success in locating a viable alternative, I gladly paid the licence fee and downloaded the footage. The shot would readily accommodate the clinic and the action of the car; the freeways that ran alongside the far boundaries were an unexpected bonus.

Figure 46. Screenshot. Sc. 18: Shopping centre car park base from purchased stock footage. (*Source:* VideoAir/Shutterstock, 2010)

Figure 47. Screenshot. Sc. 18: Composite image of animal hospital and car park. (*Source:* Woodruff, 2020.)

The task of grafting the clinic and the car into the shot proved to be time consuming and intricate, involving numberless hours of effort. But the labour was easily worth the trouble. Not only had I plugged a hole in the edit, the shot that had been created out of desperation is so compelling it immediately became my favourite image of the film (Figure 47). I was so happy with the result that I ran it as long as I dared in the edit, at around seven seconds.

At the end of the editing process, I was confident that the decision to cut the film myself had been sound. As I'd expected, much of the work proved to be remedial. But, as O'Steen (2009) reminds us, the ameliorative aspects of the craft apply even to high-end productions, where the issues of experience and budget typical of student filmmaking do not apply, 'So much goes wrong or has to be compromised during shooting that an editor must use sleight-of-hand to distract the audience from that reality' (p. 14). Engaging in this sleight-of-hand involves the editor or, in this case, the editor-director, in a close scrutiny of the rushes, with the insights gained benefitting both the current and future endeavours,

readily evoking the assertion of Proferes (2018) from the head of this chapter that 'the feedback necessary to grow in one's craft ... is never more available for study than in the uncut camera takes' (p. 136).

I began the edit deeply concerned about what I'd find in the rushes and at the end of the process I'm still uncertain about the quality of the film. But, oddly enough, the need to be mindful of the research questions, with their focus on my performance as director, provided a different – and very positive – perspective for the post process. The shift enabled me to reflect more coolly than usual on my achievements and disappointments; in particular, I've found it easier to recognise the things that went right instead of my usual practice of fixating on the things that went wrong. I'm determined to bring this more balanced approach to bear on future directing efforts.

Personal journal extract
January 2019

SUMMARY

The decision to edit the film myself was not taken lightly. Ultimately, though, I felt my considerable experience as an editor would benefit the film *and* facilitate a more insightful response to the research questions through the close analysis of the rushes necessitated by the task.

Except for a few notable exceptions, my concerns about the performances of the father and son were confirmed, and much of the early editing work focussed on ameliorating these issues. Work then shifted to delivering the story, where it became apparent that the shots I'd chosen in preproduction, heavily influenced by my editing background, cut together smoothly to deliver the story in a fluent and dramatically satisfying way. This included the troublesome sequence showing the family's arrival at the veterinary clinic. Loaded with temporal and spatial issues, the sequence had proved resistant to all attempts at storyboarding until a deep dive into my editing past delivered a solution that was simple, elegant and affirming.

I also drew on my knowledge of visual effects to further develop my directorial vision for the film, including the addition of camera moves and buildings, traffic and other embellishments to lift the production values away from those typical of a low-budget student film. At other times I resolved editing issues by creating entirely new shots using VFX to fill gaps in the action rather than compromise (and diminish) the narrative flow.

In this final phase of the production, my editing background was indisputably an asset, not a liability. The decision to edit the film myself allowed greater insights into my performance as director than I would have gained otherwise, of benefit to both this research project and future projects.

CHAPTER 6
Conclusion

> 'What also helps [when I'm directing] is that I remember what was left on the cutting room floor. … It saves a lot of time when you're walking around with that moviola [editing machine] in your head, when you're shooting and cutting at the same time.'
>
> Sam O'Steen, editor-turned-director
> (O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002, p. 112)

ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

Quite by chance, during the final phase of this investigation, I was reunited with the Super 8 film I'd made as part of my efforts to get into film school more than thirty years ago. I assumed it had been lost, part of the flotsam of one's early years, but instead it had been slumbering in a disused cupboard on the verandah of my parents' house in rural Victoria.

The intervening years, mostly spent pursuing a career in high-end feature film postproduction, had not been kind to my memory of this long unseen film. I imagined it to be amateurish in the extreme, self-conscious and overreaching—an uncharitable but perhaps inevitable assessment of the efforts of a naïve wannabe viewed from the lofty perspective of three decades' experience in the world of professional filmmaking.

There had been no script, only a series of ever-evolving shots, as many of which failed as succeeded. The failures were discarded, and new shots formulated and attempted. The 'narrative' was a very slight boy-meets-girl story centred around the journey of the passenger train that daily made the return haul from my hometown to the city. These fragments were pulled into a loose cohesion through the use of wall-to-wall German electronic music.

Thirty years later it was a delight to find that the film vigorously resists all attempts at condescension. It *is* amateurish: it was made by an amateur. But it's also an exuberant and charmingly imperfect answer to the question How do I make a film? It made me nostalgic for those early filmmaking days when my only resources were an abundance of enthusiasm and time.

The discovery coincided with the completion of the film that forms the practical component of this investigation. My recent directorial fumblings may be a little less artless but the two projects, although separated by three decades, are nevertheless strongly connected. I recognise in both the unmatched excitement that comes only through authentic self-expression—the pursuit of one's *own* vision—something impossible to attain when facilitating other people's ideas, no matter in what capacity.

Revisiting my Super 8 days affirmed for me the value of this current research journey as being powerful and transformative, both a consolidation and a reawakening, and it is with mixed feelings that I enter the final phase of the process. The journey has been long and at times arduous, but it has delivered more insights and given greater pleasure than I could have imagined.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My research journey began with the intention of responding to the following two research questions:

1. What challenges does an editor face when journeying to directing?
2. How can the production of a short fiction film be designed and produced to aid in this journey?

However, as I engaged with both the practical and theoretical components of the research an unexpected perspective on the transition process emerged with such insistence that I felt it deserved to be responded to as a supplementary research question:

3. What benefits does a cutting room background provide an editor when transitioning to directing?

METHODOLOGY AND PROJECT

Driving my choice of methodology was my determination that the research had an impact on my practice that extended beyond the investigation. For this reason, I was drawn to the use of the personal voice—the use of 'I'—as the most potent way of exploring both my own responses to the research questions and those of the other practitioners who feature in this project.

I felt that autoethnography, with its easy accommodation of the researcher as the centre of the investigation, was the ideal methodology. So, 'I', the researcher, became the protagonist in an emotionally engaging story with a narrator, characters and a plot. As I engaged with this story, I was also attempting to connect this autobiographical account to wider cultural, social, political understandings; I used my own journey through the process of making a short film to understand the journeys of others who have made the transition from editing to directing. That is, I used my own 'experience of exploring a particular life in order to understand a way of life' (Ellis & Bochner, 2011, p. 737).

The project component of the research involved the formulation and realisation of a short film that had been designed to replicate the production of mainstream screen stories such as feature films and TV series, but on a smaller, achievable scale. Crucial to the success of the investigation was the formulation, at the pre-scripting stage, of a list of elements intended to deliver the challenges a transitioning editor would typically encounter, while also providing the necessary equivalency between the short- and longer-form production paradigms. On the issue of equivalency, Rabiger and Hurbis-Cherrier (2020) are steadfast.

> Short films … can be equally, if not more, profound, moving and memorable as features. Indeed, shorts demand more brainwork since you must immediately and deftly establish characters, time, place, and dramatic situation. But what an opportunity to demonstrate your production, authorship, and stylistic skills! (p. 29)

SCRIPTING

An unusual but not unreasonable perspective of the film at the centre of this investigation is that the story it tells is more or less irrelevant. It is, at best, of secondary importance, with the specified parameters relating to its translation from script to screen, specifically, the challenges designed to test a transitioning editor, taking precedence. Of these, the two

key elements, identified early in this investigation, are the ability to work with actors and to creatively record their performances using a camera, pithily articulated by writer-director David Mamet (1994) as '"where do I put the camera?" and "what do I tell the actors?"' (p. 347).

The demands of this investigation required a complete inversion of my usual scripting process: instead of starting with an idea—an epiphany that I would then develop within the bounds of a realistic production paradigm—here I began with a predetermined and necessarily fixed paradigm for which I sought an epiphany. I found this 'wag the dog' approach extremely difficult. It drove me deep into a jag of reading and re-reading screenwriting books, not in search of an idea, but as a way of allaying the anxiety I felt in the face of this back-to-front task.

It was during this process that I chanced across the quote, also from Mamet (1994), that heads Chapter 2: Scripting, 'The guy says to the girl, "That's a lovely dress". He does not say, "I haven't been laid in six weeks"' (p. 373), an edict delivered in Mamet's typically provocative way against the use of backstory. Backstory refers to details of the character's lives that have taken place before the story begins (i.e. before the opening credits) (Kaire, 2014). I had an ambivalent reaction to the quote. It seemed at once both clear and straightforward, even obvious, and yet somehow illuminating and profound, as though a half-formed thought had suddenly been made whole. I added it to the already daunting list of script criteria—and, counter-intuitively, my anxiety about the task of finding a suitable story immediately lessened.

Under Mamet's sway, I then hunted for a narrative that operated entirely in the here-and-now, utilising only events that occurred within the timeframe of the narrative. As Mamet would ask, how would knowing the details of the trip from which John has just returned at the start of the film, such as where he'd been and what he'd been doing, advance the story of this family drama? It manifestly would not, and therefore had no place in the story.

Of course, I did not know about John and his business trip at this early, pre-story stage. Nor Tara. Nor Sam. But they and their predicament eventually emerged, and it was gratifying to see that their story delivered the challenges required by the research questions and, with

only a single exception, was without backstory. I had allowed myself the indulgence of having Tara tell John about Sam's 'Oreo sex' story during the trip home from the airport. However, as outlined earlier, the sequence was so at odds with the rest of the film—so obviously extraneous—that it was deleted in the early stages of editing, improving the story while also confirming Mamet's succinct reiteration of his stance that 'backstory is bullshit' (Walters, 2011).

PREPRODUCTION

Initially, I was surprised when the account of the planning phase of the project grew to become the longest chapter in this exegesis. However, I came to realise that this simply reflects the paramount importance of preproduction in the filmmaking process, regardless of budget or experience. Stanley Kubrick regularly asserted its primacy, saying that this is where many creative battles are won or lost.

> You have a problem of allocating your resources of time and money in making a film, and you are constantly having to do a kind of artistic cost-effectiveness of all the scenes in the film against the budget and the time remaining.' (Ruchti, Taylor & Walker, 2000, p. 38)

Under the strain of this relentless preparation I began to suffer waves of acute and, at times, debilitating anxiety. Dmytryk (2018) contends that nervousness may actually assist in improving a director's performance but cautions 'it's a sin to show it to the world. Above all, a director is looked to for leadership, and leadership is what he must demonstrate, even if he has to stage an act of his own' (p. 16).

For the first and only time in this investigation, I found Dmytryk's advice to be unhelpful. I needed more than an exhortation to bravado. Then I remembered the documentary *Billy Wilder Speaks* (Junkersdorf, 2006), which supplies the quote at the head of Chapter 3: Preproduction. Looking back on a forty-year career, Wilder—winner of six Academy Awards and responsible for films such as *Double Indemnity* (Sistrom, 1944) and *Some Like it Hot* (Wilder, 1959)—recalls an attack of nerves prior to his first outing as a director: 'I went to see [Ernst] Lubitsch [his mentor]. I said, "I'm going to start work in the morning on the first scenes of my first film. I'm scared shitless". And he said, "I've made seventy movies, and I'm still scared shitless"' (Junkersdorf, 2006, 0:07:37). Watching Wilder's relish as he

tells this story against himself leaves no doubt that any insecurities he suffered early in his stellar directing career were quickly despatched. And his self-deprecating guffaw as he delivers the punchline is both hilarious and reassuring in equal measure.

Of all the challenges I imagined I'd face during this investigation, my biggest anxieties centred around issues of performance, so I was enormously relieved to learn during preproduction that John and Tara were expecting nothing more than a straightforward conversational approach from their director. During rehearsal, we spoke casually about the characters as though they were people we all knew, and it was exciting to watch them move from third person to first person perspectives—to 'I'—as they stepped into their roles. What I'd feared as being a daunting, even potentially crippling, part of the project now seemed straightforward and feasible. My initiation mirrored that of editor-turned-director Sam O'Steen: '[Initially] I didn't like it. I was intimidated because I didn't know what I was talking about. I just knew what I liked' (O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002, p. 111). But he, too, quickly found that actors responded to simple instructions using everyday language, 'I'd say, "Just act naturally, just say the words, and then we'll take it from there". … I more or less hired good actors and let them act' (p. 111). Further reassurance came from director Patrick Tucker (2019). 'Sometimes it works just to tell the cast what you want and let them work it out; or to give them an end result of emotions or moves and let them build the stepping stones to achieve it' (p. 88).

The difficulties with John and Sam were in the future, and were to be a test of a different sort, but at this stage I looked forward to the performance component of the shoot with newfound optimism.

PRODUCTION

An unexpected highlight of writing this exegesis has been to be occasionally reminded that not everything during the shoot went awry. My recollection of those six torturous days is so predominantly negative that it evokes the line director-actor François Truffaut allows himself in the movie *La Nuit Américaine*, and that heads Chapter 4: Production. 'Shooting a movie is like a stagecoach ride in the Old West. At first you hope for a nice trip. Soon you just hope to reach your destination' (Berbert, 1973, 0:13:32).

But not everything *did* go awry, and the film itself provides tangible evidence of this: the occasional line or look from one of the characters, or a shot or a juxtaposition that works precisely as I intended. Or that works even better than I'd intended. Or, better yet, something entirely *unintended*, such as Sam's 'Maybe he is' moment—a line that catapults the scene to a new level, adding depth and poignancy to what I'd imagined as a mere spat between father and son.

Ironically, then, it is father and son, John and Sam, who proved to be the biggest disappointments of the production. Sam, a curious ten-year-old, can be forgiven for pursuing his curiosity about acting only to find himself bored by it. But John, a capable, trained performer with decades of experience, knew better than to commit to the central role of the film given the onerous demands of his other project. His frenzied, stress-fuelled performance reduced the character of the father to an angry stereotype.

Dmytryk (2019c) describes the camera as 'a powerful telescope' (p. 33) from which the actor can't hide, 'If the camera is focusing on her in a tight over-shoulder shot, she had better mean it. Acting for the screen is really a matter of being – not behaving. Honest attitude is everything' (2018, p. 28). A disproportionate amount of time and energy was lost trying to rein in John's histrionics, to have him engage with the other actors in the scene or, at the very least, to heed performance coach Judith Weston's (1999) advice to simply listen to them. But he was so distracted by his other obligations that he was only in small ways able to accommodate any of my requests or suggestions, so much so that I claim no credit whatsoever for his occasional moments of verisimilitude.

My editing background had unconsciously inclined me to explore the shooting style championed by David Mamet, in which the shots are designed to deliver Kuleshov-type juxtapositions in the cutting room. 'You always want to tell the story in cuts. Which is to say, through a juxtaposition of images … because otherwise you have not got dramatic action, you have narration' (Mamet,1994, p. 347). The power of this strategy is exemplified in the transition between Scenes 13 and 14, as shown in Figure 48.

Figure 48. Collage. Scs. 13 & 14: Screenshots showing the transition from Sc. 13 to Sc. 14. (*Source:* Woodruff, 2020)

Scene 13 ends with Tara and Sam talking at the fridge. Tara tells Sam they need to take the lizard to the vet. He asks softly if John is going with them. Cut to John and Sam in the car, John in the front, Sam in the back.

No narration. Instead, two juxtaposed images that require viewers to *interpret* the juxtaposition. This they do without effort, instantly recognising that:

- John does accompany Tara and Sam to the vet
- the stand-off between John and Sam has not been resolved
- Sam's anxiety has increased, and
- John's foul mood, although only seen in soft focus, has also darkened.

All delivered in less time than it takes to blink.

Mamet (1999) vigorously champions these juxtapositions, arguing that 'the idea so created is *vastly* stronger – i.e. more effective – … because it is the viewer who creates the idea – who, in effect, tells herself the story' (p. 10, emphasis in original).
This collision of images, together with several others was designed into the story at scripting stage with the Kuleshov effect firmly in mind. However, it was only later, during post, after seeing the success of these transitions and reflecting on Mamet's writings, that I realised their potential to operate *throughout* the story and not simply as an occasional transitional device. This realisation, spanning three key areas of filmmaking—writing, directing and editing—has been the single most profound outcome of this investigation, and Mamet's (1994) edict, 'You *always* [emphasis added] want to tell the story in cuts', (p. 347) is now a cornerstone of my writing strategy.

POSTPRODUCTION

Editor-turned-director Ralph Rosenblum tells a story from editing folklore involving fractious New York editor Paul Falkenberg that provides an hilarious repudiation of the cliché that films can be saved in the cutting room. Recruited to rescue a less-than-mediocre underseas adventure film, Falkenberg endured a screening of the work-in-progress edit, then when the lights came up, announced acerbically, 'From shit you get shit!' (Rosenblum & Karen, 1986, p. 3), and marched out. Another editor-turned-director, Sam O'Steen, who ran a parallel career 'doctoring' films in trouble, agrees, 'If the director doesn't know what he's doing, if he dumps a whole lot of bad film on you, I don't care who you are, it's not going to be a great movie. … Some movies can't be saved' (O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002, p. 236).

My overwhelming concern as I approached the task of editing the film was that I had dumped a whole lot of bad film *on myself*. With only a few exceptions, the rushes confirmed my memory of the shoot—in particular, the disappointing performances of both John and Sam—corroborating performance coach Judith Weston's (1999) assertion that 'the worst thing about low-budget films is usually the acting' (p. 3). John's oscillating performance was especially troubling given his central role in the story, an enervating thought that kept me away from any substantial cutting work for several months. Eventually I caved in to the obvious: his performance was no longer an acting problem; it was now an editing problem—*my* problem. Dmytryk (2019b) provided some consolation, 'A great deal of [an editor's] time is spent ... in fleshing out missed opportunities, or in correcting mistakes, and this is "cutting territory"' (p. 66). That is, the ameliorative work I faced was simply part of the job.

I plunged in and, fortunately, my love of editing quickly reasserted itself. Early work focussed on the task of building credible performances, often through VFX trickery, then building those performances into viable scenes. There was no tug-of-war between directorial and editorial demands; I saw cutting as simply progressing the work I'd already done on set during shooting. My stance was similar to that of Kubrick, who said, 'When the picture is shot, it's only partially finished. I think the cutting is just a continuation of directing a movie' (Ginna, 1999a, para. 16).

The sense of freedom through not having to work elbow-to-elbow with a separate director was exhilarating. I was free to pursue every possibility, every whim, that might improve the film no matter what the odds, without the need to consult or negotiate or persuade. I jettisoned the script, adopting the 'listening' approach of editor-turned-director Hal Ashby, 'The film will tell you what to do' (Beebe, Janssen, Lynch & Morrow, 2018, 0:11:33). I simply watched the rushes and followed my instincts.

Some of the scenes worked more or less as written, but elsewhere I dropped dialogue, cheated eyelines, stole shots from other scenes, and even combined actors from different takes into a single shot—anything I thought might improve the film. I also ignored continuity when I felt a mismatched or 'jump' cut was better for the drama. As O'Steen puts it, 'I never cut for matches, I cut for impact. I don't care if the cut is rough. People in the audience don't care either [because] they're going along with the movie' (O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002, p. 236).

The performances of John and Sam improved markedly—and this, in turn, improved the story. Had I saved the film in the cutting room? The opinions of the experts, including Falkenberg and O'Steen, militate against such indulgent thinking—and so perhaps, setting aside the performances of the recalcitrant actors, my fledgling directorial efforts weren't as bad as I'd initially feared. Mamet (1994) asserts 'the main questions a director must answer are: "where do I put the camera?" and "what do I tell the actors?"' (p. 347). While it's true that what I told John and Sam seemed to have little or no effect, Tara and the other actors *did* appear to respond to my attempts to direct them, although I suspect that Tara's performance under such trying circumstances was first and foremost a measure of her own innate talent and professionalism.

Furthermore, the ambitious schedule directed not only *where* to put the camera but *when*, with such matter-of-fact authority that only later did I realise its crucial role in delivering the required shots to the cutting room. I'm certain that the success of this planning work was due, in no small part, to years of watching other people's rushes. As O'Steen says, 'I remember what was left on the cutting room floor, so as a director I think I have the inside track on what to shoot and what to pass on' (O'Steen & O'Steen, 2002, p. 112). Knowing which shots were vital and which weren't meant we didn't jeopardise our punishing

schedule by shooting material of borderline value. 'It saves a lot of time when you're walking around with that moviola [editing machine] in your head, when you're shooting and cutting at the same time' (p. 112).

While Mamet cites performance and camera as the essential focus of the director, others, including Ashby, promote a wider vista of elements beyond this simple pairing. He singles out the cutting room as the ideal vantage point.

> When a film comes into a cutting room, it holds all the work and efforts of everyone involved, up to that point. The staging, writing, acting, photography, sets, lighting, and sound. It is all there to be studied again and again and again, until you really know why it's good, or why it isn't. This doesn't tell you what's going on inside a director, or how he manages to get it from his head to film, but it sure is a good way to observe the results, and the knowledge gained is invaluable. (Ashby, 1970, as cited in Dawson, 2011, p. 43)

My experience of this investigation together with my decades-long career in post makes it no surprise that I concur with Ashby. My early Super 8 efforts may have succeeded in getting me into film school but watching other people's rushes in the cutting room, again and again and again, has been my true education in filmmaking.

NEW KNOWLEDGE

The outcomes of this research have provided new knowledge in two ways. Firstly, for myself as I journeyed from editing to directing during the production of the artefact, and secondly, through the exegetical account of the journey which will be of value to other screen practitioners and academics. My research has added to the knowledge of the challenges faced by editors making the journey, offering insights, analysis and reassurance, while also providing a springboard for further research.

The creative practice research presented the opportunity to create an artefact (a short film) that clearly fulfils its purpose as a means to investigate the challenges faced by an editor attempting the task of directing a drama under mainstream conditions, together with an exegesis that chronicles those challenges, and the production of the artefact itself.

The exegesis also presented the opportunity to research high-profile directors who began their careers as editors and to incorporate their perspectives and those of other acclaimed directors into the account of the journey.

In summation of my research inquiry into this journey, I will give a brief overview of knowledge gained from the exegetical output and the production of the artefact.

In Chapter 1, 'An Introduction', I explore the design of an artefact that is achievable within the modest means of the investigation while also being comparable to the task of directing a mainstream project. Such was the importance of establishing a suitable paradigm that it was inserted directly into the investigation as a research question. It was established that the process of making a short film emulates longer-form production in every way except duration and was therefore suitable for the purposes of this investigation.

I also reflect on my choice of the creative practice model to frame my research. The use of autoethnography allowed me to locate my practice at the centre of the investigation through the process of producing the artefact. The accompanying exegesis, written in the personal voice, offers detail and analysis of the process of producing the artefact, incorporating the observations and perspectives of other practitioners who have made the journey from editing to directing.

Chapter 2, 'Scripting', records the process of writing the script for the production of the artefact, beginning not in the usual way with the challenge of resolving a creative idea as a screenplay, but instead driven by the need to deliver challenges typical of those an editor would face when attempting the task of directing a film made under the industry paradigm. The process, completely counter to my usual creative practice, was made even more frustrating because I could find no references to this 'reverse engineered' approach in any of the screenwriting literature. Thus, my first-hand account of the resolution of this dilemma is new knowledge and complements the 'ideas-driven' strategies of conventional screenwriting texts, and as such adds to the literature.

Preparing the film for shooting is the focus of Chapter 3, 'Preproduction'. My account of this daunting, logistical process focusses on the two critical aspects of directing for which I was

certain my time in cutting rooms would provide little or no assistance: directing the camera and directing the actors. But despite my pessimism, it emerged that my editing background *was* of use. I show that during rehearsal the actors responded to straightforward guidance from their director, couched in everyday language, based directly on my experience of evaluating performances in the cutting room. So, too, with directing the camera. I detail how my editing experience drove decisions about camera usage, enabling me to instinctively read the syntax of a scene yet to be shot, and to readily determine where to include close ups, where to stay wide, and so on. My record of this preproduction phase provides new knowledge through its unique editor's vantage point, and its demonstration that along with the perceived deficits of a postproduction background there are also insights and perspectives, acquired in the cutting room, that can serve a director well.

Chapter 4, 'Directing' goes to the nub of the research topic: the challenges faced by an editor when attempting the task of directing a film under mainstream conditions. My report of this period differs in several ways from other research through both its close focus on the unfolding events of the intense six days of filming and the fact that it is written from the perspective of an editor attempting the journey.

The account begins with the portentous first evening where the lack of preparation by the main actor and its implications became apparent, and continues through to the final day when it was realised that a key shot had been missed, with no opportunity to pick it up. Supplementing this detailed chronology are entries from my journal, which record my private, unfiltered reactions to the events of the shoot.

Uniquely, this account of the intensely pressured production environment is delivered from the perspective of a journeying editor and includes instances of strategising and problem solving that drew upon my postproduction background. For instance, I was able to use my cutting room skills to edit the film in my head as we were shooting it. This ability to 'see' a mental picture of completed scenes, even when only partially completed, allowed me to evaluate the material remaining to be shot against the time available to shoot it. This insight allowed me to confidently jettison material I considered to be of secondary importance in order to maintain our punishing schedule. This strategy was particularly

useful in dealing with the time-consuming antics of the wayward actor, whose derelictions threatened to derail the project.

At other times, an editor's eye proved invaluable in avoiding problematic transitions from one scene to another – a somewhat esoteric skill acquired through years spent in the cutting room – that would otherwise have resulted in problems later had the scenes had been shot as scripted. Once identified, these problems were resolved using alternative strategies devised on the fly, again with the benefit of cutting room experience, with the result that the scenes ultimately came together seamlessly.

The account of the filming process goes to the very core of this investigation and represents new knowledge due to its close and unflinching look at an editor's progress through the hurly burly of directing the film. Notably, along with the anticipated challenges was a growing realisation of the resources an editor brings to the task. This reassurance will be of value to other editors who are considering taking the journey themselves, and also to aspiring directors contemplating the potential value of time spent in the cutting room as part of their preparation.

Finally, in Chapter 5, 'Editing', I discuss my decision to edit the film myself in order to maximise opportunities for analysis and growth. Key scenes in the film are examined closely from the unusual perspective of having the same author across each of the scripting, directing and editing phases.

This commonality of authorship together with the almost forensic examination of the rushes required by the editing process generates new knowledge through its unique and illuminating perspectives on the making of the artefact from inception to completion. Particular attention is paid to analysing those elements that were intentionally incorporated into the project in order to challenge and test a journeying editor.

It is demonstrated that I capably managed the seemingly daunting tasks of directing camera and performance, both of which had been identified early in the investigation as key directorial elements for which I believed an editing background would be of little or no assistance. Yet, as evidenced by the exegesis, my success at negotiating these vital

challenges was assisted in part by being able to draw on perspectives and experiences acquired in the cutting room.

This unanticipated observation had recurred throughout the investigation with such regularity and quiet insistence that a third research question was postulated, probing the *benefits* of a cutting room background for a journeying director. As demonstrated in each of the specialised chapters in this exegesis – scripting, preproduction, directing, editing – the advantages of an editing background for editors exploring directing are significant and extend considerably further than my initial estimation.

Beyond its value as reassurance for editors considering the challenge of directing, the new knowledge generated as a result of this research will be of benefit to a broad spectrum of researchers, students and practitioners, including creative practice researchers investigating aspects of film production, film students regardless of their intended specialty, and directors seeking new perspectives on their craft.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It's been mentioned several times within this exegesis that the story of the film that forms the centre of this research project is of secondary importance to the business of implementing it. This is as it should be. A key reason for undertaking this research was the stance of mainstream producers who, despite awards garnered at film festivals around the world, judged my previous short films too unorthodox to confidently engage in creative partnerships for larger projects. Hence the focus here on the industry paradigm; I set out to demonstrate both to the producers and to myself that I could: (i) work within a schedule reflective of mainstream production, (ii) that I could design and implement a viable shooting strategy that delivered the required material to the cutting room, and (iii) that I was able to work with actors to create credible performances. (And on this latter point I'm comfortable with any scrutiny regarding my response to the two recalcitrants.)

A very welcome outcome of this investigation has been the re-energising of my passion for directing, which has always been overshadowed by my postproduction career, and which foundered completely after the dismissal by producers. Toward the end of my research I chanced across a quote from Stanley Kubrick that I feel illuminates the way ahead:

> I recall a comment recorded in a book called *Stanislavski Directs*, in which Stanislavski told an actor that he had the right understanding of the character, the right understanding of the text of the play, that what he was doing was completely believable, but that it was still no good because it wasn't interesting. (Strick & Houston, 1972, para. 14)

Having achieved—I believe—a convincing demonstration that I have the *right understanding* of how to operate within the industry paradigm, the *right understanding* of how to direct camera and performance, I am now keen to attempt something *interesting*. Editing is a career spent facilitating other people's visions. Directors' visions. It's time to hear my *own* voice, time to tell my *own* stories.

It's time.

REFERENCES

Alessandro, P. (2010). *The Coffee Break Screenwriter*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions.

Bare, R. & Garner, J. (2000). *The Film Director: Updated for Today's Filmmaker* (2nd ed.). Foster City, CA: IDG Books Worldwide, Inc.

Bass, S. (n.d.). *Psycho* [Storyboard illustrations]. Retrieved from: www.oscars.org/events/saul-bass-celebration/?fid=37931

Beebe, C., Janssen, L., Lynch, J. & Morrow, B. (Producers), & Scott, A. (Director). (2018). *HAL* [Motion picture]. United States of America: Saboteur Media.

Berbert, M. (Producer), & Truffaut, F. (Director). (1973). *La Nuit Américaine* [Motion picture]. France: Les Films du Carrosse, PECF and Produzione Internazionale Cinematografica.

Blakeston, Oswell ed. (1947). *Working for the Films*. London, England: Focal Press. Retrieved from: http://www.davidlean.com/page1/Books/Books/film_director.html

Bordwell, D. & Thompson, K. (2020). *Film Art: An Introduction* (12th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Bowers, S. (2012, November 21). *Lawrence Uncut: David Lean Restores Lawrence of Arabia*. Retrieved from: http://www.thuisbios.nl/lawrence-uncut-2012-11-21

Brabourne, J. & Goodwin, R. (Producers), & Lean, D. (Director). (1984). *A Passage to India* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom: Thorn EMI Screen Entertainment & Columbia Pictures.

Brody, R. (2019). The Truffaut Essays That Clear Up Misguided Notions of Auteurism. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from: http://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row/the-truffaut-essays-that-clear-up-misguided-notions-of-auteurism

Brownlow, K. (1996). *David Lean*. New York, NY: St Martin's Press.

Buchanan, E. (2018). *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Byrne, J. (2012, September, 29). *Life after Harry*. Retrieved from: http:www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life-after-harry-20120924-26fr5.html

Chaplin, C. (Producer/Director). (1921). *The Idle Class* [Motion picture]. United States of America: First National Pictures.

Chauvat, C. (Producer), & Cozarinsky, E. (Director). (1983). *Jean Cocteau: Autoportrait d'un Inconnu* [Motion picture]. France: Antenne 2.

Ciment, M. (2003). *Kubrick: The Definitive Edition*. Gordonsville, VA: Faber & Faber.

Cooper, P. & Dancyger, K. (2017). *Writing the Short Film* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Focal Press.

Coward, N. (Producer), Lean, D. & Coward, N. (Directors). (1942). *In Which We Serve* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom: Two Cities Films.

Crane, R. & Fryer, C. (2012). *Jack Nicholson: The Early Years*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

Davis, L. (Producer), & Davis, L. (Director). (2004). *City of Night: The Making of 'Collateral'* [Motion picture: DVD]. United States of America: Paramount Pictures Corporation.

Dawson, N. (2011). *Being Hal Ashby: Life of a Hollywood Rebel*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (2008). *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Dmytryk, E. (1978). *It's a Hell of a Life, But Not a Bad Living*. New York, NY: NYT Times Books.

Dmytryk, E. (2018). *On Screen Directing*. [ProQuest Ebook Central version]. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Dmytryk, E. (2019a). *Cinema: concept & practice*. [ProQuest Ebook Central version]. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Dmytryk, E. (2019b). *On Film Editing: An Introduction to the Art of Film Construction*. [ProQuest Ebook Central version]. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Dmytryk, E. (2019c). *On screen acting : an introduction to the art of acting for the screen*. [ProQuest Ebook Central version]. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Eckstein, G. (Producer), & Spielberg, S. (Director). 1971. *Duel*. [Motion picture]. United States of America: Universal.

Eliseman, S. (2005, November 1). Wise, Beyond His Years: Remembering Robert Wise. *Cinemontage: Journal of the Motion Picture Editors Guild*. Retrieved from: http://cinemontage.org/remembering-robert-wise/

Ellis, C. (1999). Heartful Autoethnography. *Qualitative Health Research* (pp. 669–683). doi:10.1177/104973299129122153

Ellis, C., Adams, T. & Bochner, A. (2011). Autoethnography: An Overview. *Historical Social Research / Historische Soziailforschung*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (138). Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/23032294

Ellis, C. & Bochner A. (2011). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In: Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). (pp. 733–768). London, Great Britain: Sage.

European Commission. (2002, December 9). *Copyright: report highlights successful EU-wide recognition of directors as "authors" of films* [Press release]. Retrieved from: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-02-1824_en.htm?locale=en

Field, S. (2005). *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (4th ed.) New York, NY: Bantam Dell Publishing Co., Inc.

Field, S. (2006). *The Screenwriter's Workbook*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc.

Field, S. (2013, July 4). *Syd Field: The Art of Visual Storytelling*. Retrieved from: sydfield.com/syd_resources/the-paradigm-worksheet/

Garnett, T. (2010). Hal Ashby. In N. Dawson (Ed.), *Hal Ashby: Interviews* (pp. 53–60). Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

George, N. (2010). *Film Crew: Fundamentals of Professional Film and Video Production*. Las Vegas, NV: Platinum Eagle Publishing.

Gill, L. (2020). *Running the Show: The Essential Guide to Being a First Assistant Director* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Ginna, R. (1999a, April 9). A Film Odyssey. *Entertainment Weekly*. Retrieved from: http://www.archiviokubrick.it/english/words/interviews/1960ginna.html

Ginna, R. (1999b, July 16). Kubrick Uncovered. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/film/1999/jul/16/2

Goldman, W. (2000). *Which Lie Did I Tell?* New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Green, W. (2018, March 27). *Edgar Wright Interviews Steven Spielberg About Duel*. Retrieved from: http://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/edgar-wright-interviews-steven-spielberg-about-duel/

Griffin, J. (2017, February 28). *A Guide to Auteur Theory*. Retrieved from: http://www.filminquiry.com/guide-auteur-theory/
Halligan, F. (2015). *The Art of Movie Storyboards: Visualising the action of the world's greatest films*. London, Great Britain: Octopus Publishing Group.

Harlan, J. (Producer), & Harlan, J. (Director). (2001). *Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures* [Motion picture]. United States of America: Warner Brothers.

Harris, M. (2008, January 6). Which Editing is a Cut Above? *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/06/movies/awardsseason/06harr.html

Haseman, B. (2006). A manifesto for performative research. *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, 118. Retrieved from: http://eprints.qut.edu.au/3999/1/3999_1.pdf

Hayward, S. (2018). *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hitchcock, A. (Producer), & Hitchcock, A. (Director). (1960). *Psycho* [Motion picture]. United States of America: Paramount Pictures.

Hitchman, S. (2008). *French New Wave: Where to Start*. Retrieved from: http://www.newwavefilm.com/new-wave-cinema-guide/nouvelle-vague-where-to-start.shtml

Honthaner, E. (2010). *The Complete Film Production Handbook* (4th ed.). Burlington, MA: Focal Press.

Hoover, M. (2016, March 28). Fiction's Wounding Event: Where Character And Incident Meet. *Fiction Writers Review*. Retrieved from:

https://fictionwritersreview.com/essay/fictions-wounding-event-where-character-and-incident-meet/

Horton, A. (2000). *Writing the Character-Centered Screenplay*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Horrocks, S. (2019, March 25). *Storytelling: Beginning, Middle & End*. Retrieved from: http://momofilmfest.com/storytelling-beginning-middle-end/

Hurbis-Cherrier, M. (2018). *Voice & vision: a creative approach to narrative filmmaking* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Joffe, C. (Producer), & Allen, W. (Director). (1977). *Annie Hall* [Motion picture]. United States of America: United Artists.

Junkersdorf, E. (Producer), & Grischow, G. & Schölndorff, V. (Directors). (2006). *Billy Wilder Speaks* [Motion picture: DVD]. Germany: Bioskop Film.

Kaire, S. (2014, September 5). *Writer's Edge: The Backstory*. Retrieved from: http://scriptmag.com/features/the-backstory

Kubrick, S. (Producer/Director). (1999). *Eyes Wide Shut* [Motion picture]. United States of America: Warner Brothers.

Lasky, K. (2013). Poetics and Creative Writing Research. In J. Croll and G. Harper (Eds.), *Research Methods in Creative Writing* (pp. 14–33). Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lasley, R. (n.d.). *Poltergeist*, 1982 – Storyboards: 5/Scene 167-172 [Storyboard illustrations]. Retrieved from: collections.new.oscars.org/Details/Archive/70048148

Lillis, T. (2003). Student writing as 'Academic literacies': Drawing on Bahktin to move from critique to design. *Language and Education,* 17(3). 192–207. doi: 10.1080/09500780308666848

Longwell, T. (2008). Relationship between editor, director key. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from: http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/relationship-between-director-editor-key-104746

Lush, J. (Producer), & Thompson, B. (Director). (1988). *Film 88 Special – David Lean* [Television broadcast]. London, United Kingdom: British Broadcasting Corporation.

Mamet, D. (1994). *A Whore's Profession*. London, England: Faber and Faber Limited.

Mamet, D. (1999). *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor*. London, England: Faber and Faber Limited.

Mann, M. & Richardson, J. (Producers), & Mann, M. (Director). (2004). *Collateral* [Motion picture]. United States of America: Paramount Pictures.

May, R. (1994). *The Courage to Create*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

McKee, R. (2010). *Story*. London, England: Methuen Publishing Limited.

Milech, B. & Schilo, A. (2004). *'Exit Jesus':Relating the Exegesis and Creative/Production Component of a REsearch Thesis*. TEXT, Special Issue No. 3 (April). Retrieved from: http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue3/milecshshilo.htm

O'Steen, B. (2009). *The Invisible Cut: How editors make movie magic*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions.

O'Steen, S. & O'Steen, B. (2002). *Cut to the Chase*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions.

Osborne, B., Jackson, P., Walsh, F. & Sanders, T. (Producers), & Jackson, P. (Director). (2001). *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* [Motion picture]. New Zealand, United States of America: New Line Cinema.

Pape, S. (2016, April 30). 9 Editing Tips to Shape an Actor's Performance. *This Guy Edits*. Retrieved from: http://www.thisguyedits.com/watch?time_continue=254&v=FxKkzb5gJEw

Pepperman, R. (2004). *The Eye Is Quicker: Film Editing: Making a Good Film Better*. Studio City: CA. Michael Wiese Productions.

Power, E. (2019, September 1). Eyes Wide Shut: 20 years on, Stanley Kubrick's most notorious film is still shrouded in mystery. *The Independent*. Retrieved from: http://www.independent.co.uk

Powers, J. (1998). Dialogue on Film: Hal Ashby. In N. Dawson (Ed.), *Hal Ashby: Interviews* (pp. 83–98). Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

Proferes, N. (2018). *Film Directing Fundamentals: See Your Film Before Shooting* (4th ed.). Retrieved from: http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Rabiger, M. (2013). *Developing Story Ideas* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Focal Press.

Rabiger, M. & Hurbis-Cherrier, M. (2020). *Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics* (6th ed.). Retrieved from: http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Ressner, J. (2006, Spring). *Telling Big Stories*. Retrieved from: http:www.dga.org/Craft/DGAQ/All-Articles/0602-Summer-2006/DGA-Interview-Sydney-Pollack.aspx

Richardson, L. (2017). Writing: A Method of Inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research (*5th ed., pp. 818–837*)*. Thousand Oaks, California.

Rosenberg, J. *The Healthy Edit: Creative Editing Techniques for Perfecting Your Movie* (2nd ed.). Taylor & Francis Group, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.

Rosenblum, R. & Karen, R. (1986). *When the Shooting Stops, the Cutting Begins*. New York, NY: Da Capo Press.

Ruchti, U., Taylor, S. & Walker, A. (2000). *Stanley Kubrick, Director: A Visual Analysis.* New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc.

Ryan, M. (2017). *Producer to Producer: A Step-by-Step Guide to Low-Budget Independent Film Producing* (2nd ed.). Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions.

Ryan, T. (2015, June 9). *Who's Who on a Film Set?* Retrieved from: http://tarproduction.com/whos-who-on-a-film-set/

Sammon, P. (1998). Joining the Club: Ridley Scott on *G.I. Jane*. In L. Knapp & A. Kulas (Eds.), *Ridley Scott: Interviews* (pp. 132–171). Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

Schenk, S. & Long, B. (2015). *The Digital Filmmaking Handbook* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning PTR.

Seger, L. (2010). *Making a Good Script Great* (3rd ed.). Hollywood, CA: Samuel French Trade.

Serck, L. (2013, January 3). *Oxfordshire inspired Tolkien's The Hobbit and Lord Of The Rings*. Retrieved from: http:www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-oxfordshire.20894824

Sistrom, J. (Producer), & Wilder, B. (Director). (1944). *Double Indemnity* [Motion picture]. United States of America: Paramount Pictures.

Spielberg, S. (n.d.). *Poltergeist*, 1982 – Storyboards: Spielberg's Comprehensive Sketches for Storyboard Artist Richard Lasley [Storyboard illustrations]. Retrieved from: www.collections.new.oscars.org/Details/Archive/70048582

Street, M. & Bowen, M. (Producers), & Seet, S. (Director). (2019). *Storm Boy* [Motion picture]. Australia: Ambience Entertainment.

Strick, P. & Houston, P. (1972, Spring). Modern Times: An Interview with Stanley Kubrick. *Sight & Sound*. Retrieved from: http://scrapsfromtheloft.com/2017/08/10/modern-times-an-interview-with-stanley-kubrick

Thompson, R. & Bowen, C. (2017). *The Grammar of the Shot* (4th ed.). Burlington, MA: Focal Press.

Toscano, M. (2015, August 31). *Kuleshov's Effect: The Man behind Soviet Montage*. Retrieved from: http://www.curatormagazine.com/michaeltoscano/kuleshovs-effect-the-man-behind-soviet-montage/

Truffaut, F. (2017). *Hitchcock: A Definitive Study*. London, Great Britain: Faber & Faber.

Tucker, P. (2019). *Secrets of Screen Directing: The tricks of the trade*. Retrieved from: http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

VideoAir/Shutterstock. (2018). *Drone flyover, carpark, night. ID: 14597755*. Retrieved from: http:/www.shutterstock.com

Walters, D. (2011, February 9). *The Chicago Code*. Retrieved from: https://www.inlander.com/spokane/the-chicago-code/Content?oid=2134181

Webb, M. (2019, August 7). *Understanding the Five Stages of Indie Film Production*. Retrieved from: http://indiefilmhustle.com/5-stages-indie-film-production/

Weston, J. (1999). *Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performances for Film and Television*. Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions.

White, J. (2004). *Questions of Identity: The Researcher's Quest for the Beginning Teacher*. PhD Thesis, Melbourne University, Australia.

Wilder, B. (Producer), & Wilder, B. (Director). (1959). *Some Like it Hot* [Motion picture]. United States of America: United Artists.

Windolf, J. (2008, January 2). Steven Spielberg. *Vanity Fair*. Retrieved from: http://www.vanityfair.com

Woodruff, A. (Producer/Director). (2010). *Absolute Zero* [Motion picture: DVD]. Australia: Argot Films.

Woodruff, A. (Producer/Director). (2020). *Untitled PhD Film* [Motion picture]. Australia: whowantswhat. Retrieved from: https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/27620565

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

The screenplay of *Absolute Zero* follows.

ABSOLUTE ZERO

by

Alan Woodruff

EXT. TABLE TOP – EVENING

An old man's hands flick through an ancient scrapbook.
Page after page of yellowed newspaper clippings pass by in a blur.

The occasional headline registers: FREAK RAIL DEATH, WORKERS'S DEATH "UNEXPLAINABLE", etc.

The action stops on a page featuring a large image under the headline: FATALITY AT AURORA. The picture is of a steam locomotive at a rail station.

Cut to NEWSREEL footage from the 1950s. A black and white images of the train drawn alongside Aurora station, accompanied by a frenzied narration.

NEWSREEL NARRATION
Tragedy in the outback where a man freezes to death after becoming trapped inside a refrigerated meat wagon... Accidentally locked inside the wagon at the start of the long haul to the city, he was discovered too late to be saved.

A policeman guards the wagon. Inside, a pair of feet - curiously unclothed - protrude from underneath a blanket.

NARRATION (CONT.)
He leaves behind a bizarre record, an account of his agonising death, written in his own hand on the walls of the wagon which became his tomb.

Newspaper images show the interior of the wagon: the walls are covered with writing; a railway worker's uniform - shirt, trousers, shoes - are scattered about the floor.

NARRATION (CONT.)

He writes that he hopes his final words will be of use to scientists studying the effects of exposure on mankind.
(the music swells melodramatically)
A tragic, needless death. A noble, courageous legacy.

Newspaper and forensic photographs show the aftermath: police and railway officials at the train, the curious onlookers as the body is loaded into a hearse, etc.

Another sequence of images show the deterioration of the writing from an exquisite longhand to an illegible, child-like scrawl.

The final image is of some early writing which begins with the numbers: 7:04.

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE – NIGHT

A sheaf of close-typed pages rest on a man's thigh. He's reading aloud.

DOCTOR

'Seven-o-four: Goose bumps; heartbeat: 117. My eyes and ears sting with the cold. Breathing fast, can't count it. Walk around the wagon to keep warm. I'm sweating yet I'm cold.

The doctor is in his seventies, thin and frail. His body language suggests his extreme shyness, with his torso twisted uncomfortably away from the camera. (The image is black and white and grainy, suggesting a television kine from the 1950s.)

An off-screen interviewer asks the questions. His voice is polished and old-fashioned, typical of the time when Australian radio and television journalists had to effect English accents.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

So, Doctor, what does that tell you?

Despite his shyness, the doctor is determined to communicate. However, the effort required to overcome his diffidence makes him sound curt and cranky.

DOCTOR

'Four minute to seven...' The train hadn't even been underway ten minutes at that stage.

The interviewer remains silent, and the doctor reluctantly fills the void.

DOCTOR

Well, it means he already knew, doesn't it? That he'd already made up his mind.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

That he was going to die?

DOCTOR

Why else would he have started writing?

INTERVIEWER V.O.

You seem surprised at that?

DOCTOR

I am surprised. Yes, indeed.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

You're saying he jumped the gun?

DOCTOR

I'm saying there wasn't any gun.

INTERVIEWER V.O.
I'm afraid, Doctor, you've lost me.

DOCTOR
Tell me something. If you were in his shoes, what would you have done?

INTERVIEWER V.O.
Frankly, I'm not sure - but I must say I don't think I could match his level-headedness.

DOCTOR
His level-headedness? How do you work that out?

INTERVIEWER V.O.
His resolve to leave a record of his death for science. I couldn't match that.

The doctor opens his mouth to challenge him but remains silent.

EXT. DESERT – DAY
A steam train rides the dead-straight track through the desert. The locomotive is small and utilitarian - slow but sure - and pulls a dozen or so freight wagons.

One of the wagons bears the sign: Schultz Bros. Ltd, Wholesale Butchers & Meat Exporters.

Smoke billows from the stack, producing a trail of white, cotton-wool clouds which dissipate languidly in the azure sky.

INT. MEAT WAGON – DAY

A small kerosene lantern feebly illuminates the wagon. A man, Ford, appears out of the gloom walking briskly around the perimeter of the wagon.

He's in his early thirties and wears the uniform of a station attendant. His features glisten with sweat.

DOCTOR V.O.

'Seven twenty-three: Pulse 113. Skin cold. Walking to keep warm but getting tired. Fingers and toes cold. Cold all over.

Ford disappears briefly into the darkness before reappearing. The effort required to maintain the pace of his walking is beginning to exhaust him.

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE – NIGHT

The doctor looks up from the notes on his lap.

DOCTOR

He was dressed for summer, not for the cold, just a cotton shirt and pants. And he was the wrong body type too - he was a pretty lean sort of bloke, all skin and bone...

INTERVIEWER V.O.

Not much avoirdupois.

The attempt at humour is lost on the doctor.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry?

INTERVIEWER V.O.

I mean, he wasn't carrying much weight.

DOCTOR

No.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

So he's already in strife?

DOCTOR

Yes - and we both know how much strife.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

And the walking?

DOCTOR

It's the thing to do, really, to keep the metabolic rate up and generate heat but...

INTERVIEWER V.O.

But how long can he keep it up?

DOCTOR

Yes, that's the question.

EXT. DESERT STATION – DAY

The train is pulling into a small station which stands completely alone amid the stunted vegetation of the desert plain.

INT. MEAT WAGON – DAY

Ford stands by the door with broom. As soon as the train stops he begins striking the door with the broom handle.

He yells for assistance at the top of his lungs.

EXT. DESERT STATION – DAY

The station attendant walks past the wagon on his way to the guards' wagon at the rear of the train.

Nothing is heard from within.

The day is hot and the attendant's shirt is wet with perspiration. He accepts a mail bag from the guard, and the guard signals the driver to depart.

INT. MEAT WAGON – DAY
At the sound of the whistle, Ford slumps against the door, catching his breath.

Later:

The train is fully underway.

Ford lurches around the wagon, rolling a cigarette as he goes. He drops his matches and picks them up clumsily, almost drunkenly.

He lights up the smoke - and coughs and splutters as the acrid fumes burn his lungs. He drops the cigarette and falls hard against the wall, half-sliding, half-falling to the floor.

Later:

Ford squatting on the floor, his back wedged into a corner, casually passes his splayed-out fingers through the flames of a lighted-cigarette paper. His face registers no pain.

DOCTOR V.O.
As soon as he stops, you see, he starts paying double for all that exercise. First, he expended all that energy walking around, and now he's losing all that heat because his body's just dumping it out into the air. The

blood vessels under his skin have opened up and the heat's just pouring out of him. And his wet clothes aren't helping.

Later:

A small ball of cigarette papers burn in a pile on the floor. Ford empties the contents of his wallet onto the flames, setting aside a small photograph of himself and a young woman.

In the photograph, he has an arm around the woman's waist, holding her close. The couple beam happily into the camera.
Ford picks up a pile of tobacco from his cigarette tin and gingerly drops it onto the fire. He pushes his outstretched hands toward the heat but screws his head away to avoid the acrid fumes.

When the smoke becomes too much, he slaps out the flames and succumbs to another coughing fit.

A small cloud of burning tobacco wafts through the air and lands unnoticed on the photograph. The image blisters and buckles in the heat.

Too late, Ford notices. He swats the flame and scoops up the image, grimacing at the damage.

DOCTOR V.O.

'Seven fifty-three. I want to cut off my fingers and toes to stop the pain.
Ears aching. My body is freezing up, getting stiffer and stiffer. Getting tired.

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE – NIGHT
The doctor waits apprehensively for the next question.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

So he's showing the symptoms of exposure?

DOCTOR

By the book. Classic incipient hypothermia.

There's a pregnant pause before he blusters on.

DOCTOR

He's finding it cold because his brain has started diverting blood away from the skin to minimise heat loss. It's the classic reaction to a cold stimulus. And the empty blood vessels then act like insulation, a bit like the asbestos lagging around a hot water pipe to keep the heat in... The brain is looking after its own best interests, you see. It's protecting itself and the other essential organs - the lungs, the heart, the spinal cord. They're more important than fingers and toes, it'll do whatever it can to save them.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

So he's already started to freeze?

DOCTOR

Yes, of course... And, no, of course.

INT. MEAT WAGON – DAY

Ford leans heavily against a wall, writing clumsily. His hands have twisted grotesquely back toward his wrists making the operation difficult.

DOCTOR V.O.

His muscles and tendons have cooled and tightened making everything difficult. Soon they'll become like claws. Useless.

He reads the word Ford is writing.

DOCTOR V.O.

'Neck and back like rock, like ice...

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE – NIGHT

The doctor continues.

DOCTOR

'Everything stiff and cold...

(he looks up from the notes)

It's called pre-shivering muscle tone. He's loosing more heat than he's making, so his body's about to try to warm itself up a bit... Your body generates about as much heat a light bulb...

He points to one of the off-screen movie lights.

DOCTOR

Not one of these blokes, just an ordinary bulb. It mightn't sound like much but in his situation...

INTERVIEWER V.O.

He needs all he can get.

DOCTOR

Right, so muscles - opposing groups of muscles - start contracting and relaxing against one and other. A bit

like rubbing your hands together if you like. There's no overall movement because they cancel each other out, just little tremors.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

Shivering.

DOCTOR

That's right. Shivering.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

So he's slipping deeper and deeper into hypothermia?

DOCTOR

Like I said before. Yes - and no.

EXT. DESERT – DAY

The railway tracks lead the eye to a shimmering heat haze in the distance.

The train appears through the haze as though parting some lustrous curtain of heat, its outline uncertain and mercurial.

INT. TRAIN CABIN – DAY

Coal is being shovelled into the roaring firebox by anonymous hands.

Another set of hands - also unidentified - rest on the controls. Around the cabin, steam and water leak in small jets from various valves and gauges.

INT. MEAT WAGON – DAY

The kerosene lantern produces its own heat haze, in miniature.

In a far corner of the wagon, Ford half stands, half crouches, his back to us. One hand steadies himself against the wall while the others tug at the buttons of his trousers. Finally, looking embarrassed and ashamed, he begins urinating against the wall.

DOCTOR V.O.

I suppose you want all the grizzly details?

INTERVIEWER V.O.

Of course.

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE – NIGHT

The doctor continues awkwardly.

DOCTOR

His kidneys are working flat-out trying to deal with the fluid overload which occurred when the blood vessels constricted, trying to keep the heat in. You've got the same amount of fluid squeezed into a smaller space - and so the kidneys are working overtime trying to get rid of some of it.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

What else is happening?

DOCTOR

His metabolism - well, everything, really - metabolism, breathing, blood pressure - the lot - would all be just slowing down. Classic hypothermia.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

Well, yes and no.

DOCTOR

That's right. Yes and no - and no and yes.

EXT. DESERT – DAY

The train steams majestically across the orange desert.

INT. MEAT WAGON – DAY

The walls of the wagon bear witness to Ford's decline. Whereas his early writing was elegant and accomplished, it has deteriorated to a barely legible scrawl.

Slumped against a wall, he makes another entry, this time on the floor beside him.

He focuses intensely as he completes the word 'Sleepy'.
But curiously - impossibly - the writing is once again the elegant longhand of before.

He gazes at the word drunkenly.

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE – NIGHT

The interview continues.

DOCTOR

Everything affects everything else, you see. The cold affects the enzyme
reactions in his brain, slows them right down. But his breathing's down, too. Blood pressure, blood flow, everything. All these would affect the cerebral metabolic rate. He probably wouldn't even recognise his own wife right now.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

So, amnesia?

DOCTOR

Amnesia, hallucination, everything. The whole box and dice.

INT. DESERT – DAY
The train steams through an underpass. Smoke billows up from the engine and begins filling the screen.

By the time the train has past, the screen is completely filled with white smoke.

The image of the burnt photograph of Ford and his wife appears through the smoke.

It begins to 'un-burn' itself.

INT. MEAT WAGON – DAY
Ford shows no emotion as the photograph restores itself; the charred image re-blisters and reforms to reveal the original image of Ford and his wife.

EXT. PICNIC – DAY
Ford's wife, framed to match her image in the photograph, waits excitedly as Ford fiddles with a self-timer camera.
He sets the timer going and runs to her - but before he can get there, the camera fires, rendering him as a blur.

He makes another attempt and again is caught halfway. In this second image he's even more blurred than the first.

Another failed attempt - and this time he's so blurred as to be almost unrecognisable.

He reaches her on the fourth try. He slips an arm around her waist and they wait self-consciously for the shutter to fire.
He sneaks a kiss.

The tender mood is broken when her face creases into a look of anxiety. She looks past him as though seeking the source of a distant distraction.

He follows her gaze but sees nothing - until out of nowhere a steam locomotive appears and thunders past, its shrill whistle shattering the silence of his fantasy.

INT. MEAT WAGON – DAY

The picnic photograph - burnt and blistered - lies on the floor beside Ford.

He's shaking violently, uncontrollably.

EXT. DESERT – DAY

The train steams powerfully past the camera. As it passes, the camera jerks crazily up to the sky.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

But how did they know it was sixty-eight degrees in there?

DOCTOR V.O.

I don't know. They worked it out somehow.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

That was the minimum, they say?

DOCTOR V.O.

That's right. Sixty-eight degrees minimum.

NEWSREEL: Black and white newsreel footage of the Railway Workshops.

NEWSREEL NARRATION

At the Victorian Railway Workshops, the compressor unit is checked by police and railway engineers.

The compressor components have been disassembled and are laid out on a table. An engineer holds one of the components in his fingers, then separates it into two halves, revealing it to be broken.

NEWSREEL NARRATION

It wasn't working! Now the boffins are really confused. A man died in this wagon. The writing on the walls tell of a painful death by freezing - yet it can't be so! How did he die? Was it a cruel trick of the human mind? The scientists want to know. The police need to know!

The music swells to a melodramatic flourish.

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE – DAY

The doctor stares morosely at the notes in his lap.

DOCTOR

So, you still admire his level-headedness?

INTERVIEWER V.O.

But how? It beggars belief.

DOCTOR

He believed it.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

But it's not possible.

The doctor reads from his notes.

DOCTOR

'Fingers covered with frostbite burns. Blisters...

INTERVIEWER V.O.

Certainly, he had a vivid imagination.

The doctor waves the papers in the air.

DOCTOR

This is the autopsy report.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

But it was sixty-eight degrees.

DOCTOR

That's right.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

But surely he must've known how cold it really was.

DOCTOR

He knew all right - he was freezing to death.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

But only in his head.

DOCTOR

(sarcastically)

Why didn't he just wake up to himself, you mean?

EXT. DESERT – SUNSET

Time lapse photography shows the vestiges of a picture-postcard sunset.

Stars appear in the darkening sky. The moon rises, then quickly arcs from view.

In the distance, the lights of a small railway station: Aurora.

EXT. DESERT – NIGHT
The train speeds through the night.

INT. MEAT WAGON – NIGHT
The shivering is at its height. Ford shakes uncontrollably, his face twisted with pain.

Later:

Miraculously, inexplicably, the shivering has stopped.

He squints around the wagon, suspicious at his release. He raises a hand in front of him. It shakes so uncontrollably that it is rendered as a blur. Ford's face registers his terror.

He raises his other hand. The same. He drags himself to his feet and staggers around the wagon.

His entire body has become a blurry, amorphous mass - it's as though he's been so consumed by shivering he has no form.

EXT. DESERT – NIGHT
The train and surrounding countryside are rendered in the same amorphous fashion.

INT. MEAT WAGON – NIGHT
Ford's eyes fall on the box of matches on the floor. The box sinks into the floorboards as they're made of liquid.

Ford watches stupidly.

INT. BLACK VOID
The box of matches tumbles through the air in extreme slow motion.

A match is dragged along the striking edge of the box and explodes into life.

EXT. RAILWAY YARD – DAWN

The locomotive sits alone at one end of the railway station.

Ford holds the lighted match underneath a wad of newspaper. He feeds the burning paper into the firebox of the loco.

Later:

The firebox glows red with burning coals.

Ford makes his way through the rail yard to the line of wagons, carrying with him a broom and a kerosene lantern.

He enters each in turn, whistling and sweeping as he goes, finally arriving at the refrigerated wagon. He levers himself inside.

Back at the locomotive, the driver and fireman climb aboard, and ease the engine toward the wagons. Ford continues his sweeping, unaware of the imminent danger.

The engine slowly approaches the wagons, colliding intentionally with the front wagon to secure the coupling.

INT. MEAT WAGON – DAWN

Ford is almost knocked off his feet by the impact. He spins around in time to see the airtight door slam closed.

EXT. RAILWAY YARD – DAWN

As the wagon door slides closed, it reveals an official-looking notice attached to the outside of the wagon.

It's a repair order declaring the compressor unit of the wagon to be malfunctioning.

Three cryptic letters, scrawled in large print, dominate the form: NBG

INTERVIEWER V.O.

And 'NBG'?

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE – NIGHT

The doctor squirms.

DOCTOR

It's a slang term, I understand. It means the compressor isn't working.

INTERVIEWER V.O.

A slang term?

The doctor's embarrassment is acute.

DOCTOR

Yes. It stands for 'no bloody good'.

INT. MEAT WAGON -- DAWN

Black.

Ford lights a match and tries the door. It is locked tight.

DOCTOR V.O.

You know afterwards, after they'd taken him away, we all just stood around in that wagon. No-one said anything, what could you say? But we were all thinking the same thing...

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE – NIGHT
The doctor continues.

DOCTOR
Jesus Christ Almighty, it was a stinking hot day but inside that wagon it was... It was pleasant.

EXT. DESERT – NIGHT

The train speeds through the night.

In the cabin, the anonymous hands tend the engine, stoking the firebox, adjusting the controls, etc.

INT. MEAT WAGON – NIGHT
Ford lies on the floor, staring blankly at the flickering light of the lantern.

The vacant look on his face becomes one of mounting terror. Suddenly he thrashes around on the floor, grabbing at the buttons of his shirt and ripping it from his body.

He kicks off his shoes, then his trousers.

After the frenzy, he is naked.

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE – NIGHT
The doctor sits morosely.

DOCTOR
They don't know why that happens. But it happens a fair bit apparently. They reckon it might be because the blood vessels under the skin suddenly open up again - and there's a rush of blood to the surface, so

DOCTOR (CONT)
their skin suddenly feels really hot, like their clothes
are on fire.

INT. MEAT WAGON – NIGHT

Ford lies naked on the floor. He's resumed his fixation with the lantern flame, now tiny and flickering as the kerosene runs low.

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE – NIGHT

INTERVIEWER V.O.
Tell me something, Doctor. What if you were in his position?

DOCTOR
Would I know, do you mean?

INTERVIEWER V.O.
Yes.

DOCTOR
Well, you'd like to think so, wouldn't you?

But his shrug reveals his uncertainty.

INTERVIEWER V.O.
Would you write on the walls?

DOCTOR
(adamant)
No! Never. Not in a month of bloody Sundays.

INT. MEAT WAGON – NIGHT

Ford's eyes, barely open, stare at the guttering flame. Only the occasional flutter of his eyelids signal that he's still alive.

The flame flickers and extinguishes.

Black.

Silence.

Suddenly, a horrendous piercing screech as the brakes lock on.

EXT. TRAIN -- NIGHT

Metal grates on metal as the train skids along the tracks, showering the rails and sleepers with sparks.

The train grinds to a noisy halt.

The driver and fireman leap from the cabin and sprint along the wagons.

INT. MEAT WAGON – NIGHT

The door to the wagon is thrown open.

DRIVER

Jesus bloody Christ! It's young Fordy!

He leans into the wagon and grabs him, hauling him to the door.

DRIVER

Come on, let's get him outside. Quick!

EXT. DESERT – NIGHT

They lay him on the ground and begin rubbing his face and arms vigorously.

FIREMAN

He's dead.

DRIVER

No, he not, bloody close to it though.

Ford looks at them groggily.

FIREMAN

He's like ice, the poor bastard. Come on, Fordy. Come on, mate.

DRIVER

You're going to be all right, young fella. Let's get him up to the engine, by the heat.

Ford forces himself to his feet. He struggles to be free of his rescuers.

DRIVER

Easy, mate. We're just going to warm you up a bit.

But he pushes them away and begins shuffling toward the front of the train on his own. The men call to him urgently but he ignores them.

At the engine he presses his palms first to the warm metal and then to his cheeks. The heat rejuvenates him and a slow, wide smile grows across his face.

Suddenly, he pushes himself away from the train and runs into the night in a slow, steady trot.

The trot becomes a jog - slow at first but building, his energy returning with every step.

The train falls away and the hiss of escaping steam is lost under his deep, easy breathing.

His smile grows broader ... before collapses like a punctured balloon.

He stops in his tracks, then spins around to see the distant train.

Instead of the image he expects to see, he's presented with a black and white newspaper photograph of the wagon.

Several policemen stand inside the wagon staring down at the floor. A railway worker, drawing hard on a cigarette, stands outside.

Another figure walks toward the wagon with his back to the photographer; he's much closer to the camera flash and so his image is overexposed and out of focus.

Ford gapes at the image. His eye travels from the people in the wagon to the blurry figure hurrying to join them.

The focus of the photograph magically shifts so that the wagon becomes soft while the figure moves into crisp relief. A second - matching - photograph, taken immediately after the first reveals the figure's face.

It is the doctor. He and Ford 'stare' at each other momentarily.

The image of Ford freezes, then jump cuts to another image of him, identical to the first except that it is now blurred and streaked in a manner similar to his failed efforts with the self-timer at the picnic.

This image, in turn, is replaced by another, more streaked and blurred.

And another image. And another - until Ford is rendered as nothing more than a few streaks of white against a black background.

Finally, even the streaks fade from view.

Black.

Another newspaper image: a stretcher is being passed into the wagon.

And another: the stretcher, now loaded with Ford's body and draped with a sheet, being carried along the platform by a couple of policemen. On the wall behind them is a large sign bearing the name of the station: Aurora

EXT. AURORA STATION, PRESENT DAY – DAY

All that remains of the Aurora sign today is a weather-worn wooden frame.

The station has been long abandoned in the name of progress; the windows broken and boarded up, the walls daubed with obscenities and puerile graffiti.

A long-haul diesel, pulling a seemingly endless string of grain wagons, appears at one end of the platform and makes its way indifferently past the broken-down station.

INT. DOCTOR'S RESIDENCE – NIGHT

The following sequence is introduced by a series of short, split-second shots which suggest the usual routine of a camera crew prior to wrapping at the end of shoot: the flashes which accompany gate checks, camera run-on with splayed fingers across the lens, etc.

The footage also reveals the doctor, visibly relaxed, standing beside his chair. He's removed his jacket and tie and sips from a cup of tea.

Another shot shows the doctor seated once again at the table. On the table in front of him is a Nagra, a reel-to-reel tape recorder, once the film industry standard for recording audio. He shows no awareness of being filmed as he listens to playback through headphones.

He listens intently at first, presumably to the sound of his own voice, before breaking into a broad, almost child-like, grin.

But as he listens, his buoyant mood disappears. His face becomes grave and his eyes well with tears.

His embarrassment is compounded when he spots the camera rolling. After a baleful look into the lens he screws around in his seat to face away from us.

End.

APPENDIX B

The screenplay of *Untitled PhD Film* follows.

UNTITLED PhD FILM

by

Alan Woodruff

EXT. AIRPORT - PASSENGER PICK UP — NIGHT

JOHN, a man in his early 40s with gentle but weary features, sits uncomfortably on a suitcase, waiting. Another couple of bags sit in a trolley alongside.

A car draws alongside, a black recent-model Holden with shiny, designer alloy wheels - a cashed-up bogan's dream car.
TARA pops the boot and joins John at the back of the car. She's about John's age, relaxed and confident with an obvious no-nonsense attitude.

John begins roughly loading his bags into the boot, ignoring Tara.

TARA
Hi, remember me.

He kisses her perfunctorily.

JOHN
It's been a hell of a three weeks.
(he looks into the car)
So where is he?

TARA
He's at home.

JOHN
On his own? You're kidding me.

TARA
Why not? He's a big boy now.

JOHN

So it seems.

TARA
You want to drive?

JOHN
You're changing the subject.

TARA
(cheerily)
You noticed.

He throws his last case into the boot.

JOHN
No, I don't want to drive.

TARA
You always drive.

He slams the boot shut.

JOHN
Jesus, Tara. I said no, didn't I?

Tara grits her teeth. It's going to be one of those nights.

INT. CAR — NIGHT

They drive in silence, John staring moodily out of the window.

JOHN
He knows I know, doesn't he? That's

why he didn't come.

TARA
I can't say I blame him.

JOHN
He's gutless.

TARA
Gutless kids don't tell their parents they might be gay.

JOHN
He didn't 'tell his parents'. He told you.

TARA
(grinning)
So that's what this is about. He didn't tell you first.

He shoots her a look, then stares out the window for a bit. He stabs the radio 'on' button, flicking angrily through the presets - rock, retro, news - until he finds an 'easy listening' station, slow and soporific, more muzac than music.

Tara grins mischievously to herself.

JOHN
What?

TARA
I feel like I'm at the dentist.

He kills the radio.

JOHN
So what did he say, exactly?

TARA
Exactly?

JOHN
You know what I mean.

TARA
We were just talking one night and he came out with it.

JOHN
No pun intended.
(Tara supresses a grin)
It's not funny.

TARA
He only said he might be gay.

JOHN
Of course he's gay. He's just getting us used to the idea.

TARA
Maybe.

JOHN
I didn't count on having a gay son, that's for sure.

TARA
But it's not about you, is it?

JOHN
And I suppose you're fine with it?

TARA
It's not about me, either.

JOHN
Stop sounding like a lawyer.

TARA
OK, just so you know, if it was any of my business - and it's not -I am fine with it. And in case it's slipped your mind during your time away, I am a lawyer.

JOHN
How can you not have a problem with it?

TARA
Because I don't. I just don't.

JOHN
That's bullshit.

TARA
I'm sorry?

JOHN
I don't believe you.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET — NIGHT

The car pulls into the driveway of a smart weatherboard house.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY — NIGHT

Tara opens the door but John, loaded up with bags, tries to push past her.

TARA
Not so fast.

JOHN
I'm just putting these [bags] in the bedroom. Jesus!

She touches his face.

TARA
John? Softly softly, OK?

But he pushes indifferently past her.

INT. HOUSE - LOUNGE — NIGHT

Tara enters the darkened lounge and turns on the light. She walks into the room, pulls out her phone and hits a preset.

John strides into the room.

JOHN
Well?

She raises the phone to her ear...

TARA
I did say we're out of milk.

...and a mobile phone starts ringing somewhere nearby.

JOHN
Great!

He marches off in pursuit of the phone.

INT. SAM'S ROOM — NIGHT

A typical teenage boy's bedroom, messy and eclectic. A framed, autographed football jumper on the wall.

John bursts in and follows the sound of the ringing to a bag on the desk. He upends the bag and Sam's phone drops onto the floor. Tara picks it up, raising it to her ear.

TARA
Hello?

JOHN
This is not funny.

He takes the phone from her and flicks through the menu.

JOHN
Who's Billy?

TARA
His friend from school. You know Billy.

JOHN
And Alex?

She takes the phone from him.

TARA
John, stop it. You're being silly.

He turns to Sam's laptop. The screensaver features a photograph of a prominent footballer. John taps the keys and the image is replaced with a security window.

JOHN
It's password protected!

TARA
And yours isn't?

But John's eye has been caught by something in the glass cage alongside the computer. Inside, a lizard wriggles about frantically on its back. Nearby, another lizard watches on nonchalantly.

TARA
What's wrong with it?

JOHN
You're asking me?

He raises the lid of the cage and turns the lizard upright. Almost immediately, it flips itself onto its back again and resumes wriggling.

TARA
Just what I feel like right now - a trip to the vet.

JOHN
Did you see that? A leg. A little leg.

TARA
You're kidding me.

JOHN
There!

He lifts the lizard out of the cage and scrutinises it closely.

TARA
Bert's having a baby?

JOHN
How can you tell it's Bert.

TARA
He's the small one.

JOHN
There's a clue.

TARA
Bert's a girl? I just want to remind you at this point that it was you who insisted on getting two lizards, not one.

JOHN
You can't have just one. It'd die of boredom.

TARA
Maybe, but as glad as I am that they've found a way to distract themselves from life's existential void, I am not going into the lizard breeding business.

JOHN
What?

He turns his attention to lizard. He's grabbed the leg. The lizard struggles violently.

JOHN
It's stuck somehow.

Tara flicks through the menu of her phone.

JOHN
We need the vet.

Tara waves the phone, signalling she's onto it.

TARA
I'm getting a recording.

JOHN
You sure it's the after hours number?

TARA
Must you try to micro-manage absolutely everything?

JOHN
What about another vet?

TARA
What about the animal hospital?

JOHN
Out near the freeway? We just came from there.

TARA
OK, you find another vet, then.

Too hard. He takes the path of least resistance.

JOHN
What about Sam?

TARA
We'll call him later.

JOHN
He doesn't have his phone, remember.

TARA
His phone’s here. He'll be back soon enough.

JOHN
Unless he's in a public toilet somewhere, supplementing his pocket money.

Tara explodes.

TARA
Don't you ever speak about our son like that again, you hear me? Ever!

JOHN
Sorry.

TARA
Ever!

JOHN
Alright, alright. Sorry.

Tara shoots him a dark look.

TARA
I'll be in the car.

She storms out.

EXT. HOUSE — NIGHT

John arrives the car with the lizard in a plastic box, Tara behind the wheel.

JOHN
Want me to drive?
TARA
Is that by way of an apology?

JOHN
I said I'm sorry.

She starts the car, still furious.

EXT. TRAVEL — NIGHT
The car retraces its route to the freeway.
INT. CAR — NIGHT

John has the lizard on its back, trying to grab the tiny leg as it pops out.

JOHN
Lie still.

But the lizard struggles violently.

TARA
Is there anything to be gained by doing that, do you think?

JOHN
Honestly, I don't know. Funnily enough, none of the first aid training I've done has included anything about breech births in lizards.

TARA
It's just that he doesn't seem all that grateful.
(grimacing)
Poor Bert. When all this is over we're going to have come up with a new name for him.

The leg slips from John's grasp.

JOHN
Bugger. Lost it.

The lizard thrashes about as John tries to grab the leg again.

TARA
You know, when I was having Sam it only felt like they were pulling him out by one leg.

Tara's phone rings. She fishes it out of her bag.

TARA
Speak of the devil.

JOHN
Give it to me.

TARA
No way.

JOHN
Pull over, at least.

But she continues driving.

TARA
Hi, honey. ... Really? You OK?

John signals an agitated 'What?' gesture.

TARA
Sam, listen, I want you to go outside and wait for us there, OK? Just in case. ... No, I don't think we need the police. Not yet anyway.

JOHN
The police? Where the hell is he?

TARA
Hang on, Sam, Dad's trying to say something.

JOHN
The police?

TARA
He's at home. Any chance you left the front door open?

He looks at her stupidly. She returns to Sam on the phone.

TARA
Honey, we'll be there in a few minutes. ... OK, bye.
(she buttons off)
He's just come home to find the front door wide open.

She grins to herself.

JOHN
What's so funny?

TARA
You. The control freak. You left the front door open.

JOHN
We don't know that for sure.

She gives him a well-deserved patronising look. He turns away, pissed off and embarrassed.

EXT. TRAVEL — NIGHT

The car executes a messy U-turn, and heads back toward home.

EXT. HOUSE — NIGHT

Tara joins John on the porch. The front door is closed and Sam is nowhere to be seen.

JOHN
Where the hell's he got to now?

Tara cocks an ear at the door and hears the faint noise of a TV. She blithely unlocks the door and the TV sounds swells.

TARA
Give me a minute, John? One minute.

She heads inside without waiting for an answer.

INT. HOUSE - LOUNGE — NIGHT

Sam is curled up in an armchair, watching a Hong Kong action film on TV. He's a typical kid in his early teens.

TARA
Hey.

But he can't hear her over the TV.

TARA
Sam.

He turns the sound down.

SAM
Hi. No-one was here.

John arrives beside Tara. Sam pulls himself upright. Tara gives John a 'say something' look as she heads into the room - but he stays mute.

SAM
(nervously)
Hi.

John nods sullenly.

At the far end of the room Tara picks up a couple of containers of milk from the table and waves them with a flourish at John.

TARA
(opening the fridge)
Hey, Sam, you forgot to put the milk away.

SAM
Sorry, Mum.

He joins her at the fridge.

SAM
(speaking softly)
Mum, I think I must've left the door open when I went to get the milk.

TARA
No you didn't, honey. I'll tell you about it later. But right now, we need you to come to the vet with us. Bert's ick.

SAM
What's wrong with him?

TARA
We don't know. That's why we're taking him to the vet.

SAM
Is Dad going?

Tara grins and tousles his hair.

EXT. CAR — NIGHT

They travel in silence, the only noise coming from the lizard thrashing about as it tries to free itself from John's grip.

Tara gestures to John to say something - anything - to Sam.

JOHN
Before, on the phone, I distinctly heard your mother tell you not to go inside the house. And what did you do? When we say something, we mean it, alright?

Tara shoots him a frosty stare. He responds with a what-the-fuck? look.

EXT. ANIMAL HOSPITAL — NIGHT

The car pulls up outside the hospital. The trio head inside and are immediately ushered into a consulting room.

INT. VET - CONSULTING ROOM — NIGHT

John takes charge.

VET
What seems to be the problem with this little fellow?

JOHN
That's just it. We thought it was a he but now he's having a baby.

VET
A baby?

JOHN
We've got another one at home but we thought they were both gay.

He angrily corrects himself.

JOHN
Male! Male! We thought they were both male.

VET
It can be hard to tell sometimes. Let's have ourselves a little look here.

He scrutinises the lizard under a magnifying glass.

JOHN
There's a leg. A little leg.

VET
A leg?

He puts the lizard back into the box.

VET
OK, OK. I wonder if I might have a word with you both in private.

TARA
Well, it's Sam's lizard so we'd be happy for him to stay.

The vet clears his throat self-consciously. Tara's face drops.

TARA
Sam, would you mind?

Before Sam can react, John hurries him along.

JOHN
Now, Sam!

TARA
We'll be out in a minute.

Sam shuffles out the door.

VET
Two things: Firstly, your lizard is definitely not in labour and never will be in labour. Bert, as it turns out, is a male.

JOHN
Then I don't understand.

VET
When I say a male, I mean a young male, just like your boy.

John looks at him quizzically.

JOHN
You said ‘two things’.

VET
Two things. Yes. So Bert’s a teenager, and, like most teenagers, regardless of species, they acquire certain habits.

He waits for the penny to drop. John continues to look at him stupidly but Tara gets it.

TARA
Masturbating. Bert was masturbating.

A confirming nod from the vet.

JOHN
Oh god.

TARA
So his little ‘leg’...

JOHN
Give it a rest, Tara. I thought it was a leg, alright?

She makes a pinching motion with her fingers.

TARA
And you were...

She bites her lip hard, desperate not to laugh.

JOHN
It's not funny.

TARA
No, of course it isn't.

JOHN
Jesus, Tara!

He snatches up the box with Bert inside.

JOHN
Give me the keys. I'll be in the car.

He storms out. Tara caves into the giggles.

EXT. CAR PARK — NIGHT

John storms out of the clinic to the car, aiming the remote as he goes; the alarm beeps and the indicators flash on and off.

He tries to open the door but now it’s locked.

JOHN
Fuck!

He slams the slaps the roof angrily, setting off the motion sensors. The alarm wails shrilly.

He fumbles with the keys and lets himself in.

INT. CAR — NIGHT

He drops into the driver's seat and stares vacantly out through the windscreen.

JOHN
Fuck.

He begins to brood in silence, then gets the feeling he's not alone. He checks the mirror. Sam slinks low in the back seat, wishing he was anywhere else in the world right now.

SAM
It wasn't locked.

JOHN
You don't say.

He thrust the box containing Bert at Sam. He can't resist a cheap shot.

JOHN
Turns out you're not going to be an aunty after all.

Sam knows he's been insulted but isn't sure how.

JOHN
No babies.

Sam, stung, takes a minute to summon up his courage.

SAM
I already knew that.

JOHN

Sure you did.

SAM

Wasn't my idea to take him to a stupid vet.

JOHN

What do you know?

SAM

I know he wasn't having babies.

JOHN

We thought he might've been a girl lizard. Did you think of that?

Sam stays silent

JOHN

Well?

SAM

Wouldn't make any difference.

JOHN

You reckon? Shows what you know.

SAM

I know he wasn't having babies.

JOHN

You said that already.

SAM

Because it's true.

JOHN
Let me guess - maybe he's gay too.

SAM
Maybe he is.

JOHN
(cutting)
Yeah, maybe.

SAM
Yeah, Dad, maybe!

So much for a mature father-son conversation. John grits his teeth and tries again.

JOHN
Sam, you're only ten. What do you know, really?
(Sam takes refuge in silence)
Hmmm?

SAM
I know Bert wasn't having babies.

JOHN
Will you just shut-up about the damn lizard? Like I said, we had good reasons for thinking he might be, alright. And I think we might know just a little bit more about the facts of life than you do.

Sam summons his courage and shakes his head slowly.

JOHN
Maybe you are gay, I don’t know.
But, right now, you don't know a

JOHN (CONT.)
thing about this shit, you hear me?
You don’t know shit!

SAM
(coldly)
They lay eggs. They don't have babies.
They lay eggs.

John's face collapses like a punctured balloon. He pinches the bridge of his nose but his eyes begin to tear up anyway. He turns away from Sam and wipes them with his fingers.

He envelopes his face in his hands and begins to shake and shudder. A full-on crying jag is imminent.

Sam watches from the back seat, not knowing what to do. John continues to shake - and a low, guttural sobbing noise builds in the back of his throat. After a minute, he turns back to face Sam.

He drops his hands from his face - but he's laughing, not crying, an incredulous, cathartic laugh that has taken him over and won't let up.

JOHN
You knew.

Sam plays safe by saying nothing.

JOHN
Didn't you? All along. You knew.

Sam nods cautiously - and John is off again.

Sam watches coolly. Tears stream down John's face. He laughs until Sam can stand it no more.

JOHN
You might've said something.
(but he waves dismissively)
Nah! I deserved it.

He tries to pull himself together. He clears his throat, wipes the tears from his eyes, and forces down a few deep breaths before turning to face Sam — but Sam's stony disapproval only sets him off again.

Suddenly he stops mid-laugh, and shoots Sam a grin, both mischievous and patronising.

JOHN
You know what he was really doing?

SAM
Stop it, Dad. Gross!

But Sam's discomfort only fans the flames of his hilarity. He sees Tara heading out of the clinic; he makes another attempt at decorum.

She drops into the passenger seat beside him, barely able to contain herself.

TARA
You'll never guess.

But John's change of mood stops her in her tracks.

TARA

What?

JOHN

Nothing.

TARA

Definitely looks like something to me.

John can only grin stupidly.

TARA

Sam?

(nothing from him either)

Alright, then, you two. Don't tell me.

But she's glad of the drop in temperature.

TARA

They lay eggs! They don't even have babies.

JOHN

We know.

She follows John's eyes to Sam. She shoots him a warm smile and cups his face in her hand.

TARA

So, home?

JOHN

Pizza.

A peace offering to Sam.

TARA
You're kidding me.

JOHN
Come on. When was the last time we had pizza?

TARA
When was the last time we had pizza, Sam?

SAM
Last night. After swimming.

TARA
(facetiously)
And Sam's a fussy eater, as you know. It's hard enough trying to get him to eat pizza once in a while let alone two nights in a row.
(but Sam is grinning ear-to-ear)
OK, pizza it is then. Want me to drive?

JOHN
I'm fine.

TARA
OK.

John starts the car, reverses out of the parking space...

Sam grabs the box containing Bert and puts it on the parcel shelf behind him. His eye is drawn back inside the hospital where the vet is doing paperwork at the front desk. He's joined by a second vet, much younger and very handsome.

Sam watches the young vet closely, then looks away.

Then looks back.

He indulges a quiet grin.

The end.