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first cut

more conversations
with film editors

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5. Capturing the Feeling

LUCIA ZUCCHETTI

- 1995 *Soprano (Synchro Year 3)* (short), dir. Dani Williamson
1996 *Just a Little Crush* (short), dir. Louise Wadley
1996 *Small Deaths* (short), dir. Lynne Ramsay
1996 *Kill the Day* (short), dir. Lynne Ramsay
1998 *Anthrakitis* (short), dir. Sara Sugarman
1997 *Gasman* (short), dir. Lynne Ramsay
1999 *Ratcatcher*, dir. Lynne Ramsay
2000 *The Low Down*, dir. Jamie Thraves
2002 *Spyhole* (short), dir. Jodhi May
2002 *Long Time Dead*, dir. Marcus Adams
2002 *Morvern Callar*, dir. Lynne Ramsay
2002 *Ten Minutes Older: The Cello, "Addicted to the Stars,"* dir. Michael Radford
2003 *Intermission*, dir. John Crowley
2003 *The Deal*, TV, dir. Stephen Frears
2004 *The Merchant of Venice*, dir. Michael Radford
2005 *Mrs. Henderson Presents*, dir. Stephen Frears
2006 *The Queen*, dir. Stephen Frears
2007 *Boy A*, dir. John Crowley
2009 *Cheri*, dir. Stephen Frears

2010 *Tilda*, TV pilot, dir. Bill Condon

2011 *Game Change*, dir. Jay Roach

AWARDS

2007 Eddie Award (ACE) nomination, Best Edited Feature Film—Dramatic, *The Queen*

2007 BAFTA Film Award nomination, Best Editing, *The Queen*

2007 European Film Awards nomination, Prix d'Excellence (Editing), *The Queen*

2008 BAFTA TV Award, Best Editing Fiction-Entertainment, *Boy A*

A common thread linking most editors' experiences is a sense of musicality, and Lucia Zucchetti emphasizes this point frequently in discussing what editors think about or feel when cutting. Whether music is part of a sequence—or purposely *not* used when expected—Zucchetti considers how music allows audiences to incorporate their personal feelings into what they are seeing. She cites several examples from the award-winning film *The Queen*, in which both the use and nonuse of music play a pivotal role in underscoring the poignant events surrounding the death of Princess Diana. Zucchetti also discusses more of the “atypical” in that narrative film through intercutting archival footage with principal photography. This unscripted combination created the vital component of tension that lifted mere “action” into a memorable tribute and a subtle commentary.

Zucchetti's fascination with the “atypical” recalls Corrao's inquiring-mind approach and Oppenheim's need to experiment in the editing room. Like Monroe as well, Zucchetti has edited for directors with contrasting styles, from a “free-form” quasi-documentary style creating dreamlike fiction films to more structured, glossy, traditional narratives. Zucchetti's comparisons and contrasts of these styles offer insights into unique ways of cutting to capture the pivotal feelings within the stories. “Great” editing, for Zucchetti, is the personal achievement of articulating the director's vision while creating a resonating “experience” for the audience—principles which many editors have echoed, particularly in the fiction-film domain. Collaborations with creative individuals in a film's productions can often trigger subjective and time-consuming debates, yet Zucchetti considers these perfect opportunities to pool the best resources available and grow the deepest essence from the film. The genteel intensity with which Zucchetti holds the greatest respect for

her collaborators, her characters, and her audiences is clearly not up for debate.

How did you get involved in film editing?

All throughout my growing up in Italy, I was involved in the arts and performance world. As a child, I made up theater, created costumes, and loved to stage plays and choreographies. I also studied piano for a few years. When I think back now, that was probably the beginning of me expressing my passion for storytelling and the performing arts, something that grew in me and that I nurtured in my teenage years by going to drama school. Soon enough, however, I learned it was much harder to perform in front of a real audience—it seemed so much easier in front of family and friends! What I really enjoyed and what suited my personality was working on the ideas and preparation of everything, the behind-the-scenes.

Did you attend schools that fostered your interest in the arts?

Yes, eventually I did. In Italy, when you reach ninth grade, you can choose the orientation of your high school. For example, you could go to a more academic grammar school, study science, or go to an arts-oriented school. I chose the arts and I was lucky to go to a very progressive experimental school in Milan called Itsos, at Via Pace 10. This school's program was born out of the sixties' student movement and ideology—it was a place created as an alternative to very traditional, boring, stuffy Italian high schools. The school nurtured the growth of the individual rather than—as was most common in Italian schools—the acquisition of “data.” In fact, it was the only place in Italy at the time where a teenager could study film as well as photography, graphic design, and cognitive psychology. Here, I became involved in making my very first film. This incredible experience as a teenager and a wonderfully supportive family gave me the strength to pursue my passion for film when I completed high school. Italy, again, did not have much to offer in terms of film and higher education. Most schools focused on academics rather than vocation. Since I had a sister studying in the U.K., I decided to explore what England had to offer. So I ended up in London and was offered a place to study at what used to be the Polytechnic of Central London (now University of Westminster), where I took a bachelor's in film, video, and photographic arts. During the three years I spent here, I “stumbled” upon editing and was inspired by brilliant teachers such as Joost Hunnigher and wonderful industry professionals who were visiting tutors—screenwriter and director Tony Grisoni among them. Like many students, I don't think I knew

what editing really was and what it entailed until I had a chance to do it myself. It is a very abstract art!

What did you finally come to understand about the editing process?

This course emphasized the importance of the collaborative process while making a film. We were encouraged to step into various head-of-department roles, and I remember not many people were putting their name forward to edit. I guess the glamour of directing or being on the set just wasn't associated with editing. So maybe out of good will—or accidentally—I was one of the first to “sacrifice” myself, and I volunteered to cut one student's film. I was surprised to discover that I not only loved the quiet, controlled, and self-reflective work that goes on in the cutting room—despite its “unglamorous” side—but that I had a knack for it as well. The job suited my creative skills *and* my introspective personality. I began to build a miniportfolio of student films that I edited, which allowed me to apply to the National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield, right outside London. I had always regarded this school as *the place* to study film in Europe, which had seemed so beyond my reach only a few years before. The best industry professionals visited, and students were lucky to shoot and edit film with the proper equipment, facilities, and support. These were the days when higher education in the U.K. was government-funded and one could get scholarships. Sadly, it's not like that anymore. Film education has become a real business.

Did you essentially major in editing?

I studied editing full-time for three years. It was a vocational postgraduate course of study, but you didn't have to have a degree to get in; you just applied to specialize in one area. If you were considered suitable for the course with the right qualities and experience, you would be offered a place. I edited many short films while I was there, but most importantly, I built relationships with fellow students that eventually took me out into the real world of making movies. The first feature I ever did, *Ratcatcher*, was directed by Lynne Ramsay, who was also a cinematography student there at the same time I was, as were other crucial collaborators on the project: DP Alwin Kuchler and Production Designer Jane Morton.

What was the knack for editing that you said you discovered?

It was many things. First, having a good instinct for choosing an image that is most relevant to the story or which image captures an emotion—and knowing how to preserve and heighten that emotion within the context

of other images. I like to think all this connects to musicality and maybe to an innate quality of the heart—meaning one’s ability to tap into one’s own and other people’s emotional spheres. I do regard myself as a highly emotional person—I take after my father (*laughs*)—and I did study piano when I was a child. In fact, one of my biggest regrets is not having pursued music more. You know, when you study music as a child, sometimes your desire to practice becomes a little dissolved by other things when you become a teenager. (*Sighs.*) But I do believe that my musical inclination and my innate sense of rhythm support my work as an editor enormously. All this, as I mentioned before, has to be combined with the right personality—an introspective personality—that can comfortably close the door and stay in a room pretty much by oneself to look at and feel the material. Then, working closely with one other person—the director—and becoming his or her eyes and ears. Finally, having an egoless approach to a project—that is *critical* for an editor. So I’d say the knack is a strange combination of artistic and diplomatic skills as well as self-confidence. Yet for all that, you have an absence of *you!* Editing is not about you, but about the director’s vision and making the best film possible with what you are given. In my early days, however, I thought editing relied mostly on good musical instinct. All other intricacies became apparent later on.

Discovering the editing personality—and knowing you had one—must have felt personally rewarding.

Yes, it did. What makes one a good editor? I’ve discussed this question with other editors too and, of course, it is open to debate. Is one born with the qualities I just mentioned or does one learn them? Probably a bit of both. Though musicality, I believe, is something one is born with.

What about editing is musical, even if music is not part of a scene?

Much in a film is analogous to music. I would say while the cuts themselves can be compared to beats, the composition, movement, and light contained within an image have different degrees of energy that can be compared to notes and tone. So it’s as if I feel a kind of music in my head when I put images together, like a sensation of beats and rhythms created by the visuals as well as by the cuts connecting the visuals. Sometimes it really feels like I am creating a melody when I edit. Of course, it is a very internal experience, so others might feel it differently. But when you discover that someone else, like the director or the audience, taps into it the same way you do, it can be the most rewarding feeling. In *Ratcatcher*, there is a sequence where the young boy James visits the vacant new

housing scheme. The musicality of that sequence arose not only from the combination of shots and the length of each shot, but also from the internal energy and movement within the shots. I remember spending a *lot* of time on that sequence because Lynne Ramsay and DP Alwin Kuchler had shot so much footage. For the exterior part of this scene, they had gone into a real building site that they received permission to turn into a set, partly “dressed” it to make it look more like what was needed, and shot it in a very documentary style by letting the camera run while the kid jumped on scaffolding and played with building materials. I then had to cut this footage with interior shots, which, if I remember correctly, were shot on a set. We had a mountain of footage for that sequence and I recall we worked on it endlessly, but the sequence works beautifully, much like a quiet piece of classical music.

You basically created a montage of that boy's experience, without sound, speaking or musical score. With so many visuals to choose from, how did you know what to eliminate or keep? Is it a linear thinking process?

Again, I would probably attribute it to instinct. But I'd say building experience in the cutting room makes it easier to find one's way through the footage and choose what needs to stay, *why* it needs to stay, and in what order. Is it a linear process? Probably not, and I will get back to that in a moment. My recollection of editing *Ratcatcher* is that it was very hard work. All films are, of course, but this was my first feature, and I was cutting it on film (rather than digitally). I had beautiful visuals—in fact, too many beautiful pictures for some scenes. It is hard to be brutal with stunning images and to drop them because they do not help the film. What helped me be brave was remembering that whatever I decide to include in a sequence while cutting is actually not permanent, but only a step toward finding the perfect cut. When I realized that, I felt free to follow my instinct and find the best edits. There is nothing like the pressure to get it right the first time round, and it can happen, but in my experience, that most likely happens when you feel no pressure or when your director is not checking every single cut while you are making them! That is why I said that editing is not a linear process: when you place the sequence into the context of the larger film, you will almost certainly make new discoveries like the scene's real purpose or emphasis in the film, or how long a scene should be in the bigger scheme of things, or new bits of information that had not been so evident at script stage. These discoveries come out of the performances and/or the images themselves. As a result, these

discoveries drive the director and editor to return to each scene to edit it to perfection—or at least certainly try.

As you describe it, the discovery process seems to be a process of clarification.

It is. You experience sudden feelings of increasing clarity for how everything should come together. It's no wonder that the very first cut coming out of the editing room is called the "first assembly." Of course, the editor tries to cut it as well as possible, but at this early stage during the shoot, an editor still won't know what images will precede or follow a scene being assembled, nor how other scenes yet to be shot will affect the scene that is now sitting in the editor's hands. There is the script continuity on paper, sure, but that does not identify the impact that the direction, visuals, and actors' interpretation may have on that continuity until the editor actually sees the footage. As the pieces slowly come together, it is easier to understand what will sharpen that original sequence—and then you tweak. Interestingly, you may find you got it absolutely right the first time around. How beautiful is the magic of editing! (*Laughs.*) But more often than not, editing a feature is an incredible—and incredibly long and complicated—journey of discovery.

The Queen had a number of montages that either built tension or made subtle commentary. In the case of building tension, I think of the poignant montage soon after the film began of the fatal car crash involving Princess Diana. It mixed both archival material and re-creation with actors. What did you wish to capture by mixing those two forms instead of relying on one or the other?

That sequence was the result of a lot of trials and tests and much debate. When I read the script, I remember that screenwriter Peter Morgan had ended the scene of the paparazzi chasing Dodi and Diana and the fatal accident in the Paris tunnel with a fade to black. No accident is shown, no sound is heard—everyone knows the outcome. I was so relieved to see that the script was only *suggesting* the event and not showing it in all its terrible detail. After all, the film was not about that. I felt at the time that nothing could represent the accident better than a fade to black, which would allow the audience to tap into their own memories of the event. Anyway, while on set, as sometimes happens, director Stephen Frears and DP Affonso Beato decided to shoot an image that was not originally planned, a shot that abstractly captured the moment of collision. I appreciated the attempt, it was abstract, it was subtle, but I never thought it would

work. This became one subject of great discussion in editing that sequence. Everyone became involved—producers, director, writer, and in this case, the DP who strongly believed that what he shot was the right way to end the scene. Whenever he said that, Stephen would say to him, “Talk to Lucia!” He would joke about it because he knew how I felt. Of course, Stephen was the final arbitrator, but he is so open to his collaborators’ suggestions that we did try the last shot in several ways. I’m happy to say I feel it finally became the best possible sequence we could have had.

The sequence ended up including archival footage, correct?

Yes, archive was the other major variable that affected the scene—and the film overall. It also amplified and lengthened the debates in the editing process. Once that archive “box” is open, endless possibilities spring out! Given that we were dealing with an event of historic proportions, the quantity of available material was vast. It was easy to spend a lot of time on it, sometimes losing the focus of what we were trying to achieve. We were extremely lucky to have a brilliant brain researching the material for us, Adam Curtis, who is a writer and documentarian. His excellent films such as *The Power of Nightmares* and *Century of the Self* were made solely out of archive and have a very specific voice and, because of it, have engendered much controversy. Again, Stephen, being so generous in giving space to his collaborators, brought Adam in for *The Queen* to present his ideas to us. We had actually worked together for the first time on *The Deal*, which Peter Morgan wrote as a kind of a prequel to *The Queen*, and then later on *Mrs. Henderson Presents* when we felt that the world wars—the context of the story—needed to be felt more vividly through archive. *The Deal* became our testing ground for the work that was needed to balance live action and archive footage in the smartest way possible. With his access to incredible archive footage, Adam can spot subtext in the imagery and understand juxtapositions as well as any editor would. We had regular sessions where Stephen would leave us to experiment with and debate the footage that would eventually support the scene and background to the story, and add complexity and wit. Adam’s vision is brilliant but very specific, so I felt it important to ensure that what he brought to the film could be integrated—with regard to both substance and style—into Stephen’s vision of the film.

What did that fortunate blend of archive and live action eventually produce?

Well, given that the use of archive was never intended to be there—in fact, it was probably not intended in many other parts of the film—we

realized that if used just *so*, the archive would add an unbelievable texture, complexity, and emotion to our main story. As it was originally, the chase scene in Paris played too much like an action movie and did not feel right. I have to admit, we even got to the point of wondering why we were spending so much time on it! I think one of our producers finally encouraged us to experiment with archive for the chase, even though that was not the original plan. Adam had brought us so much incredible material of Diana that she was actually becoming a new character in the film—a ghostly presence, if you will. So we decided, why not push it further? The producer reinforced this by suggesting that we think about the idea that before one dies, it is said a person glimpses his or her whole life. That became the basis of our work on that sequence and every other scene in which Diana's past life reentered the story. We could not play the car chase from Diana's POV, of course, but the images we ultimately selected of her life to intercut into the car chase were charged with emotion and symbolism. The impact of the scene suddenly became heightened to the maximum. It was clever, it had heart, and everyone seemed to love it. At that point, I finally knew what would be the *last* shot of that chase sequence. Not the car crash. Not an abstract image of a collision. In the archive, I saw an image of Diana putting her hand up to cover the lens of a paparazzi's camera. *That* was the end. To me, it even topped the fade to black. We had reached the end of the moments of her life as she entered the tunnel, and her gesture closing off the camera lens was her way of saying, "Please leave me alone now." That completely fit the tone of the film.

Very touching indeed. The use of archival material had clearly elevated the montage to a new meaning. It no longer was a straightforward car chase scene, which could have been simply executed through re-creation.

Yes, and that really had been our starting point, as I said. I think in the original shooting script, that's the way that sequence was meant to be. We had a *lot* of footage for this chase, and the very first cut only used the principal photography, but the feeling of an action sequence did not fit. We knew we had to do something different, and fortunately, archive became the solution. It required so much of our time because, once archive becomes a variable in the film, too much of it can distract, dilute, and even destroy the story. It becomes a very fine balancing act.

Did you also feel that you wanted to comment editorially—perhaps it was in the script anyway—on the problem relationship Diana

had with the royal family, who for the most part treated her rather coolly?

Well, everyone, as part of a team, has personal feelings about such issues, but sometimes it's almost better to keep those feelings private. *(Laughs.)* You're working in a team and, number one, you're trying to serve the director's vision. Of course, good directors will surround themselves with people who have the right sensibility for what they are trying to do. In other words, there is most likely a great respect for each other's opinion—even in the midst of a disagreement! Your train of thought as an editor will lead you to construct a film in a certain way even while listening to a director's notes—it is probably impossible to separate the two things. But once everyone sees what you are pulling together, the interpretation of the scene—whatever it turns out to be—will be appreciated, and that is fantastic! Of course, sometimes the sequence is appreciated for reasons other than the editor's intentions. It is only human for people to project their subjective experiences onto a film.

I mention the subtle commentary because I recall the striking image toward the end of the film, after the queen resisted paying tribute to Diana but finally yielded to public demand for an appearance by the royal family. At one key point, to conclude a scene after her funeral, you inserted an archival shot of Diana in a white-and-black outfit, slowly looking at the camera with—

A kind of smirk. Yes. And a little tinkly sound that goes with it. A sound that adds wit and punctuation.

A picture worth a thousand words on what Diana thought about the royals. (Laughs.)

That is pure Adam Curtis! I loved his idea and I believed very much it should stay in the cut, even if it was not planned that way.

Do you feel, then, that you are the final arbitrator among all these talented people?

I think the editor does end up being a bit of an arbitrator. The bigger the project, the more money and “intervening forces” are involved. As a result, the creative process can blur into the realm of the political—meaning, how does one diplomatically deal with all these external forces? And, I may add, all while trying to keep the clarity of what *you* think is the best film in the end and how you can convey that to your director. Of course, a good director will always give you the opportunity to speak

out—and then decide whether he or she really wants to listen to you! (*Laughs.*) Being an editor is actually a privileged position—and I don't think many people outside of the business know this.

But do you feel that because directors have so much to do on a film and can lose a sense of objectivity, editors need to provide that clearheaded view?

It certainly is one reason why editors are valuable (*laughs*). But the filmmaking process gets to a point where even the editor starts “using” other people's eyes to keep clarity and objectivity. The film is tested with different people, and editors learn to decode and interpret and put together different people's responses. Going from that to deciding what needs to be done becomes a real skill too. In my experience, what is often pointed out as a problem area in a film might not need editorial intervention at all. The problem might in fact lie elsewhere in the film. So learning to make the right “diagnosis” should be an editor's skill. But as I said, there easily may be multiple “forces” or points of view to deal with. Perhaps the story might benefit from dropping something, but so much work and money have gone into it that before the editor can suggest losing entire scenes and even entire characters, he or she has to really try and make it work as intended. I believe that is a duty we have. That goes back to having respect for all the work that has gone into the material before the editing process started. So I learned from a director like Stephen Frears. Directors who write their own material might have a completely different attitude toward the dailies during the editing—that is, they are happy to start “rewriting” the moment they walk into the cutting room. But directors who work with scripts written by other people are generally much more cautious and respectful, and so should an editor be unless he or she has been told otherwise. Of course, the editing process reveals amazing things whereby the final cut will almost never match the shooting script. As it is often said, the writing of a movie starts on the page and finishes in the cutting room. But one has to go through a slow and organic process before getting to that point and it involves very careful labor. I try not to watch the film over and over and over again while cutting, so as not to lose clarity too quickly. For example, as I put together a sequence, I keep cutting and don't look back until I'm absolutely ready. I think that discipline came from my having started out editing on film rather than on computers. The days when I went to film school—the early nineties—were really the moment of transition between analog and digital. But at film school, we were still shooting and cutting on film and that's how I learned, cutting

on a flatbed. My first feature film, *Ratcatcher*, was shot on 35mm and I edited it on 35mm film. Those were the days.

Do you miss them?

Well, I can be romantic about it (*laughs*), but no, I would never go back. If you asked me to cut a film on film right now, I'd be like, oh my God! But I do believe that starting that way was crucial for me.

Like who wants to use a typewriter anymore, right?

Exactly. But learning to cut on film gave me a discipline that has helped my editing full stop. When you were cutting on film, you would have to really, *really* watch your material before you cut anything. By contrast, when you cut on computers, you can always go back to your uncut rushes, regardless of whatever cuts you've already made, and you can start all over again. Of course, that is wonderful, and it makes fixing things easier, but my feeling remains that watching the rushes and *honestly* tapping into your feelings when you first watch them before starting to cut is one of the most valuable things an editor can do. Cutting on film used to impose that practice.

Was it because the process was slower and you had more time to think about your choices?

Yes. But also once you did a cut and decided to go back to see your slate, you would have to literally recompose and resplice the film together in its original form. So physically, you needed to think a *lot* more *before* you did your first cut and start chop-chopping up your piece of film.

Does that imply that those without the advantage of working on film—as is the case with many young filmmakers today—have less so-called discipline to look at film as deeply as you did?

I'm sure one can self-impose the discipline of watching and thinking before starting to cut, but I feel that computers—and the pressure imposed by production to deliver quickly—can push us all to jump in and cut with too much speed. Computers work fast but the human brain does not work any faster than it used to when we were cutting on film. What goes on in the editor's mind determines the speed of his or her good work. And, as old-fashioned as it might sound, there's nothing like the "break" editors used to have when respooling a reel of film just watched on a Steenbeck that would allow them to think of a solution to a problem. Whatever way one decides to work, what is fundamental is digesting your dailies and

making sure you have captured and identified the best parts of what has been shot, what you think you want to include in your cut. If you rush through that process, chances are you will miss out on so much. I used to find the term *first assembly*—the very first attempt to put all your material together as per script—almost offensive. A lot of work goes into it! But I have come to believe it makes perfect sense. There is so much to try and incorporate, so many nuances that an editor cannot instantly bring out of the material in the time given to do it. I now believe the term *first assembly* protects editors from other people thinking that is the best they can do! With more work and more time, the *first assembly* will evolve to *first cut* and beyond.

Does that quick-choice mentality reveal itself in the final film, perhaps as a “thoughtless,” so to speak, product? Or is it that gems will still be found eventually, but not necessarily in a slow-and-steady way?

I’d say given enough time overall, editors with both skill and the right material will come up with a good product—as they should! Technology has affected the process in general. Maybe with student films, it might be possible to see someone being pushed along by computers to cut something together too quickly without really thinking about what’s there and poring over the material for the best of it. Still, there is a beauty about having such accessibility to filmmaking software on computers these days. For the first time *ever*, I myself have been contemplating having a cutting room in my own home!

Computers have also made it much easier for editors to work with music tracks as they cut, whether it’s temp music or the actual score. What is your take on temp music, especially as you feel editing is already so musical?

I like to work without music. I like to see temp music coming into the film eventually, but I have a very strong feeling that music can make you *think* something is finished too early and that an edit is more final than it is. So I try and leave the music to the latter stages of the cut because it just seems to pollute my thinking of the overall way the edit works.

What about music gives a scene that sense of completion?

Music can offer the right emotion or tone for the piece—almost the way a hat caps off a beautiful outfit! (*Laughs.*) If you take off the hat, the outfit seems incomplete. I know it’s a funny analogy, but putting music

on when you're not finished with editing the scene is almost like putting on the hat before you have finished putting on your outfit.

Not that music is an accessory like a hat, though, is it?

Oh no, absolutely not. Music should be an intrinsic part of every film when used in the right amount and in the right places. Unfortunately, it is too often used as an "accessory," much like wallpaper. It is often not integral to a scene but used to lead an emotion, or worse, "cover" something that does not work so well. The music "carries" the good feeling and so one is more forgiving of the picture. The two elements should work together, but using music too early in the editing process almost locks you in, locks in the rhythm and length of a scene. It can distract you from seeing the picture and what can be better about it. As an editor, I need to focus on the picture first, see what feeling I can get out of it, and then think about the music. Obviously, when the time comes to introduce music, then you begin a chicken-or-egg conversation. You start adjusting one to the other and vice versa. Often, a composer will come back to you and say, "You know that shot, do you think you can make it longer? Do you think you have more there because I would love to hold that note for a beat longer?" That collaboration is beautiful when you get to that point, but I prefer to find the shape of the cut first. The opening scene of *Morvern Callar* is a great example of a sequence where music was expected, but we decided not to use it. The film opens with our main character lying on the floor of her apartment next to a Christmas tree and her boyfriend is lying nearby face down—we gradually reveal that he is actually dead. While working on that scene, we discovered nothing else equaled the power of the buzzing of the Christmas lights and the "void" created by the silence around it. It seemed to match beautifully the disturbing feeling we wanted to capture.

The Queen again has two contrasting scenes in which music, and then the lack of music and sound, have different impacts. In the scene when Tony Blair calls Diana the "the people's princess," music plays under his speech. By contrast, the highly emotional scene in which Charles views Diana's body is done in complete silence—no music, no sounds, not even the voice of the priest saying prayers behind the window of a closed door, although we see his mouth moving. These two scenes contradict a perhaps old-fashioned idea that music should underscore emotion (Charles's scene) and not distract from a speech (Blair's scene)—but you've done the opposite.

I'm sure there were debates about that—there always are! (*laughs*)—and I don't remember exactly the debate we had at that time, but definitely

Alexandre Desplat, who composed the music for *The Queen*, is an extremely clever and wonderful musician, and may even have been the one to suggest how music could be used in those scenes. I give him credit for not pushing music in necessarily the most obvious of places in *The Queen*. I am very much for *not* wanting to do what is expected! (*Laughs.*) I think the bottom line is: the atypical makes audiences think about what they're watching. Because music can ride or dictate the emotion, *not* having the music gives an audience more space to feel subjectively what the visuals are representing. It allows the space for an audience to respond to the material in a more personal way.

Obviously, music never really pops in and out of real life to underscore what happens to us (laughs). So in Charles's scene, the utter silence intensifies the shock and loneliness that he must have felt upon seeing Diana's body.

Yes, a specific scene like that, which presents real events and people that we have read about in the news, permits the space to join what you're seeing with what you know and have experienced to think more deeply about it, from your personal perspective. I think this is a great example of how silence opens the space for emotions to float, to let personal feelings enter the film where they wouldn't before.

You have worked with two directors who have distinct filmmaking styles—Lynne Ramsay and Stephen Frears. These directorial styles must pose certain challenges, given that the films themselves create different moods or tones in how the stories are shot. Can you compare and contrast their styles?

Yes, Lynne and Stephen are extremely different and I would say because of that, the work in the cutting room tends to be different. Since Lynne writes her own material, the cutting-room experience can be more intense because basically she starts rewriting the film as we edit. And because it's her own writing, she can be absolutely brutal. So the debates in the cutting room about what could be done and rewritten postshoot can actually involve a lot of the work. How Lynne shoots film almost makes them like documentaries, more free-form, and so the shaping that happens in the cutting room requires more time and thinking. Stephen, on the other hand, is really cautious about rewriting in the cutting room without involving the writer. He is extremely respectful of the writer's original intention and will consult him or her if the need arises to rethink a scene altogether. In both cases, being next to the

director-writer and advising on what could or couldn't work is a great responsibility.

As another distinction between directors, Frears's films depict a straightforward reality, while Ramsay's films present almost a dreamlike quality. Is that in keeping with her free-form approach to filmmaking?

Probably yes. She started out as a photographer and works very much with sound and picture more like an artist than a traditional filmmaker. With Lynne, I discovered the importance of tapping into the *feeling* of something, and how the editing can make or break that. When you cut a sequence together, you want to know what the feeling of that moment needs to be. You look for those moments in your dailies, and if you find them, you put them together to preserve them as much as you can. The biggest compliments we received after *Morvern* was when people came up to us after seeing the film for the first time and said, "You know, that party scene, it felt like a real party! It really felt like my experience of being high at a party. It really felt like I was there and I've experienced that." In *Boy A*, which was wonderfully directed by John Crowley, there is a scene at a club with a character on a drug high, and similarly a lot of people appreciated that scene and the way it was cut. Again, I think it's because it somehow captured the feeling of the event it was representing. The main character Jack (Andrew Garfield) goes out on a date, accidentally takes an Ecstasy pill, and unwillingly experiences his first trip. When the drug kicks in, he begins dancing alone. John had worked extensively with the actor on the way he would dance and the scene was planned to be one long uncut shot. This shot worked out beautifully and we did use it, but then decided it felt right to use jump cuts, soft focus, even slight speed changes. My approach to that sequence was: what is the feeling somebody has when he's high? What we ended up with felt right.

So you visually approximated the experience of being high by using jump cuts.

Now doesn't that sound like the most obvious thing? (*Laughs.*)

But could you create the same feeling of being high by using dissolves?

Probably, yes. But in my interpretation of the experience, your mind feels jittery and your memory of it feels very fragmented. So jump cuts, and the combination of shots with slow motion and soft focus and funny movement, all put together to a certain rhythm, capture the feeling of that specific moment. Such editing may be easier to talk about within the

context of a party scene or a scene where your states of mind are altered, and so you have more freedom to experiment with how shots can be joined. But I would say that sense of capturing the feeling applies to many scenes in a film.

Such as a “mundane” dinner-table scene or a dialogue between two people on a street.

Depending on what the story is, the form is dictated by the content. It may be harder to talk about the feeling in a scene that is not so obviously “out there,” but if you really think about it, even a dinner-party sequence has “feeling” in it. Boredom? Seduction? I do believe you can tap into those feelings and cut a sequence in a way that will resonate with the audience.

What helps you to capture the feelings of a scene before you start cutting it?

Watching the uncut footage with care and taking good notes of my first response to it. And by it, I mean that the combination of performance and composition of the image is your starting point. Of course, as I said before, your director will have his or her own ideas about it and give you notes. And a lot of the time, you’ll be in agreement—but not necessarily! (*Laughs.*) Then the debates and negotiations start! Technology has completely revolutionized the way editors and directors can work with each other. There is no longer the need to be in the same physical space as there once was. Footage and cuts can be placed in the “ether” and shared this way. I think this is in theory wonderful, but in my experience, it is really, really hard to do. There’s nothing like some good face-to-face communication, and unless the director and editor really know each other and have a history of working together, it is very hard to build a good solid working relationship without being in the same physical space.

Does working separately from each other also have an impact on how editors continue to be perceived? As you suggested before, editors used to be “anonymous” and then became more acknowledged over time as being vital for making or breaking a film. Yet even today editors may remain “invisible.” I’m thinking of the DVD featurettes called “The Making of Chéri” and “The Making of The Queen,” in which director, producer, writer, actors—even costume designer—all gathered to speak of production, but never mentioned the editor. In the Chéri DVD, in fact, a producer said, “He”—meaning Stephen Frears—“cut the film very quickly. And

we went into the cutting room, and we knew we had it." No mention of a "she" who cut the film.

(Laughs.)

Is editing still that overlooked in some cases?

It's an interesting issue. When an editor finally gets a nomination, it's like "Oh, somebody's recognizing my work!" Yet many times on awards shows, the editor's award is not even mentioned or just rushed through. Editing as an end result is often intangible. By contrast, I think, there is a tangibility of the work of a director of photography, of a costume person, of the production designer. Surprisingly, not many people really know, unless you're in the business, that a film is not shot the way it is ultimately seen. Often, what you finally see on the screen has actually been shot maybe twenty times, and then the editor has to choose portions of shots and make them work together to best tell a story. You do hear people talking of the director cutting a film, and you always know that it's not the director—or not *just* the director—and it is a little sad when an editor is not acknowledged. Yet, again, there is something about the editor's personality that suits being in the shadows, behind the scenes, instead of on the floor of a film with a massive crew that sometimes equals the movement of an army. A lot of creativity goes on there, but it is slowed down by the enormous machinery of a big crew. I often get frustrated when I go to set and experience all the waiting that has to be done for this or that thing to happen. In the cutting room, you are dictating your own pace of work and this pacing comes with enormous creative responsibility. Once you have the material, it's all up to you to make it happen. I don't know, perhaps if editors had bigger egos, they would be directors! *(Laughs.)* However, it's always nice when some light is shed on the art of editing and the editors behind the scenes. It is definitely important to all who have interest in film and want to learn about it.

I know you spent time reviewing your films in advance of answering my questions, and I also know that's hard for most editors to do—they don't like looking at their own films once they have finished them. How was that experience for you?

I thought I should look at my films again because recently, my father-in-law fancied watching *Mrs. Henderson Presents*, and I just caught a little bit of it and thought, oh my God, I don't remember it! Uh-oh, maybe I should refresh my memory. *(Laughs.)* So I went to the local video store and came out with six DVDs of the films I cut. Even walking out with

these six films in my hands and looking at them in a pile just felt great. Then I watched them in the space of a few days, and it's a little scary because you, of course, say to yourself, "Am I going to see things that I would do differently today?" And yes, I did, but I will not tell you where! (*Laughs.*) I have much more clarity now because so much time has passed since I cut them. I think the best part of watching these films again was to realize that, just as in childbirth, all the pain that goes with the "delivery" has been forgotten, and I can just enjoy and take pride in the result.